
10:1—The Romantic Era (1798-1832)

Pre-Romantic era (1750-1798)

Britain rapidly becoming an industrial nation, with all its problems

12- and 14-hour workdays in factories, crowding in cities, unemployment rising

writers and intellectuals losing faith in idea that human reason and science will solve every problem—“progress” no longer so attractive

common language of everyday beginning to appear in writing—turn away from formality and high style of neoclassical writing

1750—Thomas Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” (poem of transition)

1787—Robert Burns publishes *Poems: Chiefly in Scottish* (contained dialect, had natural settings)

William Blake (1757-1827)—poet ahead of his time

unappreciated by most—died poor and relatively unknown

simple language in poetry with unique spelling

mystical ideas in poems, which attacked rapidly industrializing Britain

French Revolution begins July 14, 1789 with storming of the Bastille

revolutionaries impose restrictions on monarchy

Declaration of the Rights of Man, affirming “liberty, equality, fraternity”

ruling class in England threatened by French Revolution; most intellectuals applauded its democratic ideals

warnings of dire consequences

1792—France declares war on Austria—radicals abolish French monarchy, massacre prisoners (aristocrats and priests)

1793—King Louis XVI sent to guillotine—began the “Reign of Terror”
revolutionary authorities executed royalists, moderates, even radicals
some 4,000 in all, including revolutionary leaders

Britons react with alarm—support for Revolution erodes—France declares war on England, starting twenty-two years of conflicts

Tory government cracks down on all reform of British system

Napoleonic Wars

1799 - Napoleon Bonaparte, French military leader, comes to power

1805 - Napoleon plans invasion of Britain—defeated by British navy

1807 - Napoleon’s armies control almost all of Europe

1812 - Napoleon invades Russia, suffers bloody defeats in winter

1814 - British and allied armies defeat and exile Napoleon to island of Elba

1815 - Napoleon escapes to France—“the Hundred Days”—raises army but defeated by Duke of Wellington and allies at Waterloo in Belgium

restoration of monarchical authority in Europe; failure of revolutionary ideals

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Societal problems in Great Britain

British government ignores problems caused by Industrial Revolution

government helps employers to crush workers' unions

Luddite Riots—workers violently protest new machinery that replaces jobs

Peterloo Massacre (1819)—mounted soldiers attack peaceful meeting of cotton workers, kill several

weak and ineffectual kings (George III goes mad in 1811, son George plagued by scandals, brother William IV amiable but old and weak)

prime ministers grew in influence and power—rejected ideas of reform

new generation of Tories in 1820s—slow beginning of economic/social reforms

Beginnings of Romanticism in Europe

writers saw political changes on horizon, envisioned democracy

disappointed by events in France and England, writers turned to literary pursuits

see #2 for comparison of eighteenth-century and Romantic values

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)—leading French philosopher

“Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains”

called for abandonment of social institutions, return to nature, instinct, and intuition

quoted by American revolutionaries

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)—German writer impressed by Rousseau

turned to medieval German literature for inspiration rather than ancient

Greek or Roman works—yoked literature to nationalistic pride

source of pride for new generation of German writers

Beginnings of Romanticism in Great Britain

1798—William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge publish *Lyrical Ballads*

argued for new set of poetic standards—distinct break with neoclassicism

defined poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of human feelings...recollected in tranquility”

poetry should deal with “incidents and situations from common life” which

poet should frame with “a certain coloring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented...in an unusual way”

nature not a force to be tamed or scientifically examined, but an inspirational force

later Romantic poets—Byron, Shelley, Keats

Romantic novels—Gothic novel, novel of manners, historical romance

Gothic novel—brave heroes/heroines, scoundrels, castles, ghosts (example: *Jane Eyre*)

novel of manners—satires of British customs (*Sense and Sensibility*)

historical romance—imaginative works built around real persons/events (Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*)