

Romantic Poetry

AP English Lit

How Romanticism arose

- Romanticism was an artistic and philosophical revolt against the Enlightenment and Neoclassicism. Writers of the Enlightenment prized:
 - emotional restraint
 - order
 - balance
 - dignity and decorum



Joseph Wright of Derby, "A Philosopher Giving a Lecture on the Orrery." (1763-65)

A Romantic bridge

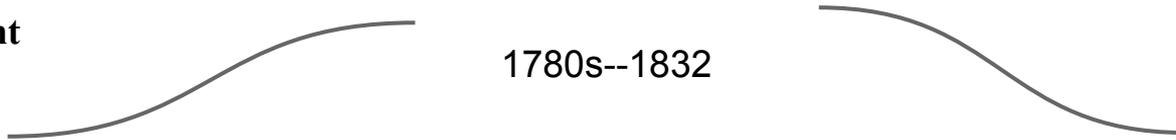
The Romantic period in British literature (roughly 1780-1832) stands between and connects the Enlightenment's promotion of commerce, reason, and liberty and the Victorian experience of industrialization and empire.

Romanticism

Enlightenment

1780s--1832

Victorian Era



Major features of Romantic poetry:

- the joys and tribulations of day-to-day life
- a love of the unspoiled natural world
- the sublime and the beautiful
- the nature of existence
- the value of the individual
- imagination, memory, and the importance of emotions

Major features, cont.

- optimistic sense of renewal
- interest in the language and lives of common people
- creativity
- mystery
- synthesis
- universality



John Constable, The Opening of Waterloo Bridge (1817)



J.M. Turner, The Morning after the Deluge (1843)



J.M. Turner, 1797. Watercolor of the ruined chapter House at Kirkshall Abbey.

The “sublime”

While the beautiful is calm and harmonious, the sublime is majestic, wild, and sometimes savage. Viewers are moved and often made happy by the beautiful, but they are overwhelmed, awe-struck, and sometimes terrified by the sublime.

Often associated with huge, overpowering natural phenomena like mountains, waterfalls, turbulent seas, and thunderstorms, the “delightful terror” inspired by sublime visions was supposed both to remind viewers of their own insignificance in the face of nature and divinity and to inspire them with a sense of transcendence.

Timeframe

- First work of Romantic poetry: *Lyrical Ballads* by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth published in 1798
- Traditionally ends with death of Sir Walter Scott in 1832

First generation:

William Wordsworth and

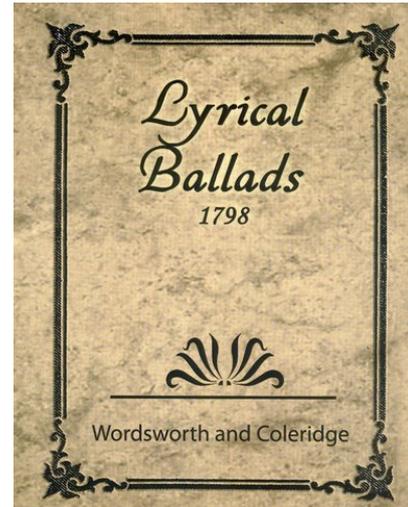
Samuel Taylor Coleridge



Together publish *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798

Wordsworth (1770-1850)

- Wordsworth's preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* is considered a central work of Romantic literary theory.
- He sets forth what he sees as the elements of a new type of poetry, based on "real language" and which avoids the poetic diction of much 18th century poetry.
- Wordsworth also gives his famous definition of poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings from emotions recollected in tranquility."



Coleridge (1772-1834)

Though most of the poems in *Lyrical Ballads* were written by Wordsworth, Coleridge contributed four poems, including one of his most famous, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”.

Water, water, every where,
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, every where,
Nor any drop to drink.



Fig.
engraving by Gustave Doré

In *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth and Coleridge present a liberating aesthetic: poetry should express, in genuine language, experience as filtered through personal emotion and imagination; the truest experience is to be found in nature.

- balance between poet's influence and "real language"
- balance between commonplace and supernatural

The canon of British Romantic poets:

William Blake (1757-1827)

William Wordsworth (1770-1850)

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834)

George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788-1824)

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822)

John Keats (1795-1821)

useful word of the day! valorize:

to give validity to something; to assign value to it.

2nd generation: Byron, Shelley, Keats



(1788-1824)



(1792-1822)



(1795-1821)

Second generation

- All have tragically short lives
- Byron and Shelley both aristocrats, well educated, leave England under pressure, see themselves as outcasts
- Keats produces poetry at 22, dies at 25. Keats was the son of a liveryman, and thoroughly working class, not the sort expected to have poetic aspirations. He was apprenticed in 1811 to an apothecary-surgeon, and passed his examination in 1816. As one biographer puts it, he then went on vacation and returned a practicing poet, writing a tremendous amount over the next three and a half years. He died of tuberculosis in Rome in 1821.

Meanwhile, what's Will up to?

In 1843, Queen Victoria I crowned William Wordsworth as the Poet Laureate of Great Britain, a position he held until his death in 1850.



Sources

Wilson, Jenny. The Lakeland Poets. Edison New Jersey: Chartwell Books. 1994

<http://www.uh.edu/engines/romanticism/introduction.html>

<http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/brief-guide-romanticism>