**Romantic Poetic Manifesto, Poem, and Decolonial Revision**

**🡪 Write Manifesto and Poem based on canon**

**🡪 Read beyond canon**

**🡪 Revise Manifesto and Poem**

*In writing and revising their unique, creative* ***Poetic Manifestos****,* ***Poems****, and* ***Reflections*** *in this assignment, students are asked to reassess their definitions of Romantic poetry, where their sense of value is derived from, and how our canonical definitions of Romanticism are often implicated in the white supremacist, imperial project.*

* **Makeademic -** This assignment draws on students’ critical thinking skills, as well as their creativity, asking them to demonstrate their understanding of Romanticism through the act of making. I, thus, employ a “makeademic” (see the work of Emily F. Brooks) model for assessing student learning and mastery of the course content.
* **Critical Distance -** The act of writing and revising their manifestos, poems, and reflections can draw them outside of the space they are comfortable with—many students sign up for this class, an upper-level course taught to English majors and minors called, “The Romantic Movement,” because they are looking for an extended discussion of the canonical Romantic poets.
* **Thinking Decolonially -** This assignment encourages students to think about the Romantic movement decolonially and to assess how much of their prior knowledge was built upon a canon that fails to represent the multifarious and diverse nature of Romanticism and the literary productions of the long nineteenth century.

**Context**

Taking a global approach to the Romantic period, this course examines the material and literary culture surrounding the movement. We look to not only textual material from the canon of British literature, but also to non-canonical visual material and ephemera, in order to consider the period materially, critically, and in its heterogeneity.Through looking to Global Anglophone studies, as well as current movements in the Digital Humanities, we implement a variety of strategies for studying the complex layers of narrative surrounding “Romanticism.”

This assignment occurs halfway through the 16-week course. The first part of the assignment follows the study in the early portion of the semester of the more canonical Romantic poets and writers. The second part of the assignment occurs after expanding the scope of our study of the Romantic movement. In this portion of the class, we examine how poets’ positions within colonized spaces affect our interpretation of space and identity in works like Henry Derozio’s, “The Poet’s Habitation: A Fragment.” Moving beyond the canon and critically evaluating periodization, we turn to Romanticism within the American tradition. Finally, we turn to the writing and material productions of the southern settler colonies in the long nineteenth century by exploring [Southhem](https://www.ucd.ie/southhem/) and accompanying scholarship.

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| **Part 1** | |
| **Read: Authors/Texts from the Romantic Canon** | **Exercise: Manifesto and Poem** |
| William Blake  William Wordsworth  Charlotte Smith  Samuel Taylor Coleridge  Mary and Percy Shelley  John Keats  Lord Byron  Helen Maria Williams  Felicia Hemans.  Poetic manifestos, from Wordsworth’s Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* to Percy Shelley’s “A Defence of Poetry” | Students write:  -1-2 page **Poetic Manifesto**, declaring what it means to be a poet, what the function of poetry should be, and what the role of the poet is in promoting a definition of Romanticism. This draws from their knowledge of the texts we have read and other writers’ ideas about the identity of the poet and the purpose of poetry.  -**Original Poem** that reflects the ideas presented in their manifesto.  -1-2 page **Reflection** on why they chose the poet(s) they did as models, how they interpreted and expressed their ideas in the manifesto, and how these ideas are illustrated by their poem. |
| **Part 2** | |
| **Read: Authors/Texts Beyond the Canon** | **Exercise: Revise Manifesto and Poem** |
| **Scholarship**  Manu Samriti Chander’s *Brown Romantics*  selected essays by:  Nikki Hessell  Jennifer Fuller  Anne Salmond  Kate Fullagar  **India**  Henry Derozio  **America**  Frederick Douglass  Phillis Wheatley  Charles Brockden Brown  Luisa May Alcott  Edgar Allan Poe  **The Southern Settler Colonies**  [Southhem](https://www.ucd.ie/southhem/) | Returning to their original project, students **revise** their **Manifesto** and **Poem,** according to the broader understanding they now have of Romanticism after reading Manu Samriti Chander's book, *Brown Romantics*,and literary and scholarly works that help us reach beyond the canon.  Once they’ve revised the poem and manifesto, students **write a new reflection** that discusses what they changed and why, citing specific passages from Chander and other relevant texts that inspired these changes. |

**Outcomes**

After completing this assignment, students confirmed that it gave them a more dynamic understanding of the Romantic movement, of the many voices, experiences, and perspectives that extend well beyond the confines of Britain.

The student sample, included below, draws specifically from Indian poet Henry Derozio in the revision. The student’s discussion of “geographically-based” conceptions of space and transcendence alludes to larger issues surrounding the examination of the Romantic movement within colonized spaces.

## Sample Student Application of Initial Manifesto and Poem

**Manifesto**

The poet is a contradiction, or at least she is the presenter and interpreter of the world’s contradictions. She exists in the straddled space between our experienced and perceived realities and makes real to a stranger the poet’s and the world’s own perceptions simultaneously. Universal perception is the impossible Romantic ideal that poets strive for; it is the idea that all men can exist in a unified, empathetic consciousness. Though the poet knows that a human’s own perception prevents him from truly participating in a collective reality, she writes to narrow the space that separates a unified world from a solipsistic one. A poet is the only person who can exist in both realities and speak to the isolated to inspire them to participate in the collective. She does this by communicating contraries through sensory experience, and she morally guides all men in their pursuit and suppression of feeling.

It is not enough for poetry to simply describe the senses that a pretty scene invokes. The poet would only then be narrating her personal reality and isolating the reader from true experience. Poetry creates a unified sensation by dealing in contraries. The grotesque is made beautiful, or the beautiful made grotesque; the dull is intensified, and the intense is dulled. The shock of these contradictions, and not the subjects of the contradictions themselves is what is beautiful, is what unites the poem’s audience. But as her poetry strives to bring the world together under one moral compass, the poet sets herself apart. She fights against isolation, and yet she is isolated in her role as a go-between. She sacrifices her participation in the collective to unite her audience, conscious that she does not have the ability to merge the individual and the world. The futility of the poet’s role as the Romantic conscience represents the futility of all conflicts in life.

**Poem**

At the chasm hour, still particles combust;

Compare the day—safe, yet deadened, dimmed.

Figures reanimate in raw wind gusts,

Guarded stone reforms as sun rescinds

Treacherous nighttime electricity;

Kind dawn barricades its tundra prison.

Gather, Midnight; reveal our complicity

In the plot to unseal light’s division.

No heat exists, simply lack of cold;

“Humans only crave to sit together

Within the hushed glowing of night-fueled coals

And the presence of company’s tether.”

Against wise intent rebelled persuasive dusks.

Fog-darkened rime conducts electric lusts.

## Sample Student Application of Revised Manifesto, Poem, and Reflection

**Manifesto**

The poet is an outsider, as she is the objective presenter and interpreter of the world’s contradictions. She exists in the straddled space between our experienced and perceived realities and makes real to a stranger the poet’s and the world’s own perceptions simultaneously. Universal perception is the impossible Romantic ideal that poets strive for; it is the idea that all men can exist in a unified, empathetic consciousness. Though the poet knows that a human’s own perception and location prevents him from truly participating in a collective reality, she writes to narrow the space that separates a unified world from a solipsistic one. A poet is the only person who can exist in both realities and speak to the isolated to inspire them to participate in the collective. She does this by communicating contraries through sensory experience, and she morally guides all men in their pursuit and suppression of feeling. Her poetry is universal and seeks to overcome the obstacle of self-localized space and identity.

It is not enough for poetry to simply describe the senses that a pretty scene invokes. The poet would only then be narrating her personal reality and isolating the reader from true experience. Poetry creates a unified sensation by dealing in unromanticized contraries. The grotesque is made beautiful, or the beautiful is made grotesque; the dull is intensified, and the intense is dulled. But in neither case is reality romanticized. The shock of these contradictions, and not the subjects of the contradictions themselves is what is beautiful, is what unites the poem’s audience. But as her poetry strives to bring the world together under one moral compass, the poet sets herself apart. She fights against isolation, and yet she is isolated in her role as a go-between. The poet can only achieve poetic privilege and genius through a solitary and unsociable life. She sacrifices her participation in the collective to unite her audience, conscious that she does not have the ability to merge the individual and the world. To be successful in her role as a poetic hermit, she must choose an identity that exists outside of society. Through this transcendence, she objectively comments on and exists within a transnational world from her own island. Yet the poet’s role as the transcendent Romantic conscience is futile, as the poet cannot truly occupy a space outside of society while she participates in it.

**Poem**

Her clouded eye peered from its island perch,

Counting the gold-rolling grains one by one.

Winds raised low sands into towers of birch

And present place disappeared with the sun.

She was taken to the yawning chasm hour

Where nerves ignite and particles combust.

Safe day suspended as an icy bower

Over the urn of night’s galvanized dust.

Sun-limbs stretched, the prison closed, its people cried

For treacherous nighttime electricity.

She heard whispers as the light again died, “Gather, midnight; reveal our complicity.”

The reanimated breathed with black’s charged cold,

“Humans crave only to starve time together

Within the hushed glowing of night-fueled coals

And the presence of company’s tether.”

Sand-sunk birches cued her fleeting visit’s close,

A lonely thought disturbed the misty eye’s repose:

*Against wise intent rebelled persuasive dusks.*

*Fog-darkened rime conducts mankind’s veiled electric lusts.*

**Revised Reflection**

As I was reading through Chander a second time, I realized that my definition of the isolated poet and Henry Derozio’s ideal of the solitary poet aligned perfectly. In my revised manifesto, I kept most of my ideas about contraries and separate realities that came from Blake and Shelley, but I refer to a true poet as a “poetic hermit.” This term comes directly from Chander’s statement that Derozio’s poems “present the poet as a hermetic figure” and describe the ideal poet as “cut off from the rest of society” (25). This connects to nationalism, as the solitary poet is not defined by time or space and can speak to a transnational audience. However, according to Chander, Derozio knows that this societal transcendence is impossible because universalism is still geographically-based (25-26). This contradiction is what inspired the revisions to my original poem.

Since Derozio describes the poet as occupying a space within poetry itself, I thought it would be interesting if “The Poet” (that isn’t me) was a character in my revised poem. With her “clouded eye” and her ability to be transported from her isolated island to an alternate place and time, my Poet is essentially a sibyl (dramatic, I know, but I’ve been obsessed with sibyls since we read The Last Man). I state in my revised manifesto that the poet “objectively comments on and exists within a transnational world from her own island.” I made this figurative idea literal by having my Poet inhabit an island from which she observes and judges the people from the place with “the towers of birch.” The themes in my original poem and revised poem are the same; “The Poet” acknowledges that humans cannot be trusted to keep away from each other in this time of quarantine because it is human nature to crave closer contact. But, just as Derozio claims that the ideal, transcendent poet cannot exist, my poet figure forgets about her experience in “the chasm hour.” The last two lines of the poem describe all that she remembers from her travels through space and time. While she remembers the immorality of the place and people she encountered, her ability to transcend space is futile because she forgets everything but the essence of her experience. This connects back to my manifesto, as “The Poet” cannot transcend society because her memory is tainted by her worldly experiences. Similarly, in Derozio’s “The Poet’s Habitation,” it is futile for the poet to try to overcome our geographically-based society and create truly universal poetry (Chander 23).