

Poets followed conventional rules for constructing verse. Wit and satire were valued.

Nature was considered to be an unsuitable focus for poetic discourse. Alexander Pope, one of the Age of Reason's leading poets, lacked an interest in nature which he rejected as simply a mighty maze without a plan.

The ideas of leading intellectuals, such as Rousseau and Voltaire, contributed to the outbreak of the French Revolution and the American Revolution.

Romanticism

The term 'Romanticism' should not be confused with the popular understanding of 'romantic', which means 'to do with love', especially glamorous, idealised love. In Literature, the term can be traced to the intense emotional experiences in Medieval tales of chivalry and the devotion of knights to women. By the eighteenth century, these tales had been sentimentalised and associated with the picturesque and the fanciful. During the Age of Reason the term was associated in a negative sense with the imagination.

The Romantic period was a cultural epoch that embodied an approach to life, which represented a radical change in thinking about politics, society, philosophy and art. The most popular dates that encompass it are 1776 – 1832. The main events that mark the beginning and the end of the Romantic Movement are:

- 1770 William Wordsworth and Ludwig Beethoven born.
- 1776 American Declaration of Independence
- 1783 America wins its independence from Great Britain
- 1789 French Revolution
- 1798 Publication of the Lyrical Ballads
- 1824 Death of Lord Byron
- 1832 British Reform Act and the death of Sir Walter Scott
- 1837 Accession of Queen Victoria
- 1850 Death of Wordsworth

Romanticism began in Germany as a reaction to the Enlightenment's emphasis on reason. It was driven by philosophical idealism, which is

associated with the critical thinking of Kant and Hegel. The term lost its negative associations and stood for authenticity and spontaneity, which allowed a broader human response to the uncertainty and changes in society and history. It was mainly an urban phenomenon supported by radical young men who were against the middle class's attitude to life.

Politically, the French Revolution and the American Revolution inspired Romanticism. The Romantic Movement was set against the background of the French Revolution, which inspired young radicals such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The storming of the Bastille in Paris by the 'rabble' or ordinary people was a colourful and significant event in the popular imagination. The French Revolution stimulated a global spirit of revolution aimed at overturning the basic assumptions of European society and politics. The revolutionaries' slogan of 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity' and the words of the American Declaration of Independence fuelled a revolutionary zeal. In 1776 the American colonists had declared that 'We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.' Supporters of the Romantic Movement wanted to celebrate the value of liberty. In Great Britain, the 1832 Reform was a milestone in the fight for liberty as it democratised the representation in Parliament by giving more people the right to vote.

The Romantic Movement inspired a new approach to using language in creating literature that would spread its values and the process of liberalisation. Wordsworth's *Preface* to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1800 contained a manifesto for the new poetry. He wrote that 'poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' and Coleridge believed that it 'also requires organic sensibility and deep thought.' Wordsworth thought the French Revolution had failed and that in England the revolution should be verbal and carried out at the level of language.

Romantic writers reacted against the classical forms and order in Neo-classical compositions from the past. These compositions had once rejected the superstitions and irrationality of the past, and established universal moral-based truths, and were inspired by the Enlightenment. Romantic