

## **Dark Romanticism/Anti-Transcendentalism**

Before we begin, let us review some of the major tenets of **Romanticism**.

- Intuition is favored over reason
- Focus on the imagination, emotional intensity, spontaneity, the individual, freedom, and nature as a source of escapism and spirituality
- Romantic heroes are usually “common” men who will often journey away from the “corruption” of civilization and seek truth in Nature
- Helped instill proper gender behavior for men and women
- Romantic texts often contain elements of the supernatural or mysterious (dreams, visions, ghosts, irrational/absurd plot points with no explanation, etc.)
- Romantics believed in the natural goodness of man; that man in a state of nature would behave well, but is hindered by civilization (The “Noble Savage”)

### **What is Dark Romanticism?**

**Dark romanticism** is a literary sub-genre that emerged from the Transcendental philosophical movement popular in America from about 1836 through the 1840's. Works in the dark romantic spirit were influenced by Transcendentalism, but did not entirely embrace the ideas of Transcendentalism. Dark Romantic works are notably less optimistic than Transcendental texts about mankind, nature, and divinity. Authors considered most representative of dark romanticism are Edgar Allan Poe ("The Raven", "Annabel Lee", *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*), Nathaniel Hawthorne (*Ethan Brand*, *The Scarlet Letter*), Herman Melville (*Bartleby the Scrivener*). The following are some basic tenets of the Dark Romantic literary movement:

- Firstly, Dark Romantics are much less confident about the notion perfection is an innate quality of mankind, as believed by Transcendentalists. Subsequently, Dark Romantics present individuals as prone to sin and self-destruction, not as inherently possessing divinity and wisdom.

- Secondly, while both groups believe nature is a deeply spiritual force, Dark Romanticism views it in a much more sinister light than does Transcendentalism, which sees nature as a divine and universal organic mediator. For these Dark Romantics, the natural world is dark, decaying, and mysterious; when it does reveal truth to man, its revelations are evil and hellish.
- Finally, whereas Transcendentalists advocate social reform when appropriate, works of Dark Romanticism frequently show individuals failing in their attempts to make changes for the better.

**Here is a quick review of the Transcendentalist philosophy:**

- Transcendentalists believed that everyone was absolutely pure and that each individual is a part of God.
- Transcendentalists believed that people's thoughts and intuition were the voice of God.
- Transcendentalists did not believe in institutions like government because they thought the individual human mind was the strongest power in the universe.
- Transcendentalists would be concerned with questions such as: Are all people good? Is the voice inside people's heads the pure voice of God?

The Dark Romantics were the forefathers to the modern horror, thriller, and mystery stories. Poe, Melville, and Hawthorne added drastically different perspectives from those of the Transcendentalists, which is why Dark Romantics are often called Anti-Transcendentalists.

Their views of human existence and strong use of symbolism made them stand apart from Emerson and Thoreau. They examined the psychological effects of guilt and sin, the conflict between good and evil, and people plagued with madness. They agreed that human nature is not necessarily good

The Dark Romantics believed that the Transcendentalists ignored the darker side of humanity, so they sought to show their readers what was otherwise ignored or hidden. They did this through dark tales of obsession, revenge, shame, and madness. Their views and styles helped shape American literature.

Taken from <https://sites.google.com/site/collegeprepenglishiii/dark-romanticism-notes>