

## Romanticism

In literature, Romanticism reflects a reaction to formalized rules for art, represented in an emphasis on emotion and the individual. This approach "arose so gradually and exhibited so many phases that a satisfactory definition is not possible" ("Romanticism" 445). Nevertheless, there are a number of elements that characterize this movement in the literature, philosophy, art, religion, and politics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In general, the romantic transcends that which is perceived in order to represent that which is ideal. An incomplete list of romantic elements includes:

- individualism
- enthusiasm for the wild, irregular, or grotesque in nature and art
- unrestrained imagination
- enthusiasm for the uncivilized or "natural"
- love of nature
- sympathetic interest in the past (esp. medieval art, letters, and life)
- idealization of rural life
- sentimental melancholy
- emotional psychology in fiction
- mysticism<sup>1</sup>
- primitivism<sup>2</sup>
- sensibility<sup>3</sup>
- interest in human rights
- sympathy with animal life

Adapted from "Romanticism." A Handbook to Literature. Ed. William Harmon. 9th ed. Upper Saddle River, 2003.

Not to be confused with common usage definitions of the noun romance or the adjective romantic.

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<sup>1</sup>Mysticism: The theory that a knowledge of God or immediate reality is attainable by a human faculty that transcends intellect and logic. (325)

"What! you don't know Jules Landau, le fameux Jules Landau, le clairvoyant? He's crazy too, but on him your sister's fate depends. See what comes of living in the provinces—you know nothing about anything. Landau, do you see, was a commis in a shop in Paris, and he went to a doctor's; and in the doctor's waiting room he fell asleep, and in his sleep he began giving advice to all the patients. And wonderful advice it was!"

—from Leo Tolstoy's Anna Karenina (1877), trans. Constance Garnett

"Mysticism." A Handbook to Literature. Ed. William Harmon. 9th ed. Upper Saddle River, 2003.

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<sup>2</sup>Primitivism: The doctrine that supposedly primitive peoples, because they had remained closer to nature and had been less subject to the influences of society, were nobler than civilized peoples. (400)

"We will not speak of Queequeg's peculiarities here; how he eschewed coffee and hot rolls, and applied his undivided attention to the influences of society, were nobler than civilized peoples."

—from Herman Melville's Moby Dick (1851)

"Primitivism." A Handbook to Literature. Ed. William Harmon. 9th ed. Upper Saddle River, 2003.

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<sup>3</sup>Sensibility: A term for a reliance on feelings as guides to truth and not on reason and law. (465)

"But it would have broke my heart, had I loved him, to hear him read with so little sensibility."

—from Jane Austen's Sense & Sensibility (1811)

"Sensibility." A Handbook to Literature. Ed. William Harmon. 9th ed. Upper Saddle River, 2003.

Not to be confused with common usage definitions of the noun sensibility or with the adjective sensible.