

# Romanticism: Movements, Texts and Contexts



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1862.





## **Age of Enlightenment:**

**The Enlightenment – known in French as the Siècle des Lumières, the Century of Lights, and in German as the Aufklärung included a range of ideas centered on reason as the primary source of authority and legitimacy, and came to advance ideals such as liberty, progress, tolerance, fraternity, constitutional government and ending the perceived abuses of the church and state. The Enlightenment was marked by increasing empiricism, scientific rigor, and reductionism, along with increased questioning of religious orthodoxy. French historians traditionally place the Enlightenment between 1715, the year that Louis XIV died, and 1789, the beginning of the French Revolution.**

The “Rationalists”, mostly in France and Germany, argued all knowledge must begin from certain “innate ideas” in the mind. Major rationalists were **Descartes, Baruch Spinoza, Gottfried Leibniz, and Nicolas Malebranche.**

The “Empiricists”, by contrast, held that knowledge must begin with sensory experience. Major figures in this line of thought are **John Locke, George Berkeley, and David Hume**

**A priori knowledge or justification is independent of experience**, as with mathematics ( $3+2=5$ ), tautologies ("All bachelors are unmarried"), and deduction from pure reason (e.g., ontological proofs).

**A posteriori knowledge or justification is dependent on experience or empirical evidence**, e.g. Some bachelors are unhappy.

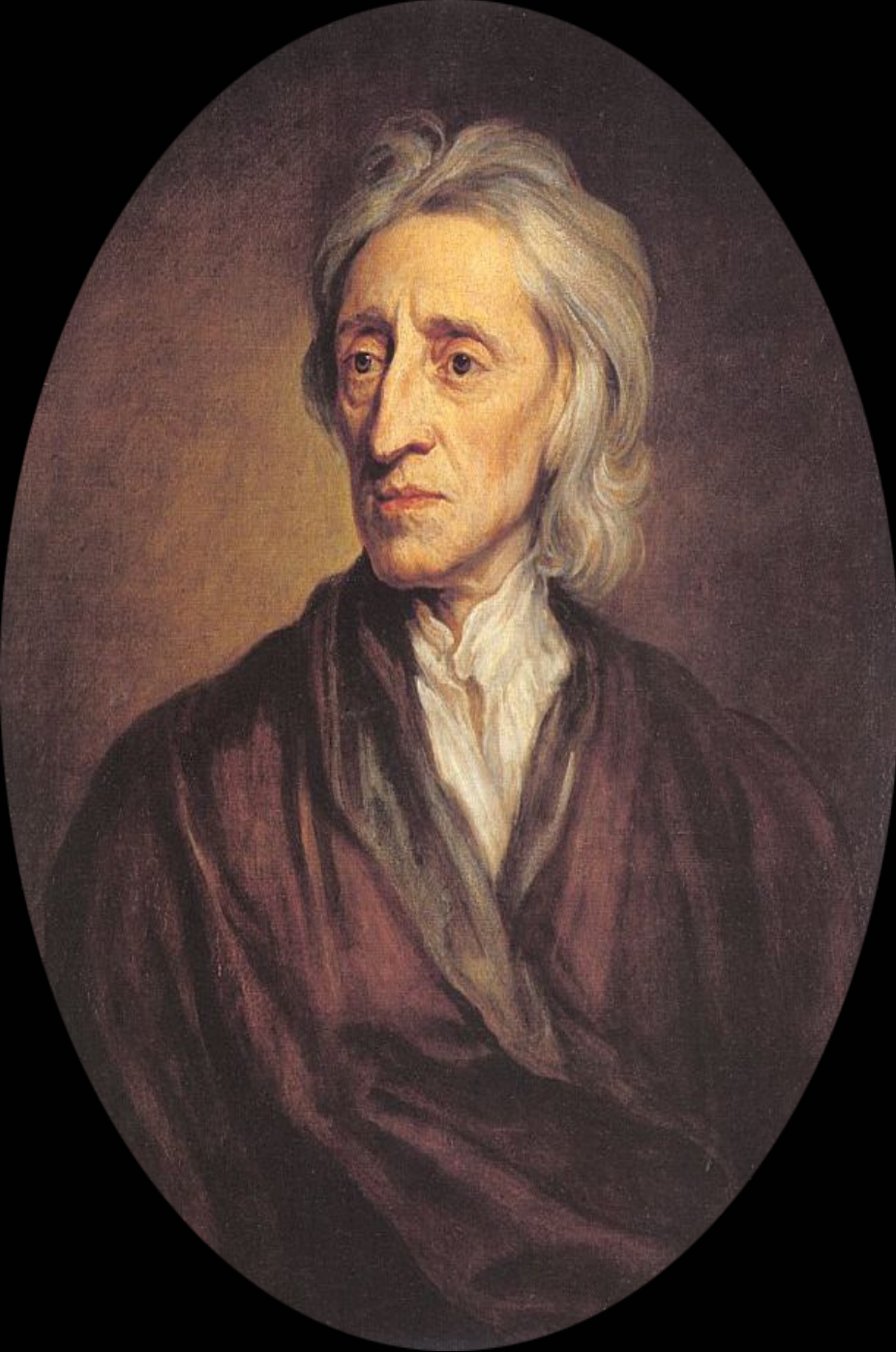




**René Descartes (1596-1650)** was a French philosopher, mathematician, and scientist. Dubbed the father of modern philosophy, much of subsequent Western philosophy is a response to his writings.

**Cartesian Methodological Skepticism:**

Initially, Descartes arrives at only a single principle: thought exists. Thought cannot be separated from me, therefore, I exist (*Discourse on the Method* and *Principles of Philosophy*). Most famously, this is known as *cogito ergo sum* (English: “I think, therefore I am”). Therefore, Descartes concluded, if he doubted, then something or someone must be doing the doubting, therefore the very fact that he doubted proved his existence. “The simple meaning of the phrase is that if one is skeptical of existence, that is in and of itself proof that he does exist.”



**John Locke's (1632-1704)** theory of mind is often cited as the origin of modern conceptions of identity and the self. He postulated that, at birth, the mind was a blank slate or **tabula rasa**. Contrary to Cartesian philosophy based on pre-existing concepts, he maintained that we are born without innate ideas, and that knowledge is instead determined only by experience derived from sense perception. In Locke's philosophy, tabula rasa was the theory that at birth the (human) mind is a "blank slate" without rules for processing data, and that data is added and rules for processing are formed solely by one's sensory experiences.

## **Eighteenth Century Literature:**

The 18th century in Europe was The Age of Enlightenment and literature explored themes of social upheaval, reversals of personal status, political satire, geographical exploration and the comparison between the supposed natural state of man and the supposed civilized state of man.

### **Some Canonical Texts of 18<sup>th</sup> Century:**

William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700)

Jonathan Swift's *The Battle of the Books* (1704) and  
*Gulliver's Travels* (1726)

Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719)

Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* (1714)

Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749)



# Main Difference between Romanticism and The Age of Enlightenment

- Imitation vs Inspiration (M.H Abrams The Mirror and the lamp)
- Reason vs Imagination
- Emphasis on the Common Man/ things/ objects instead of grand subjects (Wordsworth's Daffodils vs The Rape of the Lock)
- Subjective vs Objective (freedom of the individual, appeal of solitary over the larger social ideals)
- Interest in the natural world and the supernatural.
- Simple language vs high flown bombastic language

# Major Events that led to Romantic Movement

- The French Revolution (1789-1799)  
(Overthrow of the French Monarchy Louis XVI and establishment of the Republic- Liberty, Equality and Fraternity)
- 1780-1840- Industrial Revolution – reaction to it, call of return to nature.





## **The Gothic Novel – Result Of Excessive Repression**

### **Textual Characteristics Of The Gothic:**

- ❑ A fascination for the past, particularly — but not exclusively — the medieval era.**
- ❑ A liking for the strangely eccentric, the supernatural, the magical, and the sublime, sometimes subtly intermingled with the realistic• psychological insights, especially into sexuality, through (at best) fascinating and intricate characterisation, or (at worst) stereotypical caricatures.**
- ❑ Representation and stimulation of fear, horror, the macabre and the sinister, within the context of a general focus on the emotional rather than the rational•**
- ❑ Frequently exotic settings and locations, although this tendency may be contrasted to a more ‘domestic’ gothic tradition, especially found amongst American texts•**
- ❑ Plots within plots often multiple narrators, and other stylistic characteristics such as the use of ‘tableaux’ and overt symbolism.**

## **Characteristics of Romanticism**

**Romanticism** (also the **Romantic era** or the **Romantic period**) was an artistic, literary, and intellectual movement that originated in Europe toward the end of the 18th century and in most areas was at its peak in the approximate period from 1800 to 1850.

- ♦ Romanticism was characterized by its emphasis on emotion and individualism as well as glorification of all the past and nature, preferring the medieval rather than the classical. It was partly a reaction to the Industrial Revolution, the aristocratic social and political norms of the Age of Enlightenment and the scientific rationalization of nature.
- ♦ The movement emphasized intense emotion as an authentic source of aesthetic experience, placing new emphasis on such emotions as apprehension, horror and terror, and awe—especially that experienced in confronting the new aesthetic categories of the sublimity and beauty of nature. It considered folk art and ancient custom to be noble statuses, but also valued spontaneity. In contrast to the rational and Classicist ideal models, Romanticism revived medievalism.

**German idealism** is the name of a movement in German philosophy that began in the 1780s and lasted until the 1840s. The most famous representatives of this movement are **Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel**. While there are important differences between these figures, they all share a commitment to idealism. Kant's transcendental idealism was a modest philosophical doctrine about the difference between appearances and things in themselves, which claimed that the objects of human cognition are appearances and not things in themselves.





Kant's work purported to bridge the two dominant philosophical schools in the 18th century: 1) **Rationalism**, which held that knowledge could be attained by reason alone a priori (prior to experience), and 2) **Empiricism**, which held that knowledge could be arrived at only through the senses a posteriori (after experience). Kant's solution was to propose that while we can know, via sensory experience, particular facts about the world (which he termed **phenomena**), we cannot know the form they must take prior to any experience (which he called **noumena**). That is, we cannot know what objects we will encounter, but we can know how we will encounter them. Kant called his mode of philosophising "critical philosophy", in that it was supposedly less concerned with setting out positive doctrine than with critiquing the limits to the theories we can set out. The conclusion he presented, as above, he called "transcendental idealism".



## **Edmund Burke (1729-1797)**

concept of the sublime was developed in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1756). Burke was the first philosopher to argue that the sublime and the beautiful are mutually exclusive. And he suggested ugliness as an aesthetic quality in its capacity to instill feelings of intense emotion, ultimately creating a pleasurable experience, which was a direct opposition to Plato.





**Romantic Mind – Seclusion  
and Contemplation**

**Caspar David  
Friedrich's  
*Wanderer above the  
Sea of Fog* (1818)**





*Liberty Leading the People (1830) by Eugène Delacroix*





*Death of Sardanapalus (1827) by Eugène Delacroix*





*Death of Chatterton* Henry Wallis in 1856 (by suicide at 17 in 1770)





*Melencolia I* is a  
1514 engraving by  
the German  
Renaissance  
master Albrecht  
Dürer.

**In philosophy and the history of ideas, Romanticism was seen by Isaiah Berlin as disrupting for over a century the classic Western traditions of rationality and the idea of moral absolutes and agreed values, leading “to something like the melting away of the very notion of objective truth”, and hence not only to nationalism, but also fascism and totalitarianism, with a gradual recovery coming only after World War II.**





**William Wordsworth (7 April 1770 – 23 April 1850) was a major English Romantic poet who, with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, helped to launch the Romantic Age in English literature with their joint publication *Lyrical Ballads* (1798).**





**Samuel Taylor Coleridge** (1772 – 1834) was an English poet, literary critic and philosopher who, with his friend William Wordsworth, was a founder of the Romantic Movement in England and a member of the Lake Poets. He wrote the poems **The Rime of the Ancient Mariner** and **Kubla Khan**, as well as the major prose work **Biographia Literaria**. His critical work, especially on Shakespeare, was highly influential, and he helped introduce German idealist philosophy to English-speaking culture. Coleridge coined many familiar words and phrases, including suspension of disbelief. He was a major influence on Emerson and American transcendentalism.

# Kubla Khan

**Samuel Taylor Coleridge**

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan  
A stately pleasure-dome decree:  
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran  
Through caverns measureless to man  
Down to a sunless sea.

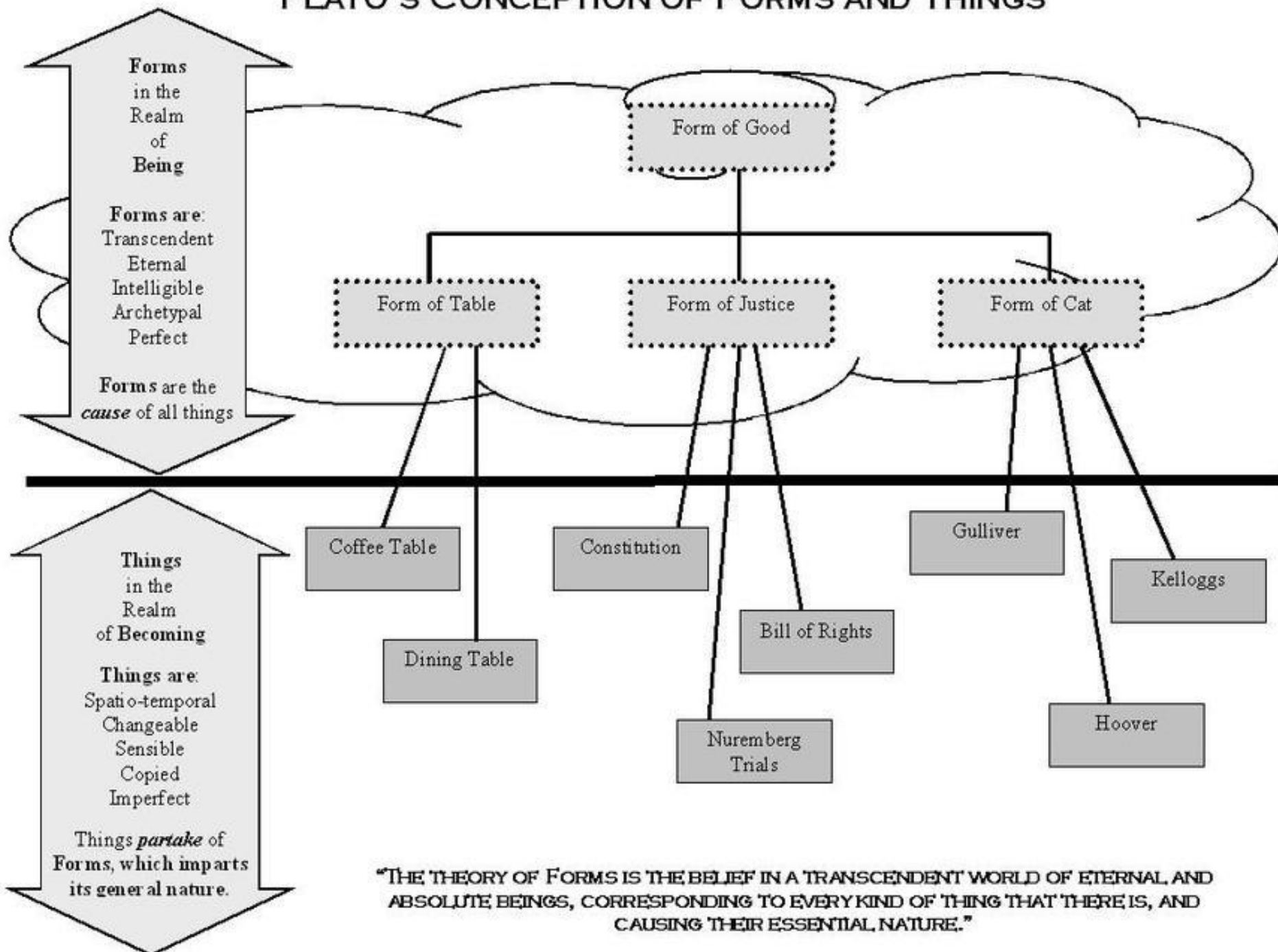
....

The shadow of the dome of pleasure  
Floated midway on the waves;  
Where was heard the mingled measure  
From the fountain and the caves.

....

And all who heard should see them there,  
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!  
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!  
Weave a circle round him thrice,  
And close your eyes with holy dread  
For he on honey-dew hath fed,  
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

# PLATO'S CONCEPTION OF FORMS AND THINGS







**John Keats (1795 –1821)  
was  
an English Romantic poet.  
He was one of the main  
figures of the second  
generation of Romantic  
poets, along with Lord  
Byron and Percy Bysshe  
Shelley.**

# Ode on a Grecian Urn

John Keats

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,  
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,  
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express  
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:

.....

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard  
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;  
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,  
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:

.....

When old age shall this generation waste,  
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe,  
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,  
Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know





**Percy Bysshe Shelley**  
(1792–1822) was one of the major English Romantic poets, and is regarded by some as among the finest lyric, as well as epic, poets in the English language. A radical in his poetry as well as in his political and social views, Shelley did not see fame during his lifetime, but recognition for his poetry grew steadily following his death. Shelley was a key member of a close circle of visionary poets and writers that included Lord Byron; Leigh Hunt; Thomas Love Peacock; and his own second wife, Mary Shelley, the author of *Frankenstein*.

**To a Skylark**  
**Percy Bysshe Shelley**

**Hail to thee, blithe Spirit!**  
**Bird thou never wert,**  
**That from Heaven, or near it,**  
**Pourest thy full heart**  
**In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.**

....

**Higher still and higher**  
**From the earth thou springest**  
**Like a cloud of fire;**  
**The blue deep thou wingest,**  
**And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest.**

.....

**That thy brain must know,**  
**Such harmonious madness**  
**From my lips would flow**  
**The world should listen then, as I am listening now.**



