Characteristics of Romanticism & Transcendentalism

**Romanticism - the “American Renaissance”**

* Importance on man’s relationship to the natural world.
  + Landscape, nature, art, gardening, music, theology (study of religion)
* Characterized by flair, extravagance, emotion, and imagination.
* Romanticism Concepts:
  + Innovation against traditionalism
  + Focus on trying to change literature
  + The supernatural
  + Shift in topics from higher class to middle class
  + Authors wrote about their own feelings, thus becoming spontaneous
  + Nature, wilderness, and landscapes
  + Life process
  + Instead of writing about others, authors tried to get the reader to put his/herself into the story
  + Realization of new beginnings
  + Infinite good in all
  + Fantasy, adventure, and romance

**Dark Romanticism**

* Gothic literature - grew out of dark romanticism
  + Gothic fiction is more about sheer terror than Dark Romanticism’s themes of dark mystery and skepticism regarding man.

Search for identity, haunted structures, inspires terror through the macabre (disturbing and horrifying because of involvement with or depiction of death and injury) and supernatural.

* Where Romantic authors took a more optimistic approach, gothic writers were more serious and found the darkness and evil in those same aspects, with evil taking over the good.
* Individuals prone to sin and self-destruction.
* Natural world portrayed as dark, decaying, and mysterious; when it does reveal truths to man, its revelations are evil and horrifying.
* Frequently shows man failing in their attempts to make changes for the better.
* Success of this movement relies on the fact that the human psyche is is attracted in a subtle way to pain, fear, tragedy, and the supernatural. This movement lead to the Gothic style and has greatly influenced music and art.
* Characteristics:
  + Creepy symbols
  + Horrific themes - horror, tragedy, the macabre, the supernatural.
  + Psychological effects of guilt and sin

**Transcendentalism**

* Belief in man’s spiritual essence and his soul’s ability to transcend the physical.
* Believed the Divinity exists everywhere - in nature and in each person
* Intuition and individual conscience “transcend” experience and serve as guides to the truth, rather than the senses and logic or reason.
* Transcendental Concepts:
  + Live close to nature
  + Dignity of manual labor
  + Intellectualism
  + Spiritual living
  + Personal relationship with God
  + Divinity of man
  + Man is one great brotherhood
  + Self-trust/self-reliance
  + Resist vulgar prosperity
  + Democracy
  + Individualism
* Organized religion inspires fear and disapproval of self and others