

Classicism vs. Romanticism

Classicism

(Also known as the Enlightenment 1669-1798)

An attitude to language and literature found in many ages and cultures. In the West, it is based on respect for and often veneration of, the models and achievements of Greece and Rome. Advocates of classicism value tradition and usually believe that written language should be governed by traditional, formal rules. They are generally conservative and often consider that contemporary culture cannot match the achievements of the ancients. They usually value regularity and simplicity of form, seek to maintain order and proportion, admire elegance and polished wit, encourage emotional restraint, and regard literature as art at its best when paying close attention to technique.

(Oxford Companion to the English Language)

- revitalized interest in the values and ideas of the classical world
- architecture of the Capitol building in Washington DC
- clarity
- symmetry
- disciplined structure

Literature in America during this time consisted of revolutionary writings, pamphlets, and speeches by such figures as Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, and Alexander Hamilton.

Romanticism (1798-1850)

A literary, artistic, musical, philosophical, and social movement that occurred as a reaction to the overly structured enlightenment.

- Emotion over reason
- Intuition over intellect
- Subjective over objective
- Individual/self-reliance
- Nature—source of goodness and inspiration
- Democracy—common man
- Mysterious/exotic

Darker Side of Romanticism

Imagination

Shadowy region—fantastic, demonic, insane, potential evil

Hawthorne—truths of the human heart (fear, greed, vanity, mistrust, betrayal)

Poe—decaying estates, insane protagonists, live burials

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Transcendentalism

- Emotion over reason
- **Intuition** over intellect—individuals could “transcend” experiences to discover fundamental truths rather than using logic; obedience to instinct
- Subjective over objective
- **Individual/self-reliance**
- Nature—source of goodness, offers lessons in life
- Democracy—common man
- Mysterious
- Criticize society’s materialism
- Reform society and create utopia
- Optimistic view of human capabilities
- **Over-Soul**—omnipotent divinity—a belief that divinity is present everywhere including nature and people; all forms are spiritually united; the belief that the soul of each individual is identical with the soul of the world and one can receive important thoughts through a mystic state.
- Everything is connected (interconnectedness)