

Pre-Romanticism, cultural movement in Europe from about the 1740s onward that preceded and presaged the artistic movement known as Romanticism (*q.v.*). Chief among these trends was a shift in public taste away from the grandeur, austerity, nobility, idealization, and elevated sentiments of Neoclassicism or Classicism toward simpler, more sincere, and more natural forms of expression. This new emphasis partly reflected the tastes of the growing middle class, who found the refined and elegant art forms patronized by aristocratic society to be artificial and overly sophisticated; the bourgeoisie favoured more realistic artistic vehicles that were more emotionally accessible.

A major intellectual precursor of Romanticism was the French philosopher and writer Jean-Jacques Rousseau. He emphasized the free expression of emotion rather than polite restraint in friendship and love, repudiated aristocratic elegance and recognized the virtues of middle-class domestic life, and helped open the public's eyes to the beauties of nature. Rousseau introduced the cult of religious sentiment among people who had discarded religious dogma, and he inculcated the belief that moral development was fostered by experiencing powerful sympathies. He also introduced the idea that the free expression of the creative spirit is more important than strict adherence to formal rules and traditional procedures.

The new emphasis on genuine emotion can be seen in a whole range of Pre-Romantic trends. These included the development of the “wild,” natural-appearing English garden in contrast to the geometric vistas of the French formal garden; the graveyard school of English poetry of the 1740s, with Edward Young's and Thomas Gray's melancholy evocations of sorrow, bereavement, death, and decay; Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and other sentimental novels that exploited the reader's capacity for tenderness and compassion; the “novel of sensibility” of the 1760s, with its emphasis on emotional sensitivity and deeply felt personal responses to natural beauty and works of art; the Sturm und Drang movement in Germany (1770–80), in which J.W. von Goethe and Friedrich Schiller rejected in their plays the conventions of French Neoclassical tragedy and instead exalted nature, feeling, and human individualism; the English Gothic novel of terror, fantasy, and mystery, as practiced by Horace Walpole in *The Castle of Otranto* (1765) and by Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Gregory Lewis in several works; and, finally, the ambitious efforts to collect and preserve folktales and ballads of all types. By the 1790s Pre-Romanticism had been supplanted by Romanticism proper.

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