

Romanticism and Nature

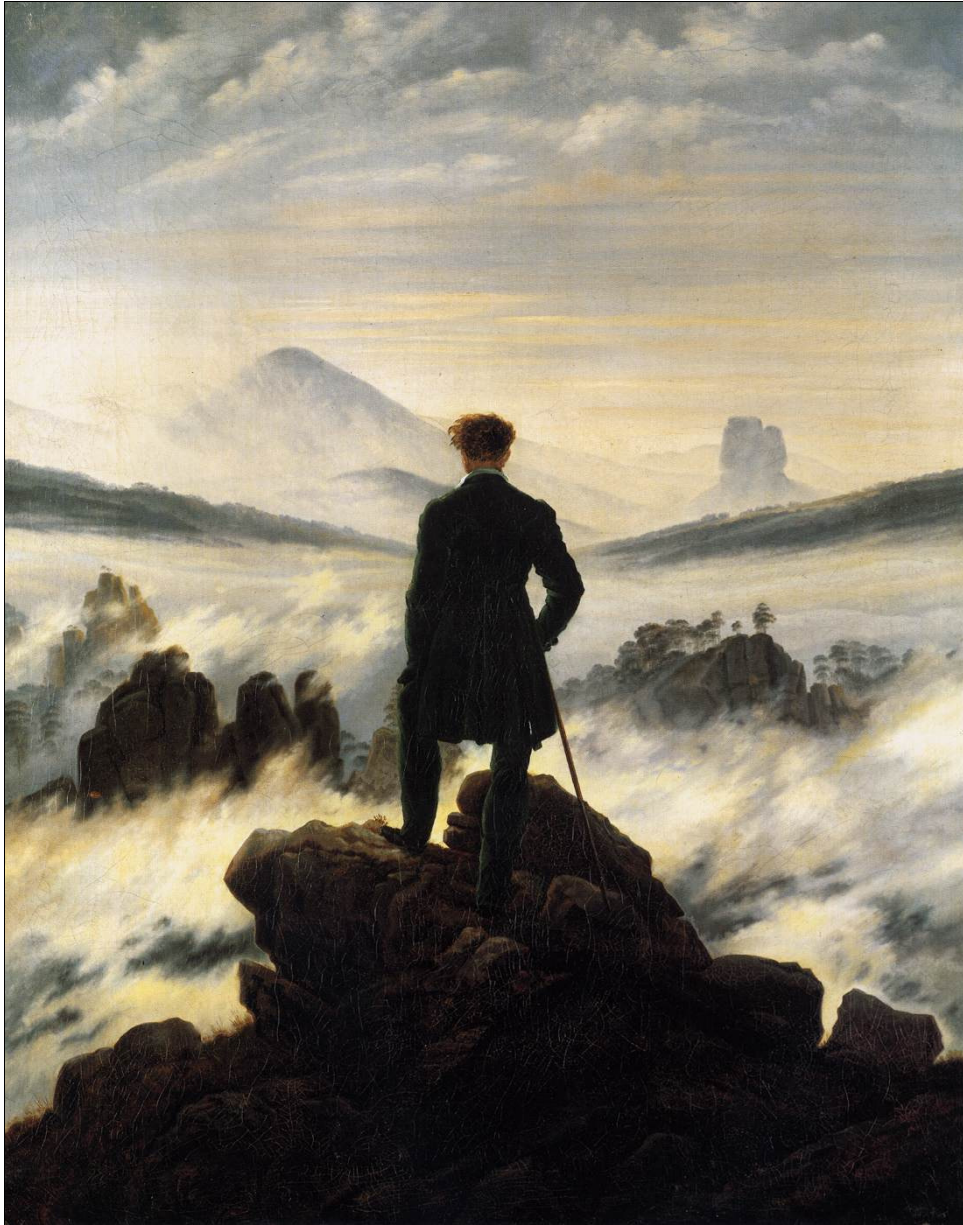
Romanticism (1789-1832)

This literary period in history is most well known in terms of the British poets Thomas Gray, William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Coleridge, Lord Byron, Percy Shelley, and John Keats. The most significant writing associated with the term “Romanticism” takes place between 1789 (when the French Revolution began) and 1824 (the death of Byron). It’s also important to note that the term also applies to political thought, history, philosophy, music, and painting during this time period. The Gothic and Victorian traditions are also a part of the Romantic Movement, especially in England.

One of the fundamentals of Romanticism is the belief in the natural goodness of man, the idea that man in a state of nature would behave well but is hindered by civilization. (Rousseau—“man is born free and everywhere he is in chains.”) The “savage” is noble, childhood is good and the emotions inspired by both beliefs causes the heart to soar. On the contrary, urban life and the commitment to “getting and spending,” generates a fear and distrust of the world. If man is inherently sinful, reason must restrain his passions, but if he is naturally good, then in an appropriate environment, his emotions can be trusted (Blake—“bathe in the waters of life”).

The Characteristics of Romanticism

- the beauty of the untamed, natural world (sometimes even seen as Pantheism)
- attractiveness of the pastoral life
- emphasis on freedom, imagination, and emotion
- emphasis on changing order—even chaos or transitory nature of life
- lack of authority or reaction to the established order
- promotion of the rights of the individual
- reaction against neoclassicism –rejection of strict forms and conventions
- writers often perceived themselves as sensitive and unappreciated—glorifying the suffering artist



Caspar David Friedrich. *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*. 1818. Oil on canvas, 75 x 98 cm. Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, Germany.