

**Culture and Society, Theories in Art and the Built Environment**

**Romanticism**

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GLA\_638\_OL1\_: Theory and Movement in Contemporary Interior Architecture

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March 19, 2023

## Romanticism

### Introduction

Today the word 'romantic' evokes images of love and sentimentality, but the term 'Romanticism' has a much wider meaning. It covers a range of developments in art, literature, music and philosophy, spanning the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The 'Romantics' would not have used the term themselves: the label was applied retrospectively, from around the middle of the 19th century (Forward,2014, [www.bl.uk](http://www.bl.uk)). The term Romanticism was first used in Germany in the late 1700s when the critics August and Friedrich Schlegel wrote of *romantische Poesie* ("romantic poetry") (Romanticism,2023, [www.theartstory.org](http://www.theartstory.org)). Madame de Staël, an influential leader of French intellectual life, following the publication of her account of her German travels in 1813, popularized the term in France. In 1815 the English poet William Wordsworth, who became a major voice of the Romantic movement and who felt that poetry should be "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," contrasted the "romantic harp" with the "classic lyre" (Romanticism,2023, [www.theartstory.org](http://www.theartstory.org)). The artists that considered themselves part of the movement saw themselves as sharing a state of mind or an attitude toward art, nature, and humanity but did not rely on strict definitions or tenets (Romanticism,2023, [www.theartstory.org](http://www.theartstory.org)). Bucking established social order, religion, and values, Romanticism became a dominant art movement throughout Europe by the 1820s (Romanticism,2023, [www.theartstory.org](http://www.theartstory.org)).

Romanticism is notoriously difficult to define and has been interpreted in various ways in different countries (Forward,2022, [www.open.edu](http://www.open.edu)). However, it is true to say that it flowered originally against a backdrop of violent revolution during a period of economic, political and social transition (Forward,2022, [www.open.edu](http://www.open.edu)). It was a European phenomenon and had an impact upon many spheres of thought and activity (Forward,2022, [www.open.edu](http://www.open.edu)).

It stands in opposition to the Rationalism and Empiricism of the preceding Age of Reason, representing a shift from the objective to the subjective (Romanticism,2023, [www.philosophybasics.com](http://www.philosophybasics.com)). Romanticism in general was a reaction against the scientific rationalization of Nature during the Age of Reason, which left little room for the freedom and creativity of the human spirit, and it stressed strong emotion as a source of aesthetic experience (Romanticism,2023, [www.philosophybasics.com](http://www.philosophybasics.com)).

### **Social and political and environmental aspects**

In 1762 Jean-Jacques Rousseau declared in *The Social Contract*: ‘Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.’ (Forward,2014, [www.bl.uk](http://www.bl.uk)). During the Romantic period major transitions took place in society, as dissatisfied intellectuals and artists challenged the Establishment (Forward,2014, [www.bl.uk](http://www.bl.uk)). In England, the Romantic poets were at the very heart of this movement (Forward,2014, [www.bl.uk](http://www.bl.uk)). They were inspired by a desire for liberty, and they denounced the exploitation of the poor (Forward,2014, [www.bl.uk](http://www.bl.uk)). There was an emphasis on the importance of the individual; a conviction that people should follow ideals rather than imposed conventions and rules (Forward,2014, [www.bl.uk](http://www.bl.uk)). The Romantics renounced the rationalism and order associated with the preceding Enlightenment era, stressing the importance of expressing authentic personal feelings (Forward,2014, [www.bl.uk](http://www.bl.uk)). They had a real sense of responsibility to their fellow men: they felt it was their duty to use their poetry to inform and inspire others, and to change society (Forward,2014, [www.bl.uk](http://www.bl.uk)). Although the movement was rooted in the German Sturm und Drang movement, which preferred intuition and emotion to the rationalism of the Enlightenment, the events and ideologies of the French Revolution were also proximate factors. Romanticism assigned a high value to the achievements of “heroic” individualists and artists, whose examples, it maintained, would raise the quality of society (Romanticism,2023, [www](http://www).

boisestate.pressbooks.pub). It also promoted the individual imagination as a critical authority allowed of freedom from classical notions of form in art (Romanticism,2023, www.boisestate.pressbooks.pub).

Romanticism influenced political ideology, inviting engagement with the cause of the poor and oppressed and with ideals of social emancipation and progress (Forward,2022, www.open.edu). The individual was prized, but it was also felt that people were under an obligation to their fellow-men: personal commitment to the group was therefore important (Forward,2022, www.open.edu). Governments existed to serve the people. There was a feeling that people were actively part of the historical process, and could therefore contribute to social progress (Forward,2022, www.open.edu).

Romanticists played a vital role in launching the conservation movement on multiple fronts. They were uniquely capable of communicating the beauties of nature and were sensitive to environmental changes in their communities (Romanticism And Conservation,2023, www.climatepolicy-watcher.org) Artists and intellectuals observed natural beauty and captured it in the painting, music, and literature of the Romantic period. Romanticism emerged along with the Industrial Revolution, which was a practical. Romanticism was, in part, a reaction to industrialization's impact on nature and was a precursor of the conservation movement (Romanticism And Conservation,2023, www.climatepolicy-watcher.org). Transcendentalism, as one facet of Romanticism, stirred a persistent place-based heritage that fostered nature-inspired artistic endeavors and a heightened sense of spiritualism. These efforts, in turn, led to the preservation of wild areas based on the intrinsic value of nature and the land (Romanticism And Conservation,2023, www.climatepolicy-watcher.org).

## **The Built Environment**

Romanticism in architecture rebelled against the Neoclassical ideals of the 18th century primarily by evoking past styles. Styles from other periods and regions in the world were incorporated, all with the purpose of evoking feeling, whether a nostalgic longing for the past or for exotic mystery (Romanticism,2023, [www.theartstory.org](http://www.theartstory.org)). Accordingly, architecture was dominated by "revival" styles, like the Gothic Revival and the Oriental Revival (Romanticism,2023, [www.theartstory.org](http://www.theartstory.org)). Though the incorporation of Gothic design began in the 1740s, the Gothic Revival became a dominant movement in the 1800s (Romanticism,2023, [www.theartstory.org](http://www.theartstory.org)).

Romanticism's Gothic Revival or Neo-Gothic style of architecture developed and was most prominent in England and France in the 18th through the 19th centuries (McLeod,2023, [www.study.com](http://www.study.com)). This style reflected the public's growing desire for buildings inspired by and reminiscent of medieval design (McLeod,2023, [www.study.com](http://www.study.com)). This outlook represented a substantial departure from the previous Classical period's focus on building designs of ancient Greece and Rome (McLeod,2023, [www.study.com](http://www.study.com)). Classical architecture emphasized symmetry, proportionately balanced wings, grand columns, and smooth rectangular windows (McLeod,2023, [www.study.com](http://www.study.com)). Common architectural elements in Romantic buildings included asymmetrical designs, disproportionately weighted towers with parapets, spires, and gables topped with finials or crossbracing (McLeod,2023, [www.study.com](http://www.study.com)). With its complex and irregular shapes, Gothic Revival architecture was equally well-suited to fortresses, castles, universities, and churches (McLeod,2023, [www.study.com](http://www.study.com)).

Interest in medieval architecture, especially in England and France, was rooted in the growing romantic literature of the 18th and 19th centuries with their tales of heroism, nobility, strength, freedom, and nationalism, including the writings of Sir Walter Scott and Victor Hugo

(McLeod,2023, [www.study.com](http://www.study.com)). The depictions of landscapes with fanciful medieval ruins further popularized the Gothic Revival architecture, especially as citizens faced with soot-filled air and long working hours in the industrializing cities of England and France (McLeod,2023, [www.study.com](http://www.study.com)).

The famous example of Oriental Revival style is the Royal Pavilion (1815-1822) in Brighton, England, built by the architect John Nash (Romanticism,2023, [www.theartstory.org](http://www.theartstory.org)). The seaside home of King George IV includes onion domes and minarets and variations on crenellations in the building to create an imposing but exotic presence which includes elements of Asian and Middle-Eastern styles (Romanticism,2023, [www.theartstory.org](http://www.theartstory.org)). Napoleon Bonaparte's campaign to Egypt inspired an interest in ancient Egyptian culture, leading to the use of Egyptian columns, obelisks, pylons, and sphinx sculptures (Romanticism,2023, [www.theartstory.org](http://www.theartstory.org)). The detention complex "The Tombs," called originally the Houses of Justice, built in New York City in 1838 is a good example of the Egyptian substyle of the Oriental Revival (Romanticism,2023, [www.theartstory.org](http://www.theartstory.org)).

Louis XV's love for Polish fashion and canopied beds ushered in the beginning of romanticism in interior design (Romantic interior design,2020, [www.nazmiyalantiquerugs.com](http://www.nazmiyalantiquerugs.com)). Home furnishing styles were usually Chinoiserie, a European imitation of East Asian art and decor that often-included flowers, plants, birds, and dragon designs (Romantic interior design,2020, [www.nazmiyalantiquerugs.com](http://www.nazmiyalantiquerugs.com)). Although the style could be found throughout various rooms in a home, they were most popular in women's dressing rooms and bedrooms (Romantic interior design,2020, [www.nazmiyalantiquerugs.com](http://www.nazmiyalantiquerugs.com)).

Rooms are often more colorful and richly detailed and/or patterned than exteriors are. Furniture and decorative objects usually display Gothic details also (Harwood,2012,p.515). Gothic Revival

interiors rarely emulate the originals, which are not clearly understood, so only a few are vaulted or of stone in a medieval manner (Harwood,2012,p.515). Unlike medieval ones, contemporary rooms rely on fixed decorative details and furniture instead of movable hangings and furnishings (Harwood,2012,p.515). Entry and stair halls frequently convey the Gothic style through architectural details. Most large English Gothic Revival houses have a great hall like those of the Middle Ages (Harwood,2012,p.515). Decorated in a medieval manner, the space, which serves as a living room, is usually two stories with a large fireplace (Harwood,2012,p.515). However, sometimes it is rarely used because it is difficult to heat. Like other houses, Gothic Revival ones may have libraries or studies, billiard rooms, conservatories, smoking rooms, art galleries, or chapels (Harwood,2012,p.515).

### **Theory and Philosophy**

Philosophical Romanticism holds that the universe is a single unified and interconnected whole, and full of values, tendencies and life, not merely objective lifeless matter (Romantiscim,2023, [www.philosophybasics.com](http://www.philosophybasics.com)). The Romantic view is that reason, objectivity and analysis radically falsify reality by breaking it up into disconnected lifeless entities, and the best way of perceiving reality is through some subjective feeling or intuition, through which we participate in the subject of our knowledge, instead of viewing it from the outside (Romantiscim,2023, [www.philosophybasics.com](http://www.philosophybasics.com)). Nature is an experience, and not an object for manipulation and study, and, once experienced, the individual becomes in tune with his feelings and this is what helps him to create moral values (Romantiscim,2023, [www.philosophybasics.com](http://www.philosophybasics.com)).

The movement emphasized intense emotion as an authentic source of aesthetic experience, placing new emphasis on such emotions as apprehension, horror and terror, and awe—especially that experienced in confronting the new aesthetic categories of the sublimity and beauty of nature

(Romanticism,2023, [www. boisestate.pressbooks.pub](http://www.boisestate.pressbooks.pub)). It elevated folk art and ancient custom to something noble, but also spontaneity as a desirable characteristic (as in the musical impromptu) (Romanticism,2023, [www. boisestate.pressbooks.pub](http://www. boisestate.pressbooks.pub)). In contrast to the Rationalism and Classicism of the Enlightenment, Romanticism revived medievalism, and elements of art and narrative perceived as authentically medieval in an attempt to escape population growth, early urban sprawl, and industrialism (Romanticism,2023, [www. boisestate.pressbooks.pub](http://www. boisestate.pressbooks.pub)).

The roots of Philosophical Romanticism can be found in the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant. Rousseau, thought that civilization fills Man with unnatural wants and seduces him away from his true nature and original freedom (Romantiscim,2023, [www.philosophybasics.com](http://www.philosophybasics.com)).

Advocating freedom and independence, many artists and philosophers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries challenged the way people looked at the world, emphasizing the integrity of the individual and refusing to bow to convention (Forward,2022, [www.open.edu](http://www.open.edu)).

## **Analysis**

Romanticism was an artistic, literary, musical and intellectual movement that originated in Europe toward the end of the 18th century, and in most areas was at its peak in the approximate period from 1800 to 1850 (Romanticism,2023, [www. boisestate.pressbooks.pub](http://www. boisestate.pressbooks.pub)). Romanticism was characterized by its emphasis on emotion and individualism as well as glorification of all the past and nature, preferring the medieval rather than the classical (Romanticism,2023, [www. boisestate.pressbooks.pub](http://www. boisestate.pressbooks.pub)). It was partly a reaction to the Industrial Revolution, the aristocratic social and political norms of the Age of Enlightenment, and the scientific rationalization of nature—all components of modernity (Romanticism,2023, [www. boisestate.pressbooks.pub](http://www. boisestate.pressbooks.pub)). It



was embodied most strongly in the visual arts, music, and literature, but had a major impact on historiography, education, and the social sciences (Romanticism,2023, [www.boisestate.pressbooks.pub](http://www.boisestate.pressbooks.pub)). It had a significant and complex effect on politics, with romantic thinkers influencing liberalism, radicalism, conservatism and nationalism (Romanticism,2023, [www.boisestate.pressbooks.pub](http://www.boisestate.pressbooks.pub)).

One thing is certain: the Romantic period marked a shift in the way people thought and has continued to exert a decisive influence on the way we see and experience the world (Izenberg,2023, [www.encyclopedia.com](http://www.encyclopedia.com)).

literary critics and historians through the 1960s did identify a number of characteristics that, even if not all shared by every Romantic, seemed to capture a distinctive Romantic style, indeed a whole ethos (Izenberg,2023, [www.encyclopedia.com](http://www.encyclopedia.com)). Central to it was a validation of both unique human particularity or individuality and the human sense for the infinite, as well as the effort to reconcile the two (Izenberg,2023, [www.encyclopedia.com](http://www.encyclopedia.com)). The Romantic idea of individuality involved a heightened awareness and legitimization of the emotions and the irrational, against what it took to be the arid rationalism and the narrow, destructive analytic spirit of the eighteenth century (Izenberg,2023, [www.encyclopedia.com](http://www.encyclopedia.com)). The crucial faculty of the expanded Romantic self was the imagination, which through the emotions and the unconscious could grasp and unite with the infinite in its various characterizations, whether a virtually deified Nature, a more abstract Absolute, or a more traditionally theistic divinity (Izenberg,2023, [www.encyclopedia.com](http://www.encyclopedia.com)).

Perhaps the most significant work to bridge Romanticism and conservation as a physical and biological science and a social science came from Aldo Leopold, a forester, writer, astute observer of nature and human activities, teacher, and internationally-known conservationist and ecologist (Romanticism And Conservation,2023, [www.climatepolicy-watcher.org](http://www.climatepolicy-watcher.org)). Leopold's contribution

to conservation comes from his conceptualization of healthy land and its relationship to human communities (Romanticism and Conservation,2023, [www.climatepolicy-watcher.org](http://www.climatepolicy-watcher.org)). Leopold did not separate the land from human activities (Romanticism and Conservation,2023, [www.climatepolicy-watcher.org](http://www.climatepolicy-watcher.org)). Rather, he extended the definition of community to include not only the places where people reside and interact with each other, but also the surrounding ecology in the landscape. Leopold added a rich component to conservation by giving it an ethical basis (Romanticism and Conservation,2023, [www.climatepolicy-watcher.org](http://www.climatepolicy-watcher.org)).

## **Conclusion**

Romanticism did not supersede Enlightenment thought; rather it offered alternative outlooks and horizons (Forward,2014, [www.open.edu](http://www.open.edu)). In promoting the imagination over reason, the Romantics encouraged individuals to experiment boldly, to question things instead of blindly accepting them (Forward,2022, [www.open.edu](http://www.open.edu)). If we pause to think for a moment about the 1960s, this was a decade in which there was a renewed emphasis on Romanticism (Forward,2022, [www.open.edu](http://www.open.edu)). The early Romantic innovative vision had clashed with classicism; in the 1960s there was again a striking opposition between tradition and countercultures, a desire to ‘get back to nature’, and many people were lured by Eastern mysticism (Forward,2022, [www.open.edu](http://www.open.edu)). Rebelliousness and innovation were again manifest in many spheres of activity (Forward,2022, [www.open.edu](http://www.open.edu)). However there has always been an underlying tension in Romanticism: it has a melancholic aspect, because Time is man’s enemy (Forward,2022, [www.open.edu](http://www.open.edu)). There is a sense of the limitless potential of man, but also an awareness that life is transitory (Forward,2022, [www.open.edu](http://www.open.edu)).

Heroic visionaries, battling on in spite of adverse circumstances, they invited admiration and empathy (Forward,2022, [www.open.edu](http://www.open.edu)). Perhaps today’s passion for celebrity is very much in

keeping with the spirit of Romanticism, and a number of media artistes have achieved immortality by virtue of their insistence on living life their way, seeking fulfilment on their own terms – whatever the outcome (Forward,2022, [www.open.edu](http://www.open.edu)).

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