



American Romantic, Transcendental,
and Gothic Literature

Romantic Period

- Literary and cultural movements in Europe and America from about 1770-1860
- The timeframe in America was slightly later (1826-1865)

Conditions that led to Romanticism

- ◉ Frontier
- ◉ Optimism
- ◉ Immigration
- ◉ Industrial growth
- ◉ Search for spiritual roots



Revolt Against Age of Reason

- Imagination over reason
- Spontaneity over control
- Individual over society
- Subjectivity over objectivity

Features of Romanticism

- ◉ Belief in natural goodness of man
- ◉ Celebration of individualism
- ◉ Nature is VERY important
- ◉ Universe is mysterious and irrational
- ◉ Formal language
- ◉ Good receive justice; nature can punish or reward

Features of Romanticism contd.

- Highly imaginative and subjective
- Emotional intensity
- Common man as hero
- Nature as refuge, source of knowledge or spirituality

Romantic Plots

- ◉ Arranged around crisis moments (watch for this with *The Scarlet Letter*)
- ◉ Often demonstrate romantic love, honor and integrity, and idealism



Five "I"s of Romanticism

- ◉ Intuition
- ◉ Imagination
- ◉ Inspiration
- ◉ Individuality
- ◉ Idealism
- ◉ <http://prezi.com/wv8nk6bookibtg/unit-2-part-1-American-romanticism/>

Transcendentalism

- To transcend means to go beyond everyday human experience in the physical world
- Ralph Waldo Emerson



Emerson and Transcendentalism

- ◉ Emerson was the most influential and best-known member of the Transcendentalist group.
- ◉ Transcendentalism blends Puritan thought and Romantic tradition
 - ◉ "Every natural fact...is a symbol of some spiritual fact."

- ◉ Emerson focused on intuitive thought. Intuition is our capacity to know things spontaneously and immediately through emotion rather than reason.
- ◉ This contrasts with the rational thinking of people like Ben Franklin (Age of Reason).
- ◉ Emerson believed that people could know God through nature if they trust themselves.
 - ◉ Oversoul
 - ◉ Very popular optimism

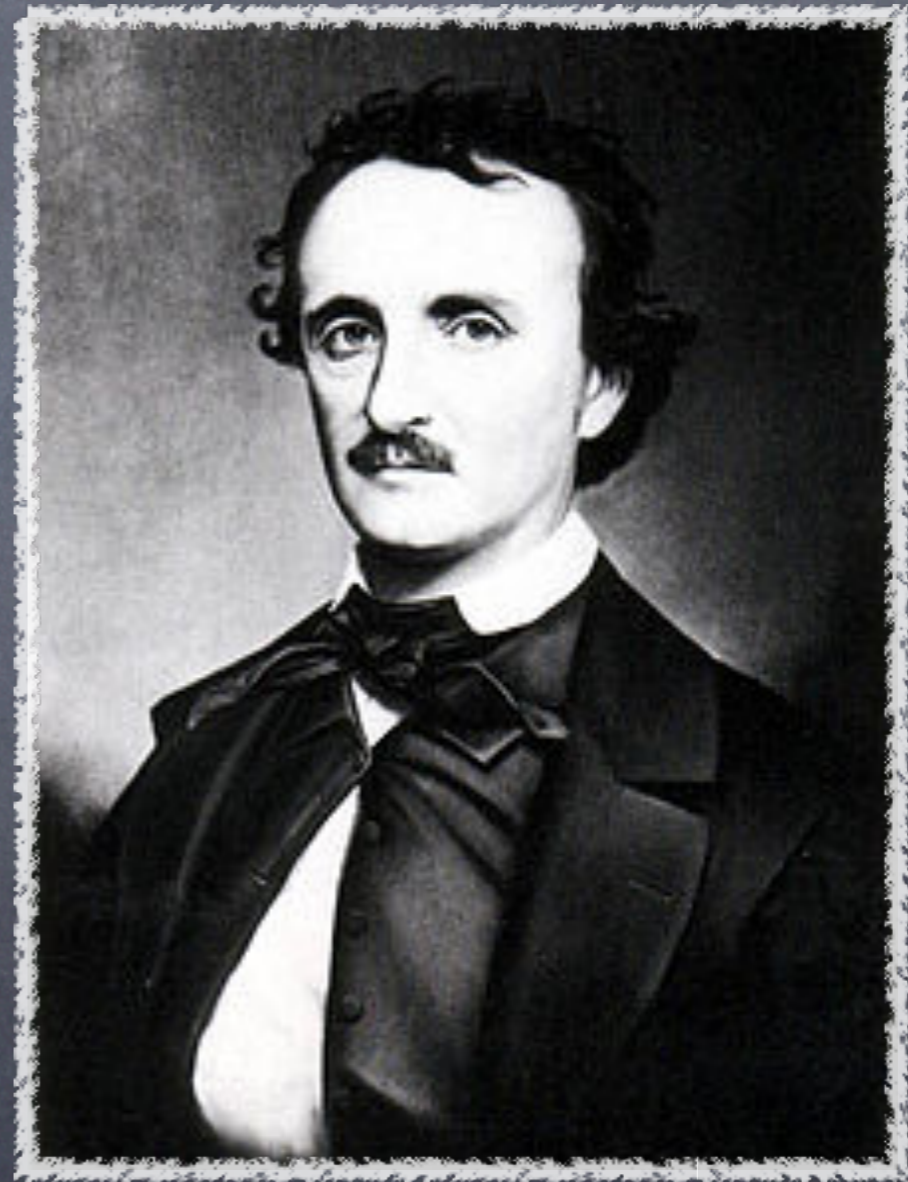
The Dark Romantics/Gothics

- ◉ In contrast to Emerson, the dark romantics did not believe nature is good or harmless.
- ◉ They explored the conflict between good and evil, the psychological effects of guilt and sin, and even madness.



Gothic Characteristics

- ◉ Atmosphere of gloom, terror, or misery
- ◉ Mysterious events
- ◉ Exotic settings
- ◉ Hidden or double realities



Review Questions

- ◉ Restate the characteristics of Romanticism in your own words.
- ◉ How did the Puritan view of nature differ from the Romantic view?
- ◉ Define Transcendentalism.
- ◉ How did Emerson's approach to knowledge differ from Ben Franklin's?
- ◉ Why was Emerson's optimism appealing to the audiences of his day?
- ◉ Describe the dark romantics.