Unit #2:

Romanticism,

Transcendentalism, & Gothic

Literature

Part 1: Romanticism (1820 – 1865)

#### America Grows as a Nation

- At the beginning of 1800's the U.S. population exploded, and Americans forged an independent nation.
- The Louisiana Purchase was the biggest land deal in history.
- This was settled between France and the United States in 1803.
- The size of the United States doubled with this purchase & a century of westward expansion was launched.



## Gold Rush!





- In 1849 gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill in California.
- By 1849, tens of thousands of Americans traveled west, hoping to strike it rich.
- Gold rushes continued through the rest of the century.
- Although many dreams were shattered, the gold rush led to the founding of new towns and cities across the country.
- It also led to the first transcontinental railroads.

## Origins of Romanticism

- \* The adventurous spirit that guided Americans out West also influenced writers of that time period.
- \* American writers sought to capture the energy and character of the United States, which was still a relatively new country.
- Writers began to create their own cultural identity with new styles of writing.
- \* These included the styles of romanticism, transcendentalism, and dark romanticism (or gothic).





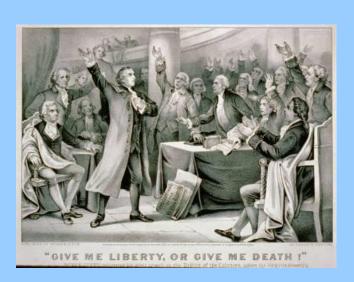
## What is Romanticism?

- \* Romanticism refers to a movement in art, literature, and music during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- It first emerged in the 1790s in Germany and Britain, and in the 1820s in France and elsewhere.
- \* It is known as the Romantic Movement or Romantic Revival.

#### Romanticism vs. Puritanism & Age of Reason

- \* The Romantic movement was a reaction to both the strict beliefs of the Puritans and the rationalism of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Age of Reason.
- \* The authors of the new Romantic movement rejected the ordered rationality of the writings of the Puritans and writers during the American Revolution.





#### Romanticism vs. Puritanism & Age of Reason

- \* The Romantic writers felt that the literature of the 1700s and earlier was too mechanical, impersonal, and artificial.
- \* Romantics were less concerned with social or political reform (as was dominant during the Age of Reason) than with the expression of their own intuitive experience.





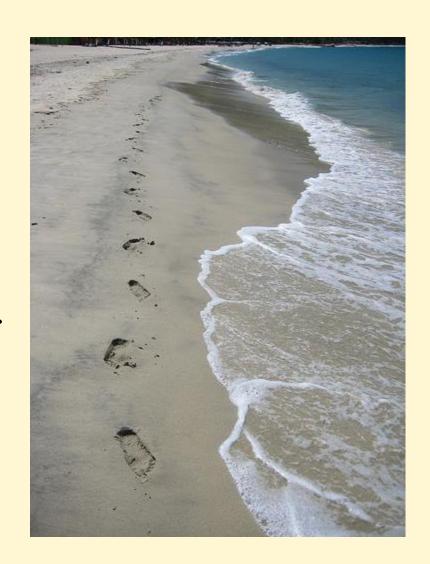
## Romanticism

- Romanticism is characterized by the 5
   "I"s
  - \* Imagination
  - \* Intuition
  - \* Idealism
  - \* Inspiration
  - \* Individuality



#### **IMAGINATION**

- To the Romantics, imagination, individual feelings, and wild nature were of greater value than reason, rationalism, and logic (which were important during the Age of Reason in the mid to late 1700s).
- Each person's imagination is the critical authority over all matters.
- The Romantics believed that the imagination was able to discover truths that the rational mind could not reach.
- These truths were usually accompanied by powerful emotion and associated with natural, unspoiled beauty.



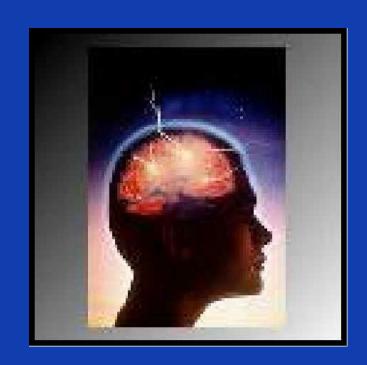
## Intuition

- Romantics placed value on "intuition."
- Feelings and instincts are now considered superior to rationality or reason as the mode of perceiving and experiencing reality.
- Intuition leads one to truth.
  - British Romantic writer William Wordsworth described poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings."



## Idealism

- \* Idealism is the belief that we should always strive for our highest ideals.
- \* This can be achieved through the human spirit and the mind.
- \* A person's thoughts or ideas have a crucial role in making the world the way it is.

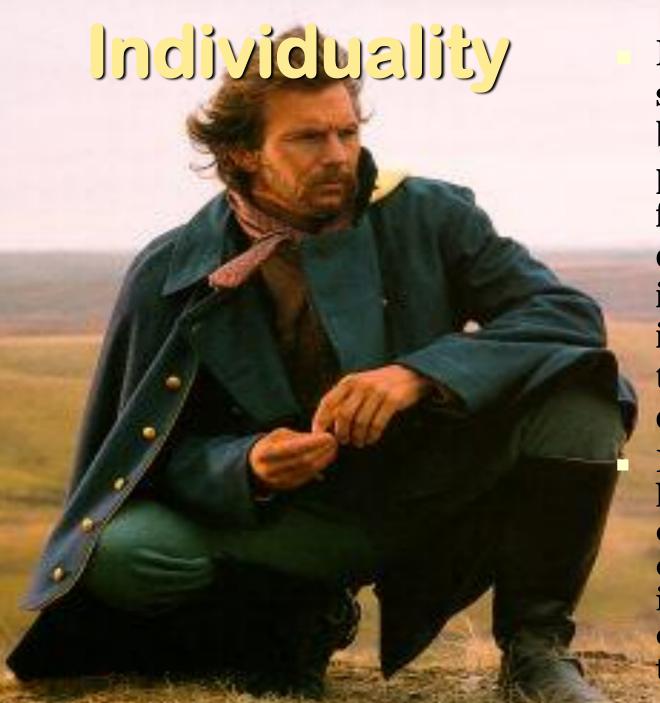


## Inspiration (Religion)

- The Romantics found inspiration through the natural world.
- Estranged from traditional religious beliefs, the romantics looked upon nature as the dwelling place of God.
- God and the natural universe were considered to be one and the same.
- They perceived nature as a metaphor for the sublime power and mystery of forces that inspire solace and self-discovery.

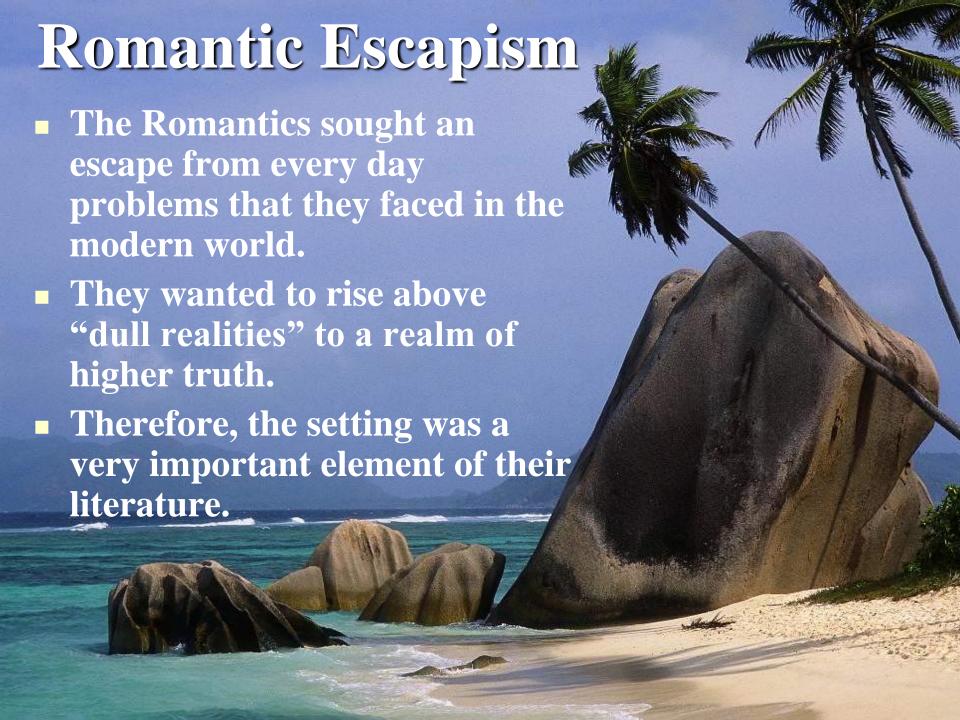






**Romantics** strongly believed in personal freedom, democratic ideals, and the importance of the rights of each individual.

Romantic literature celebrated and explored the inward experiences of the individual.



## Natural Settings

- Romantics emphasized the beauty, strangeness, and mystery of nature.
- Romantics saw nature not as a machine but as an organic process.
- Nature is in constant development and is always changing.



#### **Natural Settings**

- Romantics also believed in the natural goodness of humans.
- To the Romantics, nature equals innocence and goodness.
- They believed that the urban life of civilization hinders the goodness of humans.
- Therefore, most of the settings will take place in secluded locations such as the wilderness.







#### Settings in the past

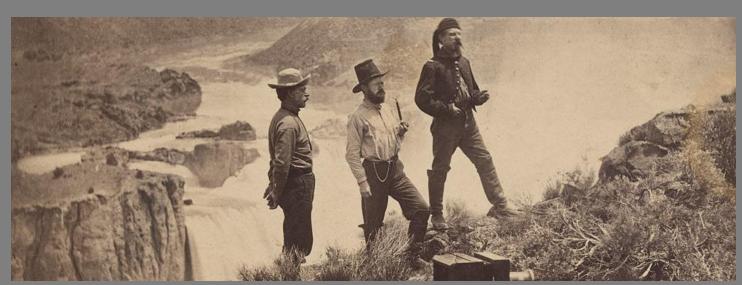
- Many of the settings of Romantic literature take place in the more "natural" past.
- Part of this was due to the rise of nationalism in the United States during this time.
- This new sense of nationalism brought with it a new interest in the American past.
- From the work of the Romantic writers, and those who followed, American literature gradually developed a sense of a national past and of an emerging national character.





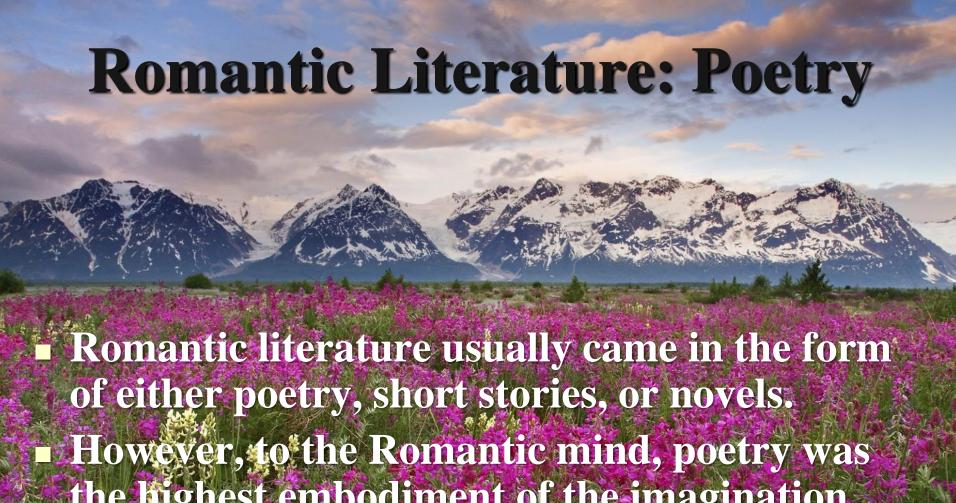
#### Settings in the past

- Romantic writers also idealized and romanticized the past.
- They saw the past as a world far removed from the grimy and noisy industrial age in which they lived.
- American writers had grown up at the edge of a continental wilderness, so they were also intrigued with the idea of wild, undiscovered land.
- The mystery and grandeur of that vast and still unknown land were part of their heritage and powerful influence upon their imaginations.
- Therefore, Romantic writers often set their stories in the frontier or in the past where they felt great nostalgia.



#### Settings in Legends or Folklore

- Romantics experimented with other exotic settings in their stories.
- Sometimes, they discovered set their stories in the supernatural realm or in old legends or folklore.
- Washington Irving found in legend and folklore a view of the natural world colored by emotion, by superstition, and by the ancient belief that supernatural beings inhabit the wild places of the earth.



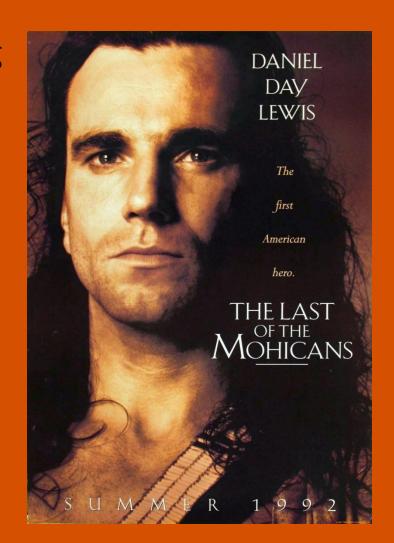
- the highest embodiment of the imagination.
- Romantic artists often contrasted poetry with science, which they saw as destroying the very truth it claimed to seek.

#### Romantic Literature: short stories & novels

- While Romantic poets of the time were still staying close to traditional forms, American novelists were discovering new subject matter to explore.
- The development of the American novel coincided with the following:
  - 1) westward expansion
  - 2) the growth of a nationalist spirit
  - 3) the rapid spread of cities.
- All these factors, however, tended to reinforce the idealization of frontier life and romanticized it.

#### **James Fenimore Cooper**

- We can see how the novel
   developed in America by looking
   at the career of James Fenimore
   Cooper (1789 1851).
- Cooper explored uniquely
   American settings and
   characters: frontier
   communities, American Indians,
   backwoodsmen, and the
   wilderness of western New York
   and Pennsylvania.
- Most of all he created the first
   American heroic figure: Natty
   Bumppo (also known as
   Hawkeye, Deerslayer, and
   Leatherstocking).

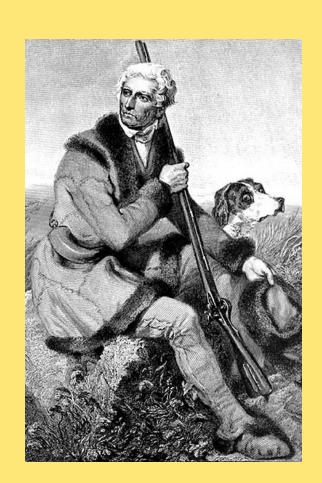


## The new American Romantic Hero vs. The "Hero" of Age of Reason

- This new American hero in literature was different from the "hero" of the Age of Reason.
- The "heroes" of the 1700s were real life leaders of the American Revolution.
- Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, Benjamin Franklin.
- These men were worldly, educated, sophisticated, and focused on making a place for themselves in civilization.

#### Characteristics of the American Romantic Hero

- Is young or possesses youthful qualities
- Is innocent and pure of purpose.
- Has a sense of honor based not on society's rules but on some higher principle.
- Has a knowledge of people and life based on deep, intuitive understanding, not on formal learning.
- Loves nature and avoids town life.
- Quests for some higher truth in the natural world.



#### The First American Hero in Literature

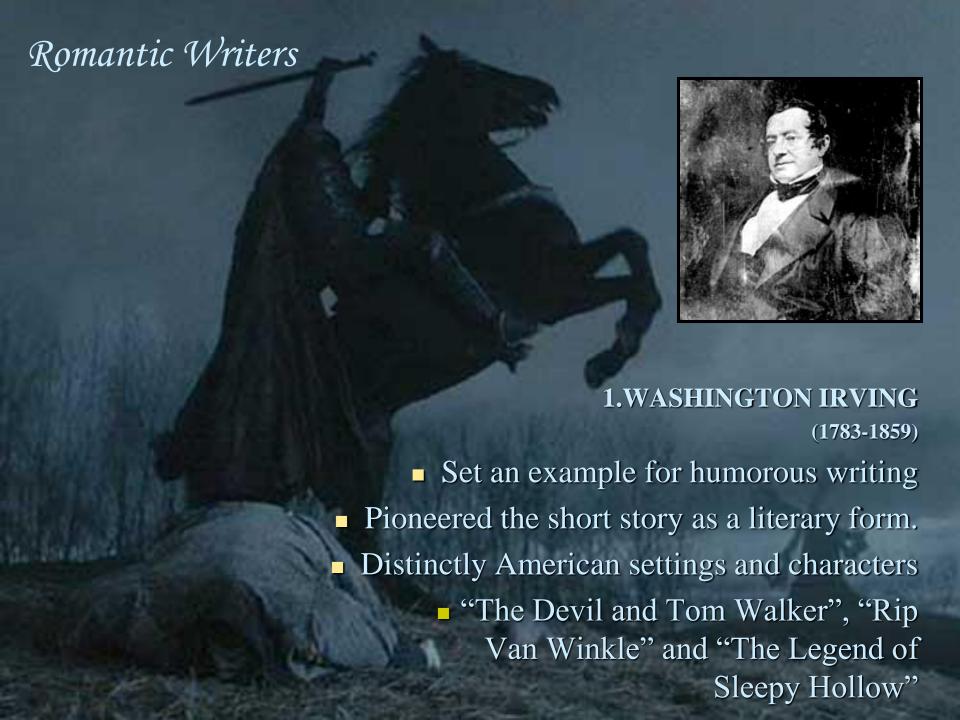
- Natty Bumppo is an appropriate Romantic hero, not just because he is a figure of heroic action, but also because he represents a "natural" view of life that is both simple and profound.
- Bumppo's values are defined by life outside society in the wilderness.
- Bumppo has many qualities that mark him as a true Romantic hero:
  - virtuous
  - skillful frontiersman
  - simple morality
  - love of nature
  - distrust of town life
  - almost superhuman resourcefulness

#### **Natty Bumppo**

- The character of Natty Bumpoo first appears in Cooper's novel *The Pioneers*.
- After he is imprisoned for shooting a deer out of season, Bumppo flees town life for the wilderness.
- There he remains an uncorrupted "natural" man, who, like the American Indian, respects nature and tries to live in harmony with it.
- Bumppo also appears in these popular sequels: The Last of the Mohicans, The Prairie, The Pathfinder, and The Deerslayer.
- We will watch clips of the 1992 film *The Last of the Mohicans* and look for the characteristics of this literary movement in the characters and story.







# New England Romantics (known as "The Fireside Poets")

- 1. Henry Wadsworth

  Longfellow (the most popular of the four)
- 2. Oliver Wendell Holmes
- 3. John Greenleaf Whittier
- 4. James Russell Lowell

These authors exhibit a typical romantic preoccupation with atmosphere, sentiment, and optimism.

