

# Romanticism

In Neoclassicism (Augustian age) nature was perceived as something controllable  
→humans are endowed with reason

In Romanticism it is not possible

For Augustans the most powerful human faculty is reason

For Romantics it is imagination →it is what makes us humans

Coleridge (coauthor of the Lyrical Ballads (first edition 1789)) →he travelled to Germany and studied philosophy

He believed that there were 2 types of imagination:

- primary: allows humans to understand reality
- secondary: more powerful faculty, allowing humans to recreate a new reality

Before Romanticism a good poet was a good copier?? →in romanticism originality played an important role

Childhood was considered as the most important stage during life →children have the sharpest imagination

Romantics were also against child labor because it was dangerous and because in this way children skipped their childhood

Romanticism emphasized individuality →there was interest in the outcast and rebel  
Romanticism followed in Rousseau philosophy →the myth of the noble savage???  
→man is naturally good, but civilization corrupts

English romantic poems were set either in the past (often in the middle ages) and in exotic places (far away from Britain)

Escapism = desire to escape the time one lives in, that is considered unjust

Reality was also considered an expression of God = pantheism →others were atheists

Augustan poetry was characterized by poetic diction (complex language and figure of speech)

Romantic poetry is more readable →syntax was not latinized and the words used were not so high sounding

Romanticism comes from romance, the languages such as Italian French etc...

In the beginning it had a negative meaning (extravagant, unreal) →but in the 18th century it became neutral and referred to picturesque nature

Relationship between the feelings of the speaker and the nature surrounding →his

feelings reflect into reality

Wordsworth said that nature was a source of consolation for mankind

## Wordsworth

First generation of romantic poets → the members of the second died young in tragic circumstances

He was born in 1770 in a lake district, area in the north of England → near the border with Scotland → characterized by lakes, woods, and rivers → but was impacted by the industrial rev.

He had a tragic life → he lost his parents in his childhood → he was then raised by relatives → he was close to his sister Dorothy → together they had long walks and he also wrote poetry to her

He was a brilliant student → he attended Cambridge University

As a young man he was a radical → he supported the French revolution → he even decided to go there and witness

There he met a woman, with whom he had a daughter but not married → he then became disappointed of the revolution, which was deranging into pure violence

He then decided to leave France → and prepared all the paperwork necessary for his lover and daughter to travel to England

But the borders closed and he was extremely disappointed → this changed also his political view → he became more conservative and critical of revolutions

He was a peculiar conservative: he was also an environmentalist, he was against the poor laws (1834, established workhouses)

They were institutions that had to host homeless, but there they had to work hard in exchange with room and board

The living conditions were also terrifying

Workhouses were expected to be terrible, because they had to convince the poor people they had to improve their social condition

This is in line with the Protestant work ethic → God approves hard work

He also believed that people without an education shouldn't vote

In England he married another woman, with which he had 5 children

His daughter never married and lived with his family

Wordsworth became a very famous poet, he was also appointed a Poet Laureate (the official poet of the British Empire)

The Poet Laureate was also expected to write poems for public occasions

Wordsworth is known for the Lyrical Ballads (a collection of 23 poems), some written by him, others by Coleridge (coauthorship)

There were 3 editions:

- 1798 anonymous
- 1800 with preface
- 1802 enlarged

The 2 most notorious ones are Tintern Abbey (Wordsworth) and the Rime of the Ancient Mariner???

## **Tintern Abbey**

It has to do with a walking tour Wordsworth and Dorothy had in Wales → here they visited the ruins of a monastery (Tintern Abbey)

It was an abbey destroyed in 1534 following "The Act of Supremacy" → it was passed by King Henry the VIII (Tutor), which made England an Anglican country → Henry broke away from the Church of Rome

Monasteries and abbeys were destroyed

The two visited the ruins and Wordsworth wrote a poem about that

In Tintern Abbey Wordsworth reflects on the passing of time and on the fact that nature has taken control of the ruins

Nature is eternal, meanwhile everything humans create is ephemeral

The Lyrical Ballads had to make up for political failures (such as French Revolution) and wanted to achieve their own revolution, a cultural revolution

It is democratical because

- it is a ballad about common people (not heroes, nor aristocrats) → Wordsworth wrote mainly about peasants
- really simple language