

## Romanticism

Romanticism dominated literature, music, and the arts in the first half of the 19th century. Romantics reacted to the Enlightenment's emphasis on reason and science, instead stressing the following:

- **Emotions** – Taking their cue from Rousseau, Romantics emphasized feeling and passion as the wellspring of knowledge and creativity.
- **Intuition** – Science alone cannot decipher the world; imagination and the “mind’s eye” can also reveal its truths.
- **Nature** – Whereas the *philosophes* studied nature analytically, the Romantics drew inspiration and awe from its mysteries and power.
- **Nationalism** – Romanticism found a natural connection with nationalism; both emphasized change, passion, and connection to the past.
- **Religion (Supernatural)** – Romanticism coincided with a religious revival, particularly in Catholicism. Spirit, mysticism, and emotions were central to both.
- **The unique individual** – Romantics celebrated the individual of genius and talent, like a Beethoven or a Napoleon, rather than what was universal in all humans.

With these themes in mind, consider the topics and individuals below:

### • THEME MUSIC AND EXAMPLE BASE

Prior to the 19th century, you will have noted the rise of objective thinking toward the natural world (Scientific Revolution, Enlightenment), but with the Romantics, we see one of the first strong reactions to the notion that all knowledge stems from the scientific method (OS). Though not the first to do so, the Romantics embrace the subjectivity of experience in a singular and seductive manner.

## Literature and History

**Lord Byron** (1788-1824) – As famous for his scandalous lifestyle as for his narrative poems, Lord Byron died from fever on his way to fight for Greek independence, a cause he supported in his writings.

**Thomas Carlyle** (1795-1881) – Carlyle pioneered history as the story of great men, as with his famous study of the French Revolution.

François-Rene de Chateaubriand (1768-1848) – In *The Genius of Christianity*, Chateaubriand glorified the mystical pull of religious faith and its connection with the beauties of nature.

## AP ACHIEVER

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**Johann Wolfgang von Goethe** (1749-1832) – Goethe’s *Sorrows of Young Werther* recounted the tale of a passionate young man who commits suicide over an unrequited love. Along with *Faust*, in which the title character sells his soul to the devil, Goethe’s works proved enormously influential in combining a neoclassical style with the Romantic themes of intuition and emotion.

**Edgar Allan Poe** (1809-1849) – With his short stories, Poe demonstrates the Romantic interest in the occult and macabre.

**Sir Walter Scott** (1771-1832) – Reflecting the Romantic interest in medieval history, Scott’s *Ivanhoe* chronicles the conflicts between Norman and Saxon knights in England.

**Mary Shelley** (1797-1851) – Daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft, Shelley gained fame with *Frankenstein*, a literary warning about the hubris of modern humans and technology gone awry.

**Percy Bysshe Shelley** (1792-1822) – Shelley gained fame both from his poetry, as with his tale of rebellion against social conventions in *Prometheus Unbound*, and his lifestyle of free love and vegetarianism. Husband of Mary Shelley.

**William Wordsworth** (1770-1850) – Wordsworth’s poetry glorified nature and suggested that “one impulse from a vernal wood” would teach humans more “than all the sages can.”

## Architecture and Painting

**Eugene Delacroix** (1798-1863) – Delacroix is most famous for his large canvases, bold use of color, and exotic themes. His tribute to the French revolutionary tradition, *Liberty Leading the People*, is his most famous work.

**Caspar David Friedrich** (1774-1840) – Friedrich’s paintings gained notoriety for their portrayals of solitary figures confronting the immensity of nature, as with *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*.

**Theodore Gericault** (1791-1824)-His immense canvas, *The Raft of Medusa*, demonstrated the Romantic fascination with nature as well as a critique of a distant and uncaring monarchy. Gericault’s works on the insane illustrate the Romantic interest in the exotic and unique.

**Houses of Parliament** (1830s) – The most famous architectural example of the neo-Gothic revival in Britain.

**J.M.W. Turner** (1775-1851) – Turner used vivid colors and atmospheric effects to depict the untamed power of nature in his *Rain, Steam, and Speed* and *Slavership*.

## Music

**Ludwig von Beethoven** (1770-1827) – Beethoven pushed the classical style to its limits with his sophisticated orchestral arrangements. Despite growing deafness, Beethoven helped establish the Romantic movement in music with his nine symphonies.

**Hector Berlioz** (1803-1869) – Berlioz developed program music in which a drama parallels the motifs of the music. His famous *Symphonie Fantastique* portrays a drug-induced imagination of a witches' gathering.

Though Romantics occupied themselves primarily with cultural expression, many combined their aesthetic vision with political activism. Romantics urged freer lifestyles and political systems, which explains the crossover from Romanticism to nationalism, as well as Liberalism. In fact, many historians term the first half of the 19th century the Age of Romantic Nationalism. As we see below, Romanticism fueled the revolutionary sentiments sweeping across Europe in the period 1815-1850.