

## Characteristics of Romantic Literature

Romanticism saw a shift from faith in reason to faith in the senses, feelings, and imagination; a shift from interest in urban society to an interest in the rural and natural; a shift from public, impersonal poetry to subjective poetry; and from concern with the scientific and mundane to interest in the mysterious and infinite. Mainly they cared about the individual, intuition, and imagination.

1. Imagination and emotion are more important than reason and formal rules; imagination is a gateway to transcendent experience and truth.
2. Along the same lines, intuition and a reliance on “natural” feelings as a guide to conduct are valued over controlled, rationality.
3. Romantic literature tends to emphasize a love of nature, a respect for primitivism, and a valuing of the common, "natural" man; Romantics idealize country life and believe that many of the ills of society are a result of urbanization.
  - a. Nature for the Romantics becomes a means for divine revelation (Wordsworth)
  - b. It is also a metaphor for the creative process—(the river in “Kubla Khan).



NEOCLASSICAL VIEW OF NATURE: Ordered and controlled  
Claude Lorraine, *Landscape*



ROMANTIC VIEW OF NATURE:  
Thomas Cole, *A Wild Scene*

4. Romantics were interested in the Medieval past, the supernatural, the mystical, the “gothic,” and the exotic;
5. Romantics were attracted to rebellion and revolution, especially concerned with human rights, individualism, freedom from oppression;
6. There was emphasis on introspection, psychology, melancholy, and sadness. The art often dealt with death, transience and mankind’s feelings about these things. The artist was an extremely individualistic creator whose creative spirit was more important than strict adherence to formal rules and traditional procedures.
  - a. The Byronic hero
  - b. Emphasis on the individual and subjectivity.