

The Romantic Period (1785-1832)

- coincided with the French Revolution, a period of radical political and social change in France (and in Europe generally) from 1789 to 1799
- took place amid the Industrial Revolution, a shift from an agrarian to a manufacturing economy that moved populations from rural to urban
- poetry flourished by poets who were placed in various “schools,” such as the “Lake School,” the “Cockney School,” the “Satanic School,” etc.
- reconceptualization of the poet as a unique genius, with an almost divine “calling,” possessed of a intelligence transcending all others’
- reconceptualization of the poem as a work of art that represented the poet’s inner psychology, rather than the external world
- while poetry dominated, other genres such as the familiar essay, the closet drama, and the Gothic novel also developed (NAEL D3-29)








Industrial Revolution

- the shift in manufacturing that resulted from the invention of power-driven machinery to replace hand labour
- main impetus came from James Watt’s invention of the steam engine in 1765; steam replaced wind and water as the power source for many manufacturing processes (including printing presses), increasing efficiency and output substantially
- population moved from small rural farming areas to sprawling manufacturing and mill towns; the population of England grew significantly, especially in large urban areas such as London, Birmingham, and Manchester
- origins of *laissez-faire* capitalism; the newly emergent labouring class (which included children as young as five) struggled under inadequate wages, long working hours, sordid and dangerous conditions, harsh discipline; they had no vote, and no opportunity to unionize (NAEL D8-9)

French Revolution Timeline

- **14 July 1789:** a large crowd storms the Bastille, a Paris prison, in protest over King Louis XVI’s plan to overthrow the Third Estate (lower classes)
- **26 Aug. 1789:** the National Assembly passes the Declaration of the Rights of Man, laying out the principles of universal liberty and equality
- **20-21 Sept. 1792:** the National Convention abolishes the French monarchy and establishes a republic; French Revolutionary Wars follow
- **Sept.-Oct. 1793:** Robespierre’s “Reign of Terror” sees thousands put to death by guillotine, including Louis XVI’s consort Marie Antoinette
- **27-28 July 1793:** Robespierre is overthrown and executed; the National Convention is dissolved and replaced with a bicameral legislature
- **9 Nov. 1799:** Military leader Napoleon Bonaparte declares himself first consul of France; he is later named emperor (*Britannica*; NAEL D7)

Romantic “Schools” of Poetry

“School”	Chief Characteristic	Associated Poets
“Lake School”	Lake District residents who saw themselves as “dissenters” from 18thC	 William Wordsworth  Samuel Taylor Coleridge • Robert Southey
“Cockney School”	working-class Londoners who had “pretensions” beyond their station	• Leigh Hunt • William Hazlitt  John Keats
“Satanic School”	“impious” writers who challenged established religious systems	• Leigh Hunt  Percy Bysshe Shelley  Lord Byron



Reconceptualization of the Poet

... a Poet ... is a man ... endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are ... common among mankind; a man ... who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life ... delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions ... in ... the universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them. (344)

William Wordsworth, "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*" (1802) (NAEL D338-49)

Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration, the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present, the words which express what they understand not: the trumpets which sing to battle, and feel not what they inspire: the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the World. (879)

Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry" (1840) (NAEL D867-79)

Reconceptualization of the Poem

- **Concepts of the Poet and the Poem:** shift from representing objective reality ("Nature") to representing the individual psychology of the poet (the power of "Nature" to act on the human mind)
- **Spontaneity and the Impulses of Feeling:** shift from adherence to neoclassical "rules" to spontaneous, impassioned, "natural" thoughts coming directly from the human imagination
- **Glorification of the Ordinary:** shift from elevating genteel subject matter to elevating and defamiliarizing ordinary lives of everyday people
- **The Supernatural, the Romance, and Psychological Extremes:** greater willingness to embrace violations of "natural" laws, altered states
- **Individualism and Alienation:** greater willingness to abandon past influences and genres, and to create a "self-sufficient" poetry grounded in solitude and communion with nature (NAEL D14-22)

Romantic Prose and Drama Genres

- **Charles Lamb**, "Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading" (1833) (NAEL D570-75)
- **Thomas De Quincey**, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821) (NAEL D617-30)

- **Lord Byron**, *Manfred* (1817) (NAEL D656-90)
- **Percy Bysshe Shelley**, *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) (NAEL D804-20)

- **Horace Walpole**, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) (NAEL D292-95)
- **Ann Radcliffe**, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) (NAEL D302-03)
- **Matthew Lewis**, *The Monk* (1796) (NAEL D304-09)

- **familiar essay:** a short prose composition that discusses a subject from author's life with an intimate viewpoint (126)
- **closet drama:** a play intended or suited only for private reading rather than for public performance (65)
- **Gothic novel:** a story of terror and suspense, usually set in a mediaeval castle, featuring supernatural occurrences (154-55) (NAEL D24-29)

Defining "Romantic"

romantic /ro:'mæntik/ *adj.* & *n.* • *adj.* **1** inclined towards or suggestive of romance in love (*a romantic woman; a romantic evening; romantic words*). **2** of, characterized by, or suggestive of an idealized, sentimental, or fantastic view of reality (*a romantic picture; a romantic setting*). **3** (of a person) imaginative, visionary, idealistic. **4 a** (of style in art, music, etc.) concerned more with feeling and emotion than with form and aesthetic qualities; preferring grandeur or picturesqueness to finish and proportion. **b** (also **Romantic**) of or relating to the Romanticism of the 18th & 19th c. **5** (of a project etc.) unpractical, fantastic. • *n.* **1** a romantic person. **2** a romanticist. • **romantically** *adv.* [*romant* tale of chivalry etc. from Old French from *romanz* ROMANCE] (OED)

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