

## Literary Periods and Poems

Below are abbreviated definitions of the literary periods we have studied. The explanations here give insight into political, historical, cultural, and literary traditions of the times. Accompanying the explanation is a poem that embodies the spirit of the age. As an exercise, you may want to read the background and see if you can annotate the poem in light of the background information.

<b>1500 - 1660</b> –	The Renaissance
<b>1660 – 1785</b> –	The Neoclassical Period
<b>1785 – 1830</b> –	The Romantic Period
<b>1832 – 1880</b> –	The Victorian Period
<b>1880 – 1910</b> –	Impressionism
<b>1914</b> –	The Modern Period

### 1500-1660: The Renaissance

"Renaissance" literally means "rebirth." It was an age of new discoveries, both geographical (exploration of the New World) and intellectual. Both kinds of discovery resulted in changes of tremendous import for Western civilization. In science, for example, Copernicus (1473-1543) attempted to prove that the sun rather than the earth was at the center of the planetary system, thus radically altering the cosmic world view that had dominated antiquity and the Middle Ages. In religion, Martin Luther (1483-1546) challenged and ultimately caused the division of one of the major institutions that had united Europe throughout the Middle Ages--the Church. In fact, Renaissance thinkers often thought of themselves as ushering in the modern age, as distinct from the ancient and medieval eras.

Study of the Renaissance might well center on five interrelated issues.

- 1) **The Great Chain of Being** – Every organism had its own divinely appointed place in the universe (See Shakespeare notes) according to quality of spirit and intellect.
- 2) **Political Changes** – Individuals seeking to break out of religious/political prescriptions associated with the Middle Ages; they wanted to become individuals, acting according to their own personal beliefs and desires, not that of church/state
- 3) **Humanism** – The belief that human beings possessed independent minds capable of achieving intellectual, artistic, mathematical, and scientific perfection. Decartes' famous line, "I think, therefore I am" embodies this notion (from the Middle Ages), but with the Renaissance, a shift occurs from being strictly contemplative to active and physical.
- 4) **Imitation** – Copying great works and infusing them with a new, Christian perspective, thereby making them "new". Also, "holding a mirror up to nature" so that the reader/viewer could experience mimetic (story telling) as closely as the author/playwright.
- 5) **Reformation** – Religious and political movement that empowered people to look at God individually, apart from Church supervision. It also created rabid individualism wherein people began thinking for themselves apart from the larger entities (church and state) that tried to rule them.

#### Literary Ramifications

Protestants stressed the need for all believers to read the Bible for themselves. To help make that possible, they were active in translating the Bible into the vernacular languages so that all laymen could read it. This practice was opposed by the Catholic Church, which insisted on preserving the Bible in Latin. At the same time, Protestants also stressed the need to understand the Bible in its original languages (Hebrew and Greek) so that it could be properly translated. In their interest in such learning, particularly of ancient languages, Protestants were similar to Humanists. This emphasis on the Bible had a significant impact on literature because the Bible became a renewed source of literary inspiration, both in literary form and subject matter; it also became a rich source of symbols. This also was an age of kings and courts, and the system lent itself to the notion of Courtly Love, wherein men and women followed certainly courtly codes of conduct, celebrated by authors and poets alike.

**Key Names:** Phillip Sydney, George Herbert, Thomas Kyd, Christopher Marlowe, William Shakespeare, Raleigh, Mallory

#### XIV

*Not from the stars do I my judgement pluck;  
And yet methinks I have Astronomy,  
But not to tell of good or evil luck,  
Of plagues, of dearths, or seasons' quality;  
Nor can I fortune to brief minutes tell,  
Pointing to each his thunder, rain and wind,  
Or say with princes if it shall go well  
By oft predict that I in heaven find:  
But from thine eyes my knowledge I derive,  
And, constant stars, in them I read such art  
As truth and beauty shall together thrive,  
If from thyself, to store thou wouldst convert;  
Or else of thee this I prognosticate:  
Thy end is truth's and beauty's doom and date.*

## **1600 – 1785: Neoclassicism/Age of Reason/The Enlightenment**

After the Renaissance – a period of exploration and expansiveness – came a reaction in the direction of order and restraint. Generally speaking, this reaction developed in France in the mid-seventeenth century and in England thirty years later; and it dominated European literature until the last part of the eighteenth century, and was characterized by “The New Restraint”:

- 1) Rejection of Shakespearean, Metaphorical Language in favor of simpler precise style
- 2) Plots are smaller and more unified (keeping to one place and time)
- 3) Rejection of Humanistic Ideal – people are imperfect, human systems are imperfect
- 4) Rise of Satire/Social Commentary – poking fun of established ideas
- 5) Rejection of Individual Opinion in favor of group consensus

### **Literary Ramifications:**

The classical ideals of order and moderation which inspired this period, its realistically limited aspirations, and its emphasis on the common sense of society rather than individual imagination, could all be characterized as rational. And, indeed, it is often known as the Age of Reason. Reason had traditionally been assumed to be the highest mental faculty, but in this period many thinkers considered it a sufficient guide in all areas. Both religious belief and morality were grounded on reason: revelation and grace were de-emphasized, and morality consisted of acting rightly to one's fellow beings on this earth. John

Locke, the most influential philosopher of the age, analyzed logically how our minds function (1690), argued for religious toleration (1689), and maintained that government is justified not by divine right but by a "social contract" that is broken if the people's natural rights are not respected.

As reason should guide human individuals and societies, it should also direct artistic creation. Neoclassical art is not meant to seem a spontaneous outpouring of emotion or imagination. Emotion appears, of course; but it is consciously controlled. A work of art should be logically organized and should advocate rational norms. The *Misanthrope*, for example, is focused on its theme more consistently than are any of Shakespeare's plays. Its hero and his society are judged according to their conformity or lack of conformity to Reason, and its ideal, voiced by Philinte, is the reasonable one of the golden mean. The cool rationality and control characteristic of neoclassical art fostered wit, equally evident in the regular couplets of Moliere and the balanced sentences of Austen.

Sharp and brilliant wit, produced within the clearly defined ideals of neoclassical art, and focused on people in their social context, make this perhaps the world's greatest age of comedy and satire.

**Key Names:** Jonathan Swift, , Rousseau, Locke, Hobbes  
Longfellow, Voltaire

### To Celia

Drink to me only with thine eyes,  
And I will pledge with mine;  
Or leave a kiss but in the cup  
And I'll not look for wine.  
The thirst that from the soul doth rise  
Doth ask a drink divine;  
But might I of Jove's nectar sup,  
I would not change for thine.

I sent thee late a rosy wreath,  
Not so much honoring thee  
As giving it a hope that there  
It could not wither'd be;  
But thou thereon didst only breathe  
And sent'st it back to me;  
Since when it grows,  
and smells, I swear,  
Not of itself, but thee!

**Ben Jonson (1573-1637)**

## 1785 -1839: Romanticism

As an international movement affecting all the arts, Romanticism begins at least in the 1770's and continues into the second half of the nineteenth century, later for American literature than for European, and later in some of the arts, like music and painting, than in literature. This extended chronological spectrum (1770-1870) also permits recognition as Romantic the poetry of Robert Burns and William Blake in England, the early writings of Goethe and Schiller in Germany, and the great period of influence for Rousseau's writings throughout Europe.

The early Romantic period thus coincides with what is often called the "age of revolutions"--including, of course, the American (1776) and the French (1789) revolutions--an age of upheavals in political, economic, and social traditions, the age which witnessed the initial transformations of the Industrial Revolution. A revolutionary energy was also at the core of Romanticism, which quite consciously set out to transform not only the theory and practice of poetry (and all art), but the very the way we perceive the world. Some of its major precepts have survived into the twentieth century and still affect our contemporary period:

1. **Imagination** – Romantics elevated imagination to the level of deity. Intellectual Intuition (reason and imagination) was considered to be the great synthesizer of human existence.

2. **Nature** -- The sole source of inspiration. Rejecting political systems and political leaders, Romantics sought to examine Nature as the universal truth every human experiences. In particular, Romantic imagination was shaped around a) *Aesthetics* – natural and artistic beauty and b) *The Sublime* – the unseen, often torturous, realities of the natural world/human nature (Gothic Literature)
3. **Symbolism and Myth** – Symbols and Myths simultaneously express many observation, connotation, denotation, temporality (here and now) and eternity. Romantics believe nature, being eternal, does the same thing. Therefore, literature should be highly-symbolic.

**Literary Implications:**

A trend began to emerge, as the Romantics withdrew more and more from what they saw as the confining boundaries of bourgeois life. In their private lives, they often asserted their individuality and differences in ways that were to the middle class a subject of intense interest, but also sometimes of horror. ("Nothing succeeds like excess," wrote Oscar Wilde, who, as a partial inheritor of Romantic tendencies, seemed to enjoy shocking the bourgeois, both in his literary and life styles.) Thus the gulf between "odd" artists and their sometimes shocked, often uncomprehending audience began to widen. Some artists may have experienced ambivalence about this situation--it was earlier pointed out how Emily Dickinson seemed to regret that her "letters" to the world would go unanswered. Yet a significant Romantic theme became the contrast between artist and middle-class "Philistine." Unfortunately, in many ways, this distance between artist and public remains with us today.

The Romantic Movement affected not just literature, but all of the arts--from music (consider the rise of Romantic opera) to painting, from sculpture to architecture. Its reach was also geographically significant, spreading as it did eastward to Russia, and westward to America. For example, in America, the great landscape painters, particularly those of the "Hudson River School," and the Utopian social colonies that thrived in the 19th century, are manifestations of the Romantic spirit on this side of the Atlantic.

**Key Names:** Edgar Allen Poe, Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Mary Shelley, Shelley, Wordsworth, Keats, Whitman, Byron, Goethe

**Love's Philosophy**

The fountains mingle with the river  
 And the rivers with the ocean,  
 The winds of heaven mix for ever  
 With a sweet emotion;  
 Nothing in the world is single,  
 All things by a law divine  
 In one another's being mingle—  
 Why not I with thine?

See the mountains kiss high heaven,  
 And the waves clasp one another;  
 No sister-flower would be forgiven  
 If it disdain'd its brother;  
 And the sunlight clasps the earth,  
 And the moonbeams kiss the sea—  
 What is all this sweet work worth  
 If thou kiss not me?

	<b>NATURALISM</b>	<b>ROMANTIC</b>
Quality of poetry	● decorum, concision, restraint, balance, reason, regularity, wit	● emotion, introspection, passion, sublimity, beauty, spontaneity, irregularity, picturesque
Subjects	● public and political concerns, social responsibility, manners & morals; "The proper study of mankind is Man"	● humankind generally, nature & the soul, spiritual identity; a-political (or radical)

	<p>(Pope)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>natural world serves as an image of or analogy for human concerns</li> <li>deals with polite, urbane society, upper and middle classes; the natural world serves as an image of or analogy for human concerns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>human value, perception and wholeness, often evoked through and deeply connected to the natural world</li> <li>inclusion of the elderly, women, children, the rural and the unlettered</li> </ul>
Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>absolute, public, rational, humanist</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>private, spiritual, universal through Spirit in nature and in humankind</li> </ul>
The poet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>urbane, witty, gentlemanly, moral, incisive; good sense, good humour, learning, social concern, capable of moral outrage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>solitary, reflective, inspired; a person of imagination and acute sensibility, sometimes visionary</li> </ul>
Setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>urban; the rural is seen either as pastoral (idealized) or as ignorant and unmannerly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>rural, the countryside; the city is seen as the locus of corruption, greed and power</li> </ul>
Allusion and history	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Classical Greece and, especially, Augustan Rome, also the Bible</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the mythic, the mediaeval, the gothic, irrational, remote</li> </ul>
Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Language is the dress of thought" (Pope); attention to decorum, propriety, allusion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>language has creative power; attention to the evocative, moving, beautiful</li> </ul>
Genres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>satire, epistle, epic (teaching, ideas, critique of public values), ode (public) and epigrams</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>lyric, ode (enthusiasm, union with nature, inspiration, emotion, meditation)</li> </ul>
Idea of 'Nature'	<p><i>(Most qualities of poetry and senses of what constitutes moral life follow upon the age's understanding of Nature.)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nature is the 'order of things', the "clear, unchanged and universal light" (Pope); it is marked by harmony, rationality and order, expressed descriptively and emotionally as well as intellectually. The 'real' world as we experience and understand it models a divinely sanctioned, hierarchical order. Poetry is public, ordered, intellectual; it values right reason, teaching, civic concern.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'Nature' refers firstly to the external world in its beauty and power, and then as that nature is an expression of the power of Being which flows through and unites all things, including humankind. This force is creative and moral, and is embodied in humans in the Imagination -- as opposed to the Reason in the neo-classical view. Therefore poetry is marked by emotion, beauty, inspiration, feeling, mystery. Its sense of the moral is the fully experiencing, passionate person, in harmony with the natural world and the higher forces -- as opposed to the civic order and right reason of the neoclassical sense of the moral.</li> </ul>
Key texts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ben Jonson, "To Penshurst"</li> <li>Alexander Pope, "Essay on Criticism"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>William Wordsworth, "Preface to The Lyrical Ballads", "Tintern Abbey"</li> </ul>

## 1839-1914: Victorian Period/Naturalism

Perhaps most important was the shift from a way of life based on ownership of land to a modern urban economy based on trade and manufacturing. By the beginning of the Victorian period, the Industrial Revolution, as this shift was called, had created profound economic and social changes, including a mass migration of workers to industrial towns, where they lived in new urban slums. But the changes arising out of the Industrial Revolution were just one subset of the radical changes taking place in mid- and late-nineteenth-century Britain — among others were the democratization resulting from extension of the franchise; challenges to religious faith, in part based on the advances of scientific knowledge, particularly of evolution; and changes in the role of women.

All of these issues informed Victorian literature. In part because of the expansion of newspapers and the periodical press, debate about political and social issues played an important role in the experience of the reading public. The Victorian novel, with its emphasis on the realistic portrayal of social life, represented many Victorian issues in the stories of its characters. Moreover, debates about political representation involved in expansion both of the franchise and of the rights of women affected literary representation, as writers gave voice to those who had been voiceless.

1. **Morality** – Authors and poets consumed themselves with propriety and lack thereof. They often instructed the reader on proper behavior (The White Man's Burden) and ridiculed society for its poor manners and arrogance (Convergence of the Twain)
2. **Treatment of Children/Women** – with the rise of industrialized culture, poverty flourished, women took on new, working roles, and children were expected to carry an economic responsibility to a country's economic needs. The brought about much examination about society's expectations and responsibilities to those who previously had not had much of a voice (Dickens, Hugo, Brontes, Austin)
3. **Romance** – the rise of Victorian morality created a romantic sense of relationships – that, by some divine design, every person (or country) had a perfect destination at which they would one day arrive. Authors of this period often created scenarios wherein the Hero triumphs in love or battle, and the end looks better than the beginning.

#### Literary Implications:

Victorian Literature was diverse. Both men and women wrote in very different styles and addressed altogether different themes. Within the period, authors wrote didactically on social, religious, and political issues. The rise of Naturalism/Realism comes out of the Victorian notion that humankind has an obligation to examine life as it is, and author's have an obligation to present their work in a way that will force the reader to examine their lives, and therein bring about change. Key to Victorian style is the concept of the authorial intrusion and the address to the reader. For example, the author might interrupt his/her narrative to pass judgment on a character, or pity or praise another, while later seeming to exclaim "Dear Reader!" and inform or remind the reader of some other relevant.

**Key Names:** Charles Dickens, Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Victor Hugo, Jane Austen, Charlotte/Emily Bronte, Robert Louis Stevenson, Tennyson, Hardy, Hopkins, Browning

#### Love in a Life

Room after room,  
I hunt the house through  
We inhabit together.  
Heart, fear nothing, for, heart, thou shalt find her,  
Next time, herself!—not the trouble behind her  
Left in the curtain, the couch's perfume!  
As she brushed it, the cornice-wreath blossomed anew,—  
Yon looking-glass gleamed at the wave of her feather.

Yet the day wears,  
And door succeeds door;  
I try the fresh fortune—  
Range the wide house from the wing to the centre.  
Still the same chance! she goes out as I enter.  
Spend my whole day in the quest,—who cares?  
But 'tis twilight, you see,—with such suites to explore,  
Such closets to search, such alcoves to importune!

## 1870 – 1910: Symbolist-Impressionist

#### Symbolist Poetry-Art

Impressionism, in the literary sense borrowed from French painting, a rather vague term applied to works or passages that concentrate on the description of transitory mental impressions as felt by an observer, rather than on the explanation of their external causes. Impressionism in literature is thus neither a school nor a movement but a kind of subjective tendency manifested in descriptive techniques. It is found in [Symbolist](#) and [Imagist](#) poetry, and in much modern verse, but also in many works of prose fiction since the late 19th century, as in the novels of Joseph Conrad and Virginia Woolf.

- Reliant on Subjectivity (personal response)

- Concentrated immediate visual impression
- Characterized by the use of subjective details and sensory impressions rather realism.
- Expressing or developing one's subjective response to a work of art over actual experience.

Symbolists, an important group of French poets who, between the 1870s and the 1890s, founded the modern tradition in Western poetry. They wrote in reaction against [realism](#) and [naturalism](#), and against the objectivity and technical conservatism.

- Rejected Victorian Sentimentalism
- Avoided direct statement in favor of subjective moods
- Avoided the description of external reality or the expression of opinion.
- They wanted to bring poetry closer to music, believing that sound had mysterious affinities with other senses
- Sought 'correspondences' between physical and spiritual realms of the senses (they called this "pure poetry")
- Advocated "De-cadence" (what we call Free Verse), verse stripped of tradition's technical constraints.

#### Literary Implications:

Impressionists wanted to change literature's definition. They wanted an honest portrayal of life by getting rid of the omniscient narrator and replace it with a fallible, partially ignorant first-person narrator who recounted what he saw and heard. With the coming of the photograph, Impressionist painters wanted to change how people viewed reality: they distinguished between what the observer assumed he was observing and what he actually observed. They wanted to change the space-time continuum; they wanted the experience of a given moment to be as telling as a long, epic narrative. The narrator, then, can only witness his experiences as fragments of a larger story. He cannot, then, ever tell the whole story, and the reader can only piece together an experience – as opposed to make a decision on factual data -- , thus making the experience subjective. Ford and Conrad attempted to present speech as it is actually spoken, with many of the meaningful solidities implied rather than stated. The result is sometimes exasperating, but only as real-life conversation frequently is. A spare brilliance of observation replaced that careful delineation of a whole face, or inventorying of a whole room, that had been the way of Balzac and other realists. In four or five brief lines of dialogue Waugh can convey as much as the 19th-century novelists did in as many pages.

#### Key Names:

**Poets:** Paul Verlaine, Arthur Rimbaud, and Stephane Mallarmé, Charles Baudelaire

**Writers:** Ford Maddox Ford, Joseph Conrad, William Faulkner, Thomas Mann

#### THE SICK MUSE

**P** OOR Muse, alas, what ails thee, then, to-day?  
 Thy hollow eyes with midnight visions burn,  
 Upon thy brow in alternation play,  
 Folly and Horror, cold and taciturn.

Have the green lemur and the goblin red,  
 Poured on thee love and terror from their urn?  
 Or with despotic hand the nightmare dread  
 Deep plunged thee in some fabulous Minturne?

Would that the breast where so deep thoughts arise,  
 Breathed forth a healthful perfume with thy sighs;  
 Would that thy Christian blood ran wave by wave

In rhythmic sounds the antique numbers gave,  
 When Phoebus shared his alternating reign  
 With mighty Pan, lord of the ripening grain.

#### 1914 – 1945: Modernism

The term modernism refers to the radical shift in aesthetic and cultural sensibilities evident in the art and literature of the post-World War One period. The ordered, stable and inherently meaningful worldview of the nineteenth century could not, wrote T.S. Eliot, accord with "the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history."

- Modernism marks a distinctive break with Victorian morality
- Rejects nineteenth-century optimism/Presents a profoundly pessimistic picture of culture in disarray.
- This despair often results in an apparent apathy and moral relativism.
- The disruption of linear flow of narrative
- The frustration of conventional expectations concerning unity and coherence of plot, character, and the cause and effect
- The adoption of a tone of self-mockery aimed at naive pretensions of wealth and success
- Recognizes the failure of language to ever fully communicate meaning
- The modernists generally downplayed content in favour of an investigation of form.
- The fragmented, non-chronological, poetic forms.

### Literary Implications

Modernism relies mainly in stylistic innovations; artists, in attempting to create something new, sought to disrupt traditional syntax and form. They questioned of form and structure, made an obsession with primitive material and attitudes and saw themselves as generally less appreciated but more sensitive, even more heroic, than the average person because artists, they argue, challenge tradition and reinvigorates it by breaking away from patterned responses and predictable forms. Like Victorians, the Modernists dramatized the plight of women, the urban experience, and elevated the examination of the rural spirit and regionalism. They promoted Collectivism – people banding together – over the authority of the individual, supported political upheaval such as the 1918 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, and sought to explore the nature of individual will overcome by collective movements, as expressed, for example, by Jazz music and the Jazz Age. In this period, the chief characteristic of the self is one of alienation. The character belongs to a "lost generation" (Gertrude Stein), suffers from a "dissociation of sensibility" (T. S. Eliot), and who has "a Dream deferred" (Langston Hughes) while led to a general awareness about one's inner life as alienated from the world at large.

**Key Names:** Kafka, Joyce, Dreiser, DosPassos, Woolf, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Stein, Eliot, Cummings, Bly, Baudelaire, Anderson

### anyone lived in a pretty how town

anyone lived in a pretty how town  
(with up so floating many bells down)  
spring summer autumn winter  
he sang his didn't he danced his did

Women and men(both little and small)  
cared for anyone not at all  
they sowed their isn't they reaped their same  
sun moon stars rain

children guessed(but only a few  
and down they forgot as up they grew  
autumn winter spring summer)  
that noone loved him more by more

when by now and tree by leaf  
she laughed his joy she cried his grief  
bird by snow and stir by still  
anyone's any was all to her

someones married their everyones  
laughed their cryings and did their dance  
(sleep wake hope and then)they  
said their nevers they slept their dream  
stars rain sun moon

(and only the snow can begin to explain  
how children are apt to forget to remember  
with up so floating many bells down)

one day anyone died i guess  
(and noone stooped to kiss his face)  
busy folk buried them side by side  
little by little and was by was

all by all and deep by deep  
and more by more they dream their sleep  
noone and anyone earth by april  
wish by spirit and if by yes.

Women and men(both dong and ding)  
summer autumn winter spring  
reaped their sowing and went their came  
sun moon stars rain