

## American Romanticism

1. **Romantic Period** – began in England around the turn of the nineteenth century
  - In England, origin attributed by some critics to the onset of the French Revolution in 1789, and others to the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1798
  - Both Coleridge and Wordsworth felt that the crucial elements of a poem were found in the mind and emotions of the poet and not the conventions of the outer world.
  
2. **Attitudes and Tendencies of American Romantic Literature:**
  - A disdain for the city or a "distrust" of civilization
  - Nostalgia for the past
  - Concern for individual freedom
  - Love for the beauties of the natural landscape
  - Interest in the supernatural
  
3. **Romantic Sensibilities**
  - The imagination, spontaneity, individual freedoms, and nature are of greater value than reason, logic, planning, and cultivation.
  - Reason is limited; the imagination is able to discover "truths" unreachable through reason.
  - Authors should rise above empirical evidence to a realm of higher truth – truth can even be found in exotic settings or in a world far removed from the industrial age. Gothic novels with wild landscapes and mysterious castles exemplify this approach.
  - God is found in nature; the nature of God is not as clearly defined when compared to the Puritans who found in nature the God they knew from the Bible.
  - Science is a "vulture whose wings are dull realities" (Poe).
  
4. **Features of American Romantic Literature**
  - The hero may have youthful qualities, innocence, a love of nature and distrust of town life, a distrust of women (thought by male writers to represent civilization and domestication), and a need to engage in a quest for a higher truth in the natural world.
  - Journeys found in American Romantic Literature are usually from the city to the world of nature.
  - Many Romantic pieces require that readers willingly "suspend their beliefs" (Coleridge).
  - European models still heavily influence American poetry.
  - Unlike European models, the American novel depicts a wilderness experience, idealizes frontier life, and coincides with westward expansion and the growth of a nationalist spirit.