Principles and Characteristics of Romanticism

1. The romantic subject is often the far-away or unusual—the ancient or fanciful. It frequently builds upon the grandly heroic, great historic moments, or even the supernatural.
2. Romantic literature has a strong element of escapism—literature as a way to avoid reality (with a lower-case “r”).
3. Emphasis upon Nature, for itself, for its beauty or sublimity, and as an expression of The Divine. Nature is seen as a source of knowledge, as a refuge from the artificial, and as a revelation of God to the individual.
4. Emphasizes emotion and optimism rather than reason and skepticism.
5. Embraces subjectivity in literary form and meaning.
6. Romantic works often appeal to the imagination and ask the reader to “willingly suspend disbelief.” Plots are often improbable and characters are usually thinly developed “heroes” or “villains,” or “stock” representatives of a class or group, rather than full, round individuals.

Principles and Characteristics of Realism

1. Insistence upon and defense of the everyday and commonplace as proper subject of literature.
2. An emphasis upon accurate representation of external reality as observed through the senses (as opposed to a subjective or moralistic filter).
3. Characters assume precedence over plot.
4. Objectivity in presentation and description is emphasized. The narration is delivered without any readily discernible moral position. The morality at work in the realistic work derives from the characters and events portrayed.
5. The realist appeals to multiple senses to immerse the reader as much as possible in the event being narrated.
6. Realistic literature tries to reflect a world that is understood and experienced as complex and contradictory; characters are not “good” or “bad”; there are as many “truths” or “realities” as there are points of view.