

A Brief Guide to Romanticism

"In spite of difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs, in spite of things silently gone out of mind and things violently destroyed, the Poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time. The objects of the Poet's thoughts are everywhere; though the eyes and senses of man are, it is true, his favorite guides, yet he will follow wheresoever he can find an atmosphere of sensation in which to move his wings. Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge—it is as immortal as the heart of man."

—[William Wordsworth](#), "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*"

Romanticism was arguably the largest artistic movement of the late 1700s. Its influence was felt across continents and through every artistic discipline into the mid-nineteenth century, and many of its values and beliefs can still be seen in contemporary poetry.

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact start of the romantic movement, as its beginnings can be traced to many events of the time: a surge of interest in folklore in the early to mid-nineteenth century with the work of the brothers Grimm, reactions against neoclassicism and the [Augustan](#) poets in England, and political events and uprisings that fostered nationalistic pride.

Romantic poets cultivated individualism, reverence for the natural world, idealism, physical and emotional passion, and an interest in the mystic and supernatural. Romantics set themselves in opposition to the order and rationality of classical and neoclassical artistic precepts to embrace freedom and revolution in their art and politics. German romantic poets included Friedrich Schiller and [Johann Wolfgang von Goethe](#), and British poets such as Wordsworth, [Samuel Taylor Coleridge](#), [Percy Bysshe Shelley](#), [George Gordon Lord Byron](#), and [John Keats](#) propelled the English romantic movement. [Victor Hugo](#) was a noted French romantic poet as well, and romanticism crossed the Atlantic through the work of American poets like [Walt Whitman](#) and [Edgar Allan Poe](#). The romantic era produced many of the stereotypes of poets and poetry that exist to this day (i.e., the poet as a tortured and melancholy visionary).

Romantic ideals never died out in poetry, but were largely absorbed into the precepts of many other movements. Traces of romanticism lived on in French [symbolism](#) and [surrealism](#) and in the work of prominent poets such as [Charles Baudelaire](#) and [Rainer Maria Rilke](#).

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