

ROMANTICISM

“The categories which it has become customary to use in distinguishing and classifying ‘movements’ in literature or philosophy and in describing the nature of the significant transitions which have taken place in taste and in opinion, are far too rough, crude [and] indiscriminating--and none of them so hopelessly so as the category ‘Romantic’.”

Arthur O. Lovejoy
“On the Discrimination of Romanticisms”
Essays in the History of Ideas
(Johns Hopkins 1948; Capricorn 1960) 253

“*Romanticism* arose so gradually and exhibited so many phases that a satisfactory definition is not possible. The aspect most stressed in France is reflected in Victor Hugo’s phrase ‘liberalism in literature,’ meaning especially the freeing of the artist and writer from restraints and rules and suggesting that phase of individualism marked by the encouragement of revolutionary political ideas...Walter Pater thought the addition of strangeness to beauty (the Neoclassicists having insisted on order in beauty) constituted the Romantic temper. [One] schematic explanation calls *Romanticism* the predominance of imagination over reason and formal rules (classicism) and over the sense of fact or the actual (Realism)...The term is used in many senses, a recent favorite being that which sees in the Romantic mood a psychological desire to escape from unpleasant realities....

Yet *Romanticism* does have a fairly definite meaning. The term designates a literary and philosophical theory that tends to see the individual at the center of all life, and it places the individual, therefore, at the center of art...Although *Romanticism* tends at times to regard Nature as alien, it more often sees in Nature a revelation of Truth, the ‘living garment of God,’ and a more suitable subject for art than those aspects of the world sullied by artifice. *Romanticism* seeks to find the Absolute, the Ideal, by transcending the actual, whereas Realism finds its values in the actual and Naturalism in the scientific laws that undergird the actual.”

C. Hugh Holman & William Harmon
A Handbook to Literature, 6th ed.
(1936; Macmillan 1992)

ROMANTIC AESTHETIC VALUES

1. individualism
2. sensibility
3. expressive style
4. love of Nature
5. organic form
6. primitivism
7. pantheism
8. interest in the past, especially Medieval

ROMANTICISM IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Romanticism first appears in American literature in poems by the essentially Neoclassical Philip Freneau such as “The Wild Honey Suckle” (1786). William Cullen Bryant is the first American Romantic, beginning with “Thanatopsis” (1817), as most evident in his pantheism and his theory of poetry: “The great spring of poetry is emotion...Strong feeling is always a sure guide.” Bryant was the precursor of Ralph Waldo Emerson, the leader of the New England Transcendentalist movement with Margaret Fuller, and the favorite poet of Walt Whitman. The most significant Romantic masterpieces are *The Leatherstocking Saga* by Cooper (1823-1841), *Nature* (1836) by Emerson, *Moby-Dick* (1851) by Melville, *Walden* (1854) by Thoreau, and *Leaves of Grass* (1855) by Whitman.

ROMANTICISM IN AMERICAN FICTION

Charles Brockden Brown (1771-1810) introduced Romanticism into literary American fiction with *Wieland* (1798), a Gothic novel featuring a Romantic ventriloquist who precipitates murders. Though written in a stiff Neoclassical prose style, the narrative is mysterious, critiques pure reason, affirms intuition and dramatizes deceptions of the senses that refute the psychology of John Locke then prevailing in the 18th century--all characteristics of Romanticism. Brown's Gothicism influenced Poe, his techniques influenced Hawthorne and his detective novel *Edgar Huntley* (1799) with Indian characters and adventure in the wilderness influenced Cooper.

Washington Irving (1783-1859) was a gentle humorist, sentimentalist and conventional Victorian who catered to women readers. He is comparable to the lighter Hawthorne without the depth or complexity except for a few pieces in *The Sketch Book* (1819), in particular "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and "Rip Van Winkle." He also wrote both comic and scholarly histories, biographies and essays. "Rip" contains a dream allegory with archetypal elements that attain mythic resonance beyond Irving's range in his other writing. The journey into the wilderness and up a mountain evokes individuation toward transcendence, but Irving, with his lighthearted good humor, renders all that as merely Rip's escape from his wife--sentimental pastoralism--the Romantic dream of many a henpecked husband.

James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851) wrote *The Leatherstocking Saga* (1823-1841) dramatizing the exploration of the continent by Natty Bumppo and his Indian friends, five mythic romances that became the definitive Romantic epic of discovery in American literature. The series was satirized by Mark Twain in his very funny "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses" and most readers today would agree with Twain's criticisms of implausibility--there are many examples--though Twain is unfair and exaggerates greatly in his descriptions of situations. Cooper was a cosmopolitan in a Romantic age. Twain is a Realist so anti-Romantic that in his *Innocents Abroad* (1869) he sounds like a Natty bumpkin in his responses to the art treasures of Europe. Cooper affirms the intuitions based on experience of Natty, identifies with his individualism and love of Nature, while ridiculing the limitations of empirical rationalists such as Dr. Battius in *The Prairie* (1827), who is as blind as a bat and cannot find his own ass in the dark.

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) was an isolated loner who went mad for his Romantic art, defined the genres of horror and crime detection and became the most influential short story writer in history. His poems are so Romantic they are often beyond comprehension. His major short story "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1840) is a psychological allegory that conveys his Gothic themes and the self-destructive quest of the Romantic artist for ultimate Truth. A more extended presentation of his dark Gothic vision is *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838). Nature scares the hell out of Poe, as expressed by his descriptions and by a prose style often tending to hysteria. Benjamin Franklin made himself a representative American enacting the puritan myth of getting ahead and Cooper created an icon of 19th century American values in Natty Bumppo, while Poe became a prototype of the suffering artist as rebel.

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864) wrote Romances as distinct from Realistic novels, yet his prose style is Neoclassical. Like Brown in *Wieland*, he contributed to the Romantic Movement by dramatizing the limitations of 18th century Lockean psychology, reason, empiricism and the senses, most directly in "Rappaccini's Daughter" (1844). His Platonic idealism is most evident in his autobiographical "The Artist of the Beautiful" (1844) and his Romanticism is most effusive in "The Old Manse" (1846). His Victorian feminism overturned vertical consciousness by affirming the equality of head and heart, man and woman--but the moral superiority of the woman. However, because he lived in such a radical Romantic culture, in most of his fiction Hawthorne is criticizing excesses of sensibility at the expense of reason, most notably the impulsive Romanticism of Hester in *The Scarlet Letter* and the Utopian Romanticism of the Brook Farm experiment in *The Blithedale Romance*. Nature is the art of God, to be understood as moral allegory. Hawthorne loved Nature not as a pantheist like Melville, but as a Christian who emphasizes the need to redeem the Wilderness within and turn it into a Garden.

Herman Melville (1815-1891) wrote the greatest masterpiece of American Romanticism in *Moby-Dick* (1851). As a young man, he was inspired and exhilarated by his adventures at sea and travels in the South Pacific. He exploited the exotic appeal of his experiences in his first book *Typee* (1846)--about living with

a cannibal tribe—and in the adventure sequel *Omoo* (1847). *Mardi* (1849) is a complicated Romantic allegory of pursuing Truth in the islands of the Pacific that prepared him to write *Moby-Dick* (1851), a celebration of the questing Romantic spirit. As a pantheist by then, he read Nature for “linked analogies” with human psychology. His style in the story of Ishmael is soaring Romantic prose, his vision of human nature liberal and exalted:

“Man in the ideal, is so noble and so sparkling, such a grand and glowing creature, that over any ignominious blemish in him all his fellows should run to throw their costliest robes... Thou shalt see it shining in the art that wields a pick or drives a spike; that democratic dignity which, on all hands, radiates without end from God; Himself! The great God absolute! The centre and circumference of all democracy! His omnipresence, our divine equality!”

Here Melville is most like Whitman. However, even at his most Romantic, Melville insists like Hawthorne on the need for balance, as he symbolizes when the Pequod has whales chained to both its sides at once (“Stubb and Flask Kill a Right Whale”): “So, when on one side you hoist in Locke’s head, you go over that way; but now, on the other side, hoist in Kant’s and you come back again; but in very poor plight. Thus, some minds for ever keep trimming boat. Oh, ye foolish! throw all these thunderheads overboard, and then you will float light and right.” Be independent and stay balanced. Melville critiques Emerson, the supreme Romantic and the most influential American philosopher of the 19th century. Both men were pantheists, but the Realist in Melville replies to Emerson’s “oversoul” with an “undersoul”—the sea: “the bottomless soul, pervading mankind and nature.” Alone up in “The Mast-Head,” when Ishmael becomes enchanted, lulled into a transcendental “dream,” he loses his balance and almost falls overboard: “Heed it well, ye Pantheists!”

From a letter of Melville to Hawthorne, same year (June 1851): “In reading some of Goethe’s sayings, so worshipped by his votaries, I came across this, ‘Live in the all.’ That is to say, your separate identity is but a wretched one,—good; but get out of yourself, spread and expand yourself, and bring to yourself the tinglings of life that are felt in the flowers and the woods, that are felt in the planets...and the Fixed Stars. What nonsense! Here is a fellow with a raging toothache. ‘My dear boy,’ Goethe says to him, ‘you are sorely afflicted with that tooth; but you must *live in the all*, and then you will be happy!’ As with all great genius, there is an immense deal of flummery in Goethe, and in proportion to my own contact with him, a monstrous deal of it in me. This ‘all’ feeling, though, there is some truth in. You must often have felt it, lying on the grass on a warm summer’s day. Your legs seem to send out shoots into the earth. Your hair feels like leaves upon your head. This is the *all* feeling. But what plays the mischief with the truth is that men will insist upon the universal application of a temporary feeling or opinion.”

As leader of the New England Transcendentalist movement, Emerson was comparable to Goethe, preaching a Romantic idealism so extreme—see in particular the conclusion of *Nature* (1836)—that much of the fiction of Hawthorne and Melville is oriented to refuting him: Hawthorne in “The Birthmark” (1843), “The Old Manse” (1846) and the childish aristocrat Clifford Pyncheon when he runs away and turns into a radical in *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851); Melville in his satires of the expedient idealist Plotinus Plinlimmon in *Pierre* (1852) and of Mark Winsome and Egbert in *The Confidence-Man* (1857).

DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN ROMANTIC AND REALISTIC FICTION in the 19th century

ROMANTIC

1. context *cosmic* and *eternal*
2. emphasis *abstract* and *universal*
3. tenor *metaphysical*

REALISTIC

- context *social* and *temporal*
emphasis *concrete* and *particular*
tenor *empirical*

CRITICS DISCUSS ROMANTICISM

“It is the addition of strangeness to beauty, that constitutes the romantic character in art; and the desire of beauty being a fixed element in every artistic organization, it is the addition of curiosity to this desire of beauty, that constitutes the romantic temper.”

Walter Pater
Appreciations
(Macmillan 1889) 241-61

“The only cure for Romanticism is to analyze it. What is permanent and good in Romanticism is curiosity...a curiosity which recognizes that any life, if accurately and profoundly penetrated, is interesting and always strange. Romanticism is a short cut to the strangeness without the reality, and it leads its disciples only back upon themselves...There may be a good deal to be said for Romanticism in life, there is no place for it in letters.”

T. S. Eliot
The Sacred Wood
(London 1920) 31-32

“A new vision dawns on the imagination....It lacks the confident clarity, the balanced humanism, the well-proportioned form, the finished correctness of the literature of a period which knows its own mind. But it is shot through and through with new and strange beauties of thought and vision, of phrase and rhythm. Language grows richer, for words become symbols, not labels, full of color and suggestion as well as clear, definable meaning,--and the rhythms of verse and prose grow more varied and subtle to express subtler if vaguer currents of thought and feeling.”

H. J. C. Grierson
Classical and Romantic
The Leslie Stephen Lecture 1923
reprinted in *Romanticism* (Prentice-Hall 1962)
eds. Robert F. Gleckner & Gerald E. Ensacoe

“Put shortly, these are the two views, then. One, that man is intrinsically good, spoiled by circumstance; and the other that he is intrinsically limited, but disciplined by order and tradition to something fairly decent. To the one party man’s nature is like a well, to the other like a bucket. The view which regards man as a well, a reservoir full of possibilities, I call the Romantic; the one which regards him as a very finite and fixed creature, I call the Classical....The Romantic, because he thinks man infinite, must always be talking about the infinite; and as there is always the bitter contrast between what you think you ought to be able to do and what man actually can, it always tends, in its later stages at any rate, to be gloomy....But the awful result of Romanticism is that, accustomed to this strange light, you can never live without it. Its effect on you is that of a drug.”

T. E. Hulme
Speculations
(1924; Harcourt 1936) 113-140

“It is clearly a *tendency away from actuality*. We see the spirit of the mind withdrawing more and more from commerce with the outer world, and endeavoring, or at least desiring, to rely more and more on the things it finds within itself....That is the habit of mind which has acquired the name of *Romanticism*....Life promising itself indefinite betterment in this actual world, and the vision of man’s earthly perfection; or life withdrawing from the actual, and the vision of a mystical experience beyond the power of earthly abilities.”

Lascelles Abercrombie
Romanticism
(Martin Seeker & Warburg 1926)

“Romanticism is disease, Classicism is health” (Goethe). “A movement to honor whatever Classicism rejected. Classicism is the regularity of good sense--perfection in moderation; Romanticism is disorder in the imagination--the rage of incorrectness. A blind wave of literary egotism” (Brunetiere). “Classic art

portrays the finite; Romantic art also suggests the infinite” (Heine). “The illusion of beholding the infinite within the stream of Nature itself; instead of apart from that stream” (More). “A desire to find the infinite within the finite, to effect a synthesis of the real and the unreal. The expression in art of what in theology would be called pantheistic enthusiasm” (Fairchild). “The return to Nature.” “A sense of the mystery of the universe, and the perception of its beauty” (Earnest). “In general a thing is Romantic when, as Aristotle would say, it is wonderful rather than probable; in other words, when it violates the normal sequence of cause and effect in favor of adventure. The whole movement is filled with the praise of ignorance, and of those who still enjoy its inappreciable advantages--the savage, the peasant, and above all the child” (Babbitt). “The opposite, not of Classicism, but of Realism--a withdrawal from outer experience to concentrate upon inner” (Abercrombie).

“Liberalism in literature. Mingling the grotesque with the tragic or sublime (forbidden by Classicism); the complete truth of life” (Victor Hugo). “The reawakening of the life and thought of the Middle Ages” (Heine, Beers, etc.). “The cult of the extinct” (Geoffrey Scott). “An effort to escape from actuality” (Waterhouse, Cabell, etc.). “Sentimental melancholy”; “vague aspiration”; “subjectivity, the love of the picturesque, and a reactionary spirit [against whatever immediately preceded it]” (Phelps). “Romanticism is, at any time, the art of the day; Classicism, the art of the day before” (Stendhal). “Emotion rather than reason; the heart opposed to the head” (George Sand, etc.). “A liberation of the less conscious levels of the mind; an intoxicating dreaming. Classicism is control by the conscious mind” (Lucas). “Imagination as contrasted with reason and the sense of fact” (Neilson). “Extraordinary development of imaginative sensibility” (Herford). “An accentuated predominance of emotional life, provoked or directed by the exercise of imaginative vision, and in its turn stimulating or directing such exercise” (Cazamian). “The renascence of wonder” (Watts-Dunton). “The addition of strangeness to beauty” (Pater). “The fairy way of writing” (Ker). “The spirit counts for more than the form” (Grierson). “Whereas in Classical works the idea is represented directly and with as exact adaptation of form as possible, in Romantic the idea is left to the reader’s faculty of divination assisted only by suggestion and symbol” (Saintsbury).

quoted by Ernest Bernbaum
Guide through the Romantic Movement
(1930; Ronald Press 1949)

“Romanticism is the endeavor, in the face of growing factual obstacles, to achieve, to retain, or to justify that illusioned view of the universe and of human life which is produced by an imaginative fusion of the familiar and the strange, the known and the unknown, the real and the ideal, the finite and the infinite, the material and the spiritual, the natural and the supernatural....Beneath the historical changes in science and man’s attitude toward science there remains...an irreconcilable hostility between the scientific spirit and the particular kind of illusion which is the essence of Romanticism.”

Hoxie N. Fairchild
The Romantic Quest
(Columbia U 1931)

“The fundamental quality of Romanticism is not mere anti-Classicism nor medievalism, nor ‘aspiration,’ nor ‘wonder,’ nor any of the other things its various formulas suggest; but rather a liberation of the less conscious levels of the mind....The Romantic intoxication of the imagination suspends the over-rigid censorship exerted by our sense of what is fact and our sense of what is fitting. The first of these dominates the extreme Realist; both inhibit the extreme Classicist; the Romantic escapes.”

F. L. Lucas
Epilogue
The Decline and Fall of the Romantic Ideal (1936)

“The Romantic theory assumes that literature is mainly or even purely an emotional experience, that man is naturally good, that man’s impulses are trustworthy, that the rational faculty is unreliable to the point of being dangerous or possibly evil. The Romantic theory of human nature teaches us that if man will rely upon his impulses, he will achieve the good life. When this notion is combined, as it frequently is, with a pantheistic philosophy or religion, it commonly teaches that through surrender to impulse man will not only achieve the good life but will achieve also a kind of mystical union with the Divinity: this, for

example, is the doctrine of Emerson. Literature thus becomes a form of what is known popularly as self-expression. It is not the business of man to understand and improve himself, for such an effort is superfluous: he is good as he is, if he will only let himself alone, or, as we might say, let himself go.

The relativist...believes that there are no absolute truths [Postmodernist], that the judgment of every man is right for himself....It is popular at present to profess relativism and yet in important matters to act as if we were absolutists. Our ideas of justice, which we endeavor to define by law and for which wars are often fought, can be defended only by involving moral absolutism. Our universities, in which relativistic doctrines are widely taught, can justify their existence only in terms of a doctrine of absolute truth....The Romantic is almost inescapably a relativist, for if all men follow their impulses there will be a wide disparity of judgments and of actions.”

Yvor Winters
In Defense of Reason
(Alan Swallow 1937-1947) 8-11

“[The]...terms, Classic and Romantic, stand for more than differences of style. The Classic sees man as master, the Romantic sees him as victim of his environment....I regard the periods of English literature as an alternation between these two concepts....Romanticism, the belief in the human conflict against the Universe and against power, seems to me to be the driving force of all art and of all science which deserves the name. In Western civilization today, there are only two recognizable elements which can be said to differentiate it from total barbarism, our art and our medical science, and both are based upon this Romantic ideology....The Romantic bases his ethic upon his belief in the hostility or the neutrality of the Universe. He does not deny the existence of absolute standards, but he denies their existence apart from Man....Because Romanticism has always been aware of the tragic aspects of human life, it has always tended to preach personalism, to base its ideology on direct responsibility and upon political *anarchism*.”
[italics added]

Alex Comfort
Art and Social Responsibility:
Lectures in the Ideology of Romanticism
(London: Falcon Press 1946)

“If a Romantic setting and mood make Romanticism, then these are permanent aspects of poetry.... There is a difference between Romanticism of the early nineteenth century and of other periods. Romanticism only expresses one mood of Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton, who have other and profounder moods....The Romantic finds everywhere in Nature his own image. This has the effect of spiritualizing Nature while at the same time it makes his mind appear to have a kinship with landscapes, moons, and vast waters. The Romantic attitude, by the exercise of an audacious selectivity--which does not appear selective simply because the vast scenes chosen give the impression that the poet is one with the whole of Nature--makes the natural scene which is outside the poet appear as a quality of his mind....In the world of Romantic poetry there is a more blurred distinction between what is real and what is unreal because everything is soaked in the poetic...”

The Romantic Movement was a crucial phase in the historic development which has led to the increasing isolation of poetry from the main streams of contemporary life and thought into a stream which is specialized. The background of this crisis was the French Revolution which offered poets the vision of a whole community living creatively, imaginatively, poetically, using modern political organization and techniques to shape a society according to the best impulses in the heart of man....Its general effect was to drive poets into themselves....

The Romantic poet is divorced from history, which he ends by despising. The faith of the Romantics (in Shelley, Byron, and Keats) is that if the world centered on the Romantic vision there would be no such thing as a human tragedy....Its aim is the creation of an ideal world through the active creating of the imagination. The peculiarity of this world is its impulsiveness, its waywardness, the extent to which it is personal to the poet himself and divorced from actuality, supernatural or human authority, and from any system of consistent thought....The Victorian age involved the poets too much in its materialism for the dissatisfaction and the isolation from society, which were the Romantic impulse, to continue. Only in the

peculiar circumstances of Emily Bronte does one get a sense of that isolation, that unreality, that secret inexpressible experience, which leads to the pure, desperate creation of beauty in a spacious emptiness of the Romantics.”

Stephen Spender
A Choice of English Romantic Poetry
(The Dial Press 1947)

“The distinction of Classical-Romantic occurs for the first time [in England] in Coleridge’s lectures given in 1811, and is there clearly derived from Schlegel...But none of the English poets, we must stress, recognized himself as a Romanticist...In Hazlitt’s *Lectures on the English Poets* (1818) a new age dominated by Wordsworth is described quite clearly, with its sources in the French Revolution, in German literature, and its opposition to the mechanical conventions of the followers of Pope and the old French school of poetry....The following three criteria should be particularly convincing, since each is central for one aspect of the practice of literature: imagination for the view of poetry, Nature for the view of the world, and symbol and myth for poetic style....

All the great Romantic poets are mythopoeic, are symbolists whose practice must be understood in terms of their attempt to give a total mythic interpretation of the world to which the poet holds the key. The contemporaries of Blake began this revival of mythic poetry....There is a profound coherence and mutual implication between the Romantic views of Nature, imagination, and symbol.”

Rene Wellek
“The Concept of ‘Romanticism’ in Literary History”
Comparative Literature I (1949) 1-23, 147-172

“First, although the word ‘romanticism’ refers to any number of things, it has two primary referents: (1) a general and permanent characteristic of mind, art, and personality, found in all periods and in all cultures; (2) a specific historical movement in art and ideas which occurred in Europe and America in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries....

[Arthur O.] Lovejoy offered three criteria of Romanticism, or rather the three basic ideas of Romanticism...sometimes essentially antithetical to one another in their implications. These ideas are *organicism*, *dynamism*, and *diversitarianism*....Briefly the shift in European thought was a shift from conceiving of the cosmos as a static mechanism to conceiving of it as a dynamic organism: static--in that all the possibilities of reality were realized from the beginning of things or were implicit from the beginning, and that these possibilities were arranged in a complete series, a hierarchy from God down to nothingness [The Great Chain of Being]--including the literary possibilities from epic to Horatian ode, or lyric; a mechanism--in that the universe is a perfectly running machine, a watch usually....

The new metaphor is not a machine; it is an organism. It is a tree, for example; and a tree is a good example, for a study of nineteenth-century literature reveals the continual recurrence of that image. Hence the new thought is organicism....We have a philosophy of becoming, not of being....In its radical form, dynamic organicism results in the idea that the history of the universe is the history of God creating himself. Evil is at last accounted for, since the history of the universe--God being imperfect to begin with--is the history of God, whether transcendent or immanent, ridding himself, by the evolutionary process, of evil. Of course, from both the old and the new philosophy, God could be omitted. Either can become materialism.

What then is Romanticism? Whether philosophic, theological, or aesthetic, it is the revolution in the European mind against thinking in terms of static mechanism and the redirection of the mind to thinking in terms of dynamic organism. Its values are change, imperfection, growth, diversity, the creative imagination, the unconscious.”

Morse Peckham
“Toward a Theory of Romanticism”
PMLA LXVI (1951) 5-23

“The central tendency of the expressive [Romantic] theory may be summarized this way: A work of art is essentially the internal made external, resulting from a creative process operating under the impulse of feeling, and embodying the combined product of the poet’s perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. The primary source and subject matter of a poem, therefore, are the attributes and actions of the poet’s own mind; or if aspects of the external world, then these only as they are converted from fact to poetry by the feelings and operations of the poet’s mind....The first test any poem must pass is no longer, ‘Is it true to nature?’....[but] ‘Is it sincere? Is it genuine?’...The work ceases then to be regarded as primarily a reflection of Nature...The mirror held up to Nature becomes transparent and yields the reader insights into the mind and heart of the poet himself.”

M. H. Abrams

The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition
(Oxford 1953; Norton 1958) 22-23

“Rene Wellek has...concluded that the ‘peculiarity’ of Romanticism lies in ‘that attempt, apparently doomed to failure and abandoned in our time, to identify subject and object, to reconcile man and Nature, consciousness and unconsciousness by poetry which is “the first and last of all knowledge”.’ Wellek’s definition works beautifully with the major writers of the 1829-1860 period: Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman; Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville. Their writings are shaped by poetic symbolism (one of the chief means of identifying subject and object), by a faith in intuition, and by an exhilarating determination to place man in a satisfying relationship to Nature and to God.

One can make a case for Cooper as another fairly complete romanticist by Wellek’s definition, although the task is not as easy as with the writers just listed. Freneau, Bryant, and Irving, however, fit the definition only imperfectly. They use many of the themes which preoccupied their successors--Nature and the picturesque, the common man, the legendary past--but they lack the underlying philosophy, the urge to identify and reconcile which Wellek isolates. This is why they are commonly called pre-romantics.”

Theodore Hornberger

The Literature of the United States I, 3rd ed.
(Scott, Foresman 1953,1966) 262-3

“[Irving] Babbitt, long before his published attacks on Romanticism...had communicated his ideas to his students, notably to the young T. S. Eliot...In 1914, Eliot settled in England; and by way of his essays and his poetry he has spread the reaction against the Romantic tradition...It was high time that English poetry and criticism should turn its back on the bog of syrupy sentiment created by the deliquescence of Romanticism. It was only to be expected that Eliot and other modern critics should bypass Romanticism to seek models among the Jacobean poets and in Dryden and Pope....In attacking Romanticism, the critics of the twentieth century have taken their stand against its sentimentality, subjectivism, and primitivism, against the cult of spontaneity, the deification of self, the contempt for any kind of discipline in thought as well as in form, the escapism, and the lack of contact between poetry and the realities of life today....The Romantics...glorify the imagination as the queen of the cognitive faculties and the very organ of truth.”

Albert Gerard

“On the Logic of Romanticism”
Essays in Criticism VII (1957) 262-73

“By the end of the eighteenth century the disparity between the ideal order and the world in which men lived had become so great, the ideal so meaningless, as to destroy its usefulness even as a myth. The growth of the middle class, of industry and trade, the decline of the monarchy and the aristocracy as representatives of power, and the approach of democracy were capped, for the early Romantic poets at any rate, by the French Revolution [and by] Godwin’s notions of a perfect society as a blithe anarchy...”

The Romantic poets wrote for a society which could not longer be measured against a concept of order and degree...The destruction of an external frame of reference led them to seek a principle of order within the individual, within themselves, to write of man and the world largely in terms of their own inner life...The point of reference in their poetry is the individual rather than society...The Romantic poet employed

the power of 'self-intuition' to restore order to a world which had ceased to afford readymade images of order, the way it had done for Shakespeare and for Pope....He wrote his greatest poetry when he succeeded in giving birth to a 'system of symbols' conducting truths."

R. A. Foakes
"Order Out of Chaos: The Task of the Romantic Poet"
The Romantic Assertion
(Yale 1958)

"In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance the literate had shared a constellation of synthesizing myths by means of which man could grasp relationships that gave significant pattern to otherwise discrete things and experiences....But by the end of the eighteenth century these communally accepted patterns had almost completely disappeared--each man now rode his own hobby-horse....We need only realize how impossible it would be to summarize the Romantic, the Victorian, or the modern world-picture, as it has been possible to describe the common Elizabethan world-pictures, to recognize the immensity of the literary difference. The modern poet must formulate his own special organizing myth, for it is the source of the lexical material and syntactic plan with which language can be transformed into poetry."

Earl R. Wasserman
"Metaphors for Poetry"
The Subtler Language
(Johns Hopkins 1959)

"French *romantique*, from Old French *romant*, romance. The term is characterized by the qualities of remoteness, desolation, melancholy, divine unrest, passion, and the all-embracing power of the imagination. It is suggestive of strangeness and of adventure, of never-satisfied aspiration after the unknown or the unattainable. Defining the Romantic Revival, in *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, Paul Harvey says: 'This is a name given to a movement in European literature which marked the last quarter of the eighteenth century. The old narrow intellectual attitude gave place to a wider outlook, which recognized the claims of passion and emotion and the sense of the mystery in life, and in which the critical was replaced by the creative spirit, and wit by humour and pathos.'

In *English Literature*, A. C. Ward outlines the relationship between Romanticism and Classicism: "That the spirit of ancient Greek literature and the ideals it expresses have irrigated and fertilized the modern mind to its incalculable profit is unquestionable; but it is also unquestionable that most of the profit which English literature owes to the Classical tradition has come through the Romantic writers. Where and when Romanticism has fallen into disrepute the cause lies in the extravagance and incapacity of undisciplined minor writers who exploit the sentimental, the sensational, the morbid, the occult, the erotic. These aspects of Romanticism appear severally in the works of lesser Elizabethan and later playwrights, in the Gothic novels of the late eighteenth century, and scattered over minor poetry at irregular intervals from the seventeenth-century Metaphysicals onwards. But modern English Romantic literature also embraces the simplicities of Nature in, for example...Wordsworth's verse, the lyrical harmony of Shelley, the restraint and form and finish of Keats's odes'."

A. F. Scott
Current Literary Terms
(Macmillan, St. Martin's 1965)

"In France, Victor Hugo (1802-1885) emphasized as a controlling idea in Romanticism the 'liberalism of literature,' the freeing of the artist from restraints and rules imposed by Classicists and the encouragement of revolutionary political ideas. In Germany, Heinrich Heine (1797-1856) thought the dominant aspect of Romanticism was its revival of the past (medievalism) in letters, art, and life. A later English writer (Walter Pater, 1839-1894) suggested that the adding of strangeness to beauty constituted the Romantic spirit of the age. Other writers have insisted that the so-called Romantic mood is a desire to escape from reality, especially unpleasant reality. This widespread movement...exhibited each of these characteristics.

Specifically, Romanticism may be called a literary attitude in which imagination is considered more important than formal rules and reason (Classicism) and than a sense of fact (Realism). Romanticism...

swept through Western Europe and culminated in England from 1798 to 1832... Among these changes were increasing emphasis on mystery and the supernatural--strangeness and wonder as opposed to common sense, the infinite as opposed to the finite; emphasis on the imaginative and emotional as opposed to the rational--an appeal to the heart rather than the head....In effect, Romanticism is a literary and philosophical theory which tends to place the individual at the center of life and experience and represents a shift from objectivity to subjectivity."

Harry Shaw
Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms
(McGraw Hill 1972)

Michael Hollister (2015)