

The Romantic Period

The Nature of [Romanticism](#):

As a term to cover the most distinctive writers who flourished in the last years of the 18th century and the first decades of the 19th, “Romantic” is indispensable but also a little misleading: there was no self-styled “Romantic movement” at the time, and the great writers of the period did not call themselves [Romantics](#). Not until [August Wilhelm von Schlegel](#)’s Vienna lectures of 1808–09 was a clear distinction established between the “organic,” “plastic” qualities of [Romantic](#) art and the “mechanical” character of Classicism.

Many of the age’s foremost writers thought that something new was happening in the world’s affairs, nevertheless. [William Blake](#)’s affirmation in 1793 that “a new heaven is begun” was matched a generation later by [Percy Bysshe Shelley](#)’s “The world’s great age begins anew.” “These, these will give the world another heart, / And other pulses,” wrote [John Keats](#), referring to [Leigh Hunt](#) and [William Wordsworth](#). Fresh ideals came to the fore; in particular, the ideal of freedom, long cherished in [England](#), was being extended to every range of human endeavour. As that ideal swept through [Europe](#), it became natural to believe that the age of tyrants might soon end.

The most notable feature of the [poetry](#) of the time is the new role of individual thought and personal feeling. Where the main trend of 18th-century poetics had been to praise the general, to see the poet as a spokesman of society addressing a [cultivated](#) and [homogeneous](#) audience and having as his end the [conveyance](#) of “truth,” the Romantics found the source of poetry in the particular, unique experience. Blake’s marginal comment on [Sir Joshua Reynolds](#)’s *Discourses* expresses the position with characteristic vehemence: “To Generalize is to be an Idiot. To Particularize is the alone Distinction of Merit.” The poet was seen as an individual distinguished from his fellows by the intensity of his perceptions, taking as his basic subject matter the workings of his own mind. Poetry was regarded as conveying its own truth; sincerity was the [criterion](#) by which it was to be judged.

The emphasis on feeling—seen perhaps at its finest in the poems of Robert Burns—was in some ways a continuation of the earlier “cult of sensibility”; and it is worth remembering that Alexander Pope praised his father as having known no language but the language of the heart. But feeling had begun to receive particular emphasis and is found in most of the Romantic definitions of poetry. Wordsworth called poetry “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling,” and in 1833 John Stuart Mill defined poetry as “feeling itself, employing

thought only as the medium of its utterance.” It followed that the best poetry was that in which the greatest intensity of feeling was expressed, and hence a new importance was attached to the lyric. Another key quality of Romantic writing was its shift from the mimetic, or imitative, assumptions of the Neoclassical era to a new stress on imagination. Samuel Taylor Coleridge saw the imagination as the supreme poetic quality, a quasi-divine creative force that made the poet a godlike being. Samuel Johnson had seen the components of poetry as “invention, imagination and judgement,” but Blake wrote: “One Power alone makes a Poet: Imagination, the Divine Vision.” The poets of this period accordingly placed great emphasis on the workings of the unconscious mind, on dreams and reveries, on the supernatural, and on the childlike or primitive view of the world, this last being regarded as valuable because its clarity and intensity had not been overlaid by the restrictions of civilized “reason.” Rousseau’s sentimental conception of the “noble savage” was often invoked, and often by those who were ignorant that the phrase is Dryden’s or that the type was adumbrated in the “poor Indian” of Pope’s *An Essay on Man*. A further sign of the diminished stress placed on judgment is the Romantic attitude to form: if poetry must be spontaneous, sincere, intense, it should be fashioned primarily according to the dictates of the creative imagination. Wordsworth advised a young poet, “You feel strongly; trust to those feelings, and your poem will take its shape and proportions as a tree does from the vital principle that actuates it.” This organic view of poetry is opposed to the classical theory of “genres,” each with its own linguistic decorum; and it led to the feeling that poetic sublimity was unattainable except in short passages.

Hand in hand with the new conception of poetry and the insistence on a new subject matter went a demand for new ways of writing. Wordsworth and his followers, particularly Keats, found the prevailing poetic diction of the late 18th century stale and stilted, or “gaudy and inane,” and totally unsuited to the expression of their perceptions. It could not be, for them, the language of feeling, and Wordsworth accordingly sought to bring the language of poetry back to that of common speech. Wordsworth’s own diction, however, often differs from his theory. Nevertheless, when he published his preface to *Lyrical Ballads* in 1800, the time was ripe for a change: the flexible diction of earlier 18th-century poetry had hardened into a merely conventional language.

Romantic Poetry

Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge:

Useful as it is to trace the common elements in Romantic poetry, there was little conformity among the poets themselves. It is misleading to read the poetry of the first Romantics as if it had been written primarily to express their feelings. Their concern was rather to change the intellectual climate of the age. William Blake had been dissatisfied since boyhood with the current state of poetry and what he considered the irreligious drabness of contemporary thought. His early development of a protective shield of mocking humour with which to face a world in which science had become trifling and art inconsequential is visible in the satirical *An Island in the Moon* (written c. 1784–85); he then took the bolder step of setting aside sophistication in the visionary *Songs of Innocence* (1789). His desire for renewal encouraged him to view the outbreak of the French Revolution as a momentous event. In works such as *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790–93) and *Songs of Experience* (1794), he attacked the hypocrisies of the age and the impersonal cruelties resulting from the dominance of analytic reason in contemporary thought. As it became clear that the ideals of the Revolution were not likely to be realized in his time, he renewed his efforts to revise his contemporaries' view of the universe and to construct a new mythology centred not in the God of the Bible but in Urizen, a repressive figure of reason and law whom he believed to be the deity actually worshipped by his contemporaries. The story of Urizen's rise was set out in *The First Book of Urizen* (1794) and then, more ambitiously, in the unfinished manuscript *Vala* (later redrafted as *The Four Zoas*), written from about 1796 to about 1807. Blake developed these ideas in the visionary narratives of *Milton* (1804–08) and *Jerusalem* (1804–20). Here, still using his own mythological characters, he portrayed the imaginative artist as the hero of society and suggested the possibility of redemption from the fallen (or Urizenic) condition.

[William Wordsworth](#) and [Samuel Taylor Coleridge](#), meanwhile, were also exploring the [implications](#) of the French Revolution. Wordsworth, who lived in [France](#) in 1791–92 and fathered an [illegitimate](#) child there, was distressed when, soon after his return, [Britain](#) declared war on the republic, dividing his [allegiance](#). For the rest of his career, he was to brood on those events, trying to develop a view of humanity that would be faithful to his twin sense of the [pathos](#) of individual human fates and the unrealized potentialities in

humanity as a whole. The first factor emerges in his early manuscript poems “The Ruined Cottage” and “The Pedlar” (both to form part of the later [Excursion](#)); the second was developed from 1797, when he and his sister, [Dorothy](#), with whom he was living in the west of England, were in close contact with [Coleridge](#). Stirred simultaneously by Dorothy’s immediacy of feeling, [manifested](#) everywhere in her *Journals* (written 1798–1803, published 1897), and by Coleridge’s imaginative and speculative genius, he produced the poems collected in [Lyrical Ballads](#) (1798). The volume began with Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” continued with poems displaying delight in the powers of nature and the humane instincts of ordinary people, and concluded with the meditative “Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey,” Wordsworth’s attempt to set out his mature faith in nature and humanity.

His investigation of the relationship between nature and the human mind continued in the long autobiographical poem addressed to Coleridge and later titled [The Prelude](#) (1798–99 in two books; 1804 in five books; 1805 in 13 books; revised continuously and published posthumously, 1850). Here he traced the value for a poet of having been a child “fostered alike by beauty and by fear” by an upbringing in [sublime](#) surroundings. *The Prelude* [constitutes](#) the most significant English expression of the Romantic discovery of the self as a topic for art and [literature](#). The poem also makes much of the work of memory, a theme explored as well in the “[Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood](#).” In poems such as “Michael” and “The Brothers,” by contrast, written for the second volume of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), Wordsworth dwelt on the pathos and potentialities of ordinary lives.

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Coleridge’s poetic development during these years paralleled Wordsworth’s. Having briefly brought together images of nature and the mind in “The Eolian Harp” (1796), he devoted himself to more-public concerns in poems of political and social prophecy, such as “Religious Musings” and “The Destiny of Nations.” Becoming disillusioned in 1798 with his earlier politics, however, and encouraged by Wordsworth, he turned back to the relationship between nature and the human mind. Poems such as “This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison,” “The Nightingale,” and “Frost at Midnight” (now sometimes called the “conversation poems” but collected by Coleridge himself as “Meditative Poems in Blank Verse”) combine sensitive descriptions of nature with subtlety of psychological comment. “[Kubla Khan](#)” (1797 or 1798, published 1816), a poem that Coleridge said came to him in “a kind of Reverie,” represented a new kind of exotic writing, which he also exploited in the supernaturalism of “The Ancient

Mariner” and the unfinished “Christabel.” After his visit to Germany in 1798–99, he renewed attention to the links between the subtler forces in nature and the human psyche; this attention bore fruit in letters, notebooks, [literary criticism](#), theology, and philosophy. Simultaneously, his poetic output became sporadic. “[Dejection: An Ode](#)” (1802), another meditative poem, which first took shape as a verse letter to Sara Hutchinson, Wordsworth’s sister-in-law, memorably describes the suspension of his “shaping spirit of Imagination.”

The work of both poets was directed back to national affairs during these years by the rise of [Napoleon](#). In 1802 Wordsworth dedicated a number of sonnets to the patriotic cause. The death in 1805 of his brother John, who was a captain in the [merchant navy](#), was a grim reminder that, while he had been living in retirement as a poet, others had been willing to sacrifice themselves. From this time the theme of duty was to be prominent in his poetry. His political [essay](#) *Concerning the Relations of Great Britain, Spain and Portugal...as Affected by the Convention of Cintra* (1809) agreed with Coleridge’s periodical *The Friend* (1809–10) in deploring the decline of principle among statesmen. When *The Excursion* appeared in 1814 (the time of Napoleon’s first exile), Wordsworth announced the poem as the central section of a longer projected work, *The Recluse*, “a philosophical Poem, containing views of Man, Nature, and Society.” The plan was not fulfilled, however, and *The Excursion* was left to stand in its own right as a poem of [moral](#) and religious consolation for those who had been disappointed by the failure of French revolutionary ideals.

Both Wordsworth and Coleridge benefited from the advent in 1811 of the Regency, which brought a renewed interest in the arts. Coleridge’s lectures on Shakespeare became fashionable, his [play](#) *Remorse* was briefly produced, and his volume of poems [Christabel: Kubla Khan: A Vision: The Pains of Sleep](#) was published in 1816. [Biographia Literaria](#) (1817), an account of his own development, combined philosophy and literary [criticism](#) in a new way and made an enduring and important contribution to literary theory. Coleridge settled at Highgate in 1816, and he was sought there as “the most impressive talker of his age” (in the words of the essayist William Hazlitt). His later religious writings made a considerable impact on Victorian readers.

Other poets of the early Romantic period:

In his own lifetime, Blake’s poetry was scarcely known. [Sir Walter Scott](#), by contrast, was thought of as a major poet for his vigorous and [evocative](#) verse narratives *The Lay of the Last*

Minstrel (1805) and *Marmion* (1808). Other verse writers were also highly esteemed. The *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784) of [Charlotte Smith](#) and the *Fourteen Sonnets* (1789) of [William Lisle Bowles](#) were received with enthusiasm by Coleridge. [Thomas Campbell](#) is now chiefly remembered for his patriotic lyrics such as “Ye Mariners of England” and “The Battle of Hohenlinden” (1807) and for the critical preface to his *Specimens of the British Poets* (1819); [Samuel Rogers](#) was known for his brilliant [table talk](#) (published 1856, after his death, as *Recollections of the Table-Talk of Samuel Rogers*), as well as for his [exquisite](#) but exiguous poetry. Another admired poet of the day was [Thomas Moore](#), whose *Irish Melodies* began to appear in 1808. His highly coloured narrative *Lalla Rookh: An Oriental Romance* (1817) and his satirical poetry were also immensely popular. Charlotte Smith was not the only significant woman poet in this period. [Helen Maria Williams’s](#) *Poems* (1786), Ann Batten Cristall’s *Poetical Sketches* (1795), [Mary Robinson’s](#) *Sappho and Phaon* (1796), and Mary Tighe’s *Psyche* (1805) all contain notable work.

[Robert Southey](#) was closely associated with Wordsworth and Coleridge and was looked upon as a prominent member, with them, of the “[Lake school](#)” of poetry. His originality is best seen in his ballads and his nine “English Eclogues,” three of which were first published in the 1799 volume of his *Poems* with a prologue explaining that these verse sketches of contemporary life bore “no resemblance to any poems in our language.” His “Oriental” narrative poems *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801) and *The Curse of Kehama* (1810) were successful in their own time, but his fame is based on his prose work—the *Life of Nelson* (1813), the *History of the Peninsular War* (1823–32), and his classic formulation of the children’s tale “The Three Bears.”

[George Crabbe](#) wrote poetry of another kind: his sensibility, his values, much of his diction, and his [heroic couplet](#) verse form belong to the 18th century. He differs from the earlier Augustans, however, in his subject matter, concentrating on realistic, unsentimental accounts of the life of the poor and the middle classes. He shows considerable narrative gifts in his collections of verse tales (in which he anticipates many short-story techniques) and great powers of description. His antipastoral *The Village* appeared in 1783. After a long silence, he returned to poetry with *The Parish Register* (1807), *The Borough* (1810), *Tales in Verse* (1812), and *Tales of the Hall* (1819), which gained him great popularity in the early 19th century.

The later Romantics: Shelley, Keats, and Byron:

The poets of the next generation shared their predecessors' passion for liberty (now set in a new perspective by the Napoleonic Wars) and were in a position to learn from their experiments. Percy Bysshe Shelley in particular was deeply interested in politics, coming early under the spell of the anarchist views of William Godwin, whose *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* had appeared in 1793. Shelley's revolutionary ardour caused him to claim in his critical essay "A Defence of Poetry" (1821, published 1840) that "the most unfailing herald, companion, and follower of the awakening of a great people to work a beneficial change in opinion or institution, is poetry," and that poets are "the unacknowledged legislators of the world." This fervour burns throughout the early *Queen Mab* (1813), the long *Laon and Cythna* (retitled *The Revolt of Islam*, 1818), and the lyrical drama *Prometheus Unbound* (1820). Shelley saw himself at once as poet and prophet, as the fine "Ode to the West Wind" (1819) makes clear. Despite his grasp of practical politics, however, it is a mistake to look for concreteness in his poetry, where his concern is with subtleties of perception and with the underlying forces of nature: his most characteristic images are of sky and weather, of lights and fires. His poetic stance invites the reader to respond with similar outgoing aspiration. It adheres to the Rousseauistic belief in an underlying spirit in individuals, one truer to human nature itself than the behaviour evinced and approved by society. In that sense his material is transcendental and cosmic and his expression thoroughly appropriate. Possessed of great technical brilliance, he is, at his best, a poet of excitement and power.

John Keats, by contrast, was a poet so sensuous and physically specific that his early work, such as *Endymion* (1818), could produce an over-luxuriant, cloying effect. As the program set out in his early poem "Sleep and Poetry" shows, however, Keats was determined to discipline himself: even before February 1820, when he first began to cough blood, he may have known that he had not long to live, and he devoted himself to the expression of his vision with feverish intensity. He experimented with many kinds of poems: "Isabella" (published 1820), an adaptation of a tale by Giovanni Boccaccio, is a tour de force of craftsmanship in its attempt to reproduce a medieval atmosphere and at the same time a poem involved in contemporary politics. His epic fragment *Hyperion* (begun in 1818 and abandoned, published 1820; later begun again and published posthumously as *The Fall of Hyperion* in 1856) has a new spareness of imagery, but Keats soon found the style too

Miltonic and decided to give himself up to what he called “other sensations.” Some of these “other sensations” are found in the poems of 1819, Keats’s *annus mirabilis*: “The Eve of St. Agnes” and the great odes “To a Nightingale,” “On a Grecian Urn,” and “To Autumn.” These, with the *Hyperion* poems, represent the summit of Keats’s achievement, showing what has been called “the disciplining of sensation into symbolic meaning,” the complex themes being handled with a concrete richness of detail. His superb letters show the full range of the intelligence at work in his poetry.

George Gordon, Lord Byron, who differed from Shelley and Keats in themes and manner, was at one with them in reflecting their shift toward “Mediterranean” topics. Having thrown down the gauntlet in his early poem *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809), in which he directed particular scorn at poets of sensibility and declared his own allegiance to Milton, Dryden, and Pope, he developed a poetry of dash and flair, in many cases with a striking hero. His two longest poems, *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (1812–18) and *Don Juan* (1819–24), his masterpiece, provided alternative personae for himself, the one a bitter and melancholy exile among the historic sites of Europe, the other a picaresque adventurer enjoying a series of amorous adventures. The gloomy and misanthropic vein was further mined in dramatic poems such as *Manfred* (1817) and *Cain* (1821), which helped to secure his reputation in Europe, but he is now remembered best for witty, ironic, and less portentous writings, such as *Beppo* (1818), in which he first used the ottava rima form. The easy, nonchalant, biting style developed there became a formidable device in *Don Juan* and in his satire on Southey, *The Vision of Judgment* (1822).

Other poets of the later period:

John Clare, a Northamptonshire man of humble background, achieved early success with *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* (1820), *The Village Minstrel* (1821), and *The Shepherd’s Calendar* (1827). Both his reputation and his mental health collapsed in the late 1830s. He spent the later years of his life in an asylum in Northampton; the poetry he wrote there was rediscovered in the 20th century. His natural simplicity and lucidity of diction, his intent observation, his almost Classical poise, and the unassuming dignity of his attitude to life make him one of the most quietly moving of English poets. Thomas Lovell Beddoes, whose violent imagery and obsession with death and the macabre recall the Jacobean dramatists, represents an imagination at the opposite pole; metrical virtuosity is

displayed in the songs and lyrical passages from his over-sensational tragedy *Death's Jest-Book* (begun 1825; published posthumously, 1850). Another minor writer who found inspiration in the 17th century was George Darley, some of whose songs from *Nepenthe* (1835) keep their place in anthologies. The comic writer Thomas Hood also wrote poems of social protest, such as "The Song of the Shirt" (1843) and "The Bridge of Sighs," as well as the graceful *Plea of the Midsummer Fairies* (1827). Felicia Hemans's best-remembered poem, "Casabianca," appeared in her volume *The Forest Sanctuary* (1825). This was followed in 1828 by the more substantial *Records of Woman*.

The Romantic Novel: from the Gothic novel to Austen and Scott:

The death of Tobias Smollett in 1771 brought an end to the first great period of novel writing in English. Not until the appearance of Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* in 1811 and Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* in 1814 would there again be works of prose fiction that ranked with the masterpieces of Richardson, Fielding, Sterne, and Smollett.

It is possible to suggest practical reasons for this 40-year partial eclipse. The war with France made paper expensive, causing publishers in the 1790s and early 1800s to prefer short, dense forms, such as poetry. It might also be argued, in more broadly cultural terms, that the comic and realistic qualities of the novel were at odds with the new sensibility of Romanticism. But the problem was always one of quality rather than quantity. Flourishing as a form of entertainment, the novel nevertheless underwent several important developments in this period. One was the invention of the Gothic novel. Another was the appearance of a politically engaged fiction in the years immediately before the French Revolution. A third was the rise of women writers to the prominence that they have held ever since in prose fiction.

The sentimental tradition of Richardson and Sterne persisted until the 1790s with Henry Brooke's *The Fool of Quality* (1765–70), Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771), and Charles Lamb's *A Tale of Rosamund Gray and Old Blind Margaret* (1798). Novels of this kind were, however, increasingly mocked in the later years of the 18th century.

The comic realism of Fielding and Smollett continued in a more sporadic way. John Moore gave a cosmopolitan flavour to the worldly wisdom of his predecessors in *Zeluco* (1786) and *Mordaunt* (1800). Fanny Burney carried the comic realist manner into the field of female experience with the novels *Evelina* (1778), *Cecilia* (1782), and *Camilla* (1796). Her

discovery of the comic and didactic potential of a plot charting a woman's progress from the nursery to the altar would be important for several generations of female novelists.

More striking than these continuations of previous modes, however, was Horace Walpole's invention, in *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), of what became known as the Gothic novel. Walpole's intention was to "blend" the fantastic plot of "ancient romance" with the realistic characterization of "modern" (or novel) romance. Characters would respond with terror to extraordinary events, and readers would vicariously participate. Walpole's innovation was not significantly imitated until the 1790s, when—perhaps because the violence of the French Revolution created a taste for a correspondingly extreme mode of fiction—a torrent of such works appeared.

The most important writer of these stories was Ann Radcliffe, who distinguished between "terror" and "horror." Terror "expands the soul" by its use of "uncertainty and obscurity." Horror, on the other hand, is actual and specific. Radcliffe's own novels, especially *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1797), were examples of the fiction of terror. Vulnerable heroines, trapped in ruined castles, are terrified by supernatural perils that prove to be illusions.

Matthew Lewis, by contrast, wrote the fiction of horror. In *The Monk* (1796) the hero commits both murder and incest, and the repugnant details include a woman's imprisonment in a vault full of rotting human corpses. Some later examples of Gothic fiction have more-sophisticated agendas. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) is a novel of ideas that anticipates science fiction. James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) is a subtle study of religious mania and split personality. Even in its more-vulgar examples, however, Gothic fiction can symbolically address serious political and psychological issues.

By the 1790s, realistic fiction had acquired a polemical role, reflecting the ideas of the French Revolution, though sacrificing much of its comic power in the process. One practitioner of this type of fiction, Robert Bage, is best remembered for *Hermesprong; or, Man as He Is Not* (1796), in which a "natural" hero rejects the conventions of contemporary society. The radical [Thomas Holcroft](#) published two novels, *Anna St. Ives* (1792) and *The Adventures of Hugh Trevor* (1794), influenced by the ideas of [William Godwin](#). Godwin himself produced the best example of this political fiction in *Things as They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794), borrowing techniques from the Gothic novel to enliven a narrative of social oppression.

Women novelists contributed extensively to this ideological debate. Radicals such as [Mary Wollstonecraft](#) (*Mary*, 1788; *Maria; or, The Wrongs of Woman*, 1798), [Elizabeth Inchbald](#) (*Nature and Art*, 1796), and Mary Hays (*Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, 1796) celebrated the rights of the individual. Anti-Jacobin novelists such as Jane West (*A Gossip's Story*, 1796; *A Tale of the Times*, 1799), [Amelia Opie](#) (*Adeline Mowbray*, 1804), and Mary Brunton (*Self-Control*, 1811) stressed the dangers of [social change](#). Some writers were more bipartisan, notably Elizabeth Hamilton (*Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, 1800) and [Maria Edgeworth](#), whose long, varied, and distinguished career extended from *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795) to *Helen* (1834). Her pioneering regional novel *Castle Rackrent* (1800), an affectionately comic portrait of life in 18th-century [Ireland](#), influenced the subsequent work of Scott.

[Jane Austen](#) stands on the [conservative](#) side of this battle of ideas, though in novels that incorporate their anti-Jacobin and anti-Romantic views so subtly into love stories that many readers are unaware of them. Three of her novels—*Sense and Sensibility* (first published in 1811; originally titled “Elinor and Marianne”), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813; originally “First Impressions”), and *Northanger Abbey* (published posthumously in 1817)—were drafted in the late 1790s. Three more novels—*Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1815), and *Persuasion* (1817, together with *Northanger Abbey*)—were written between 1811 and 1817. Austen uses, essentially, two standard plots. In one of these a right-minded but neglected heroine is gradually acknowledged to be correct by characters who have previously looked down on her (such as [Fanny Price](#) in *Mansfield Park* and Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*). In the other an attractive but self-deceived heroine (such as [Emma Woodhouse](#) in *Emma* or Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*) belatedly recovers from her condition of error and is rewarded with the partner she had previously despised or overlooked. On this slight framework, Austen constructs a powerful case for the superiority of the Augustan virtues of common sense, empiricism, and rationality to the new “Romantic” values of imagination, egotism, and subjectivity. With Austen the comic brilliance and [exquisite](#) narrative construction of Fielding return to the English novel, in conjunction with a distinctive and deadly [irony](#).

[Thomas Love Peacock](#) is another witty novelist who combined an [intimate](#) knowledge of [Romantic](#) ideas with a satirical attitude toward them, though in comic debates rather than conventional narratives. *Headlong Hall* (1816), *Melincourt* (1817), and *Nightmare Abbey* (1818) are sharp accounts of contemporary [intellectual](#) and cultural fashions, as are the

two much later fictions in which Peacock reused this successful formula, *Crotchet Castle* (1831) and *Gryll Grange* (1860–61).

[Sir Walter Scott](#) is the English writer who can in the fullest sense be called a Romantic novelist. After a successful career as a poet, Scott switched to prose fiction in 1814 with the first of the “Waverley novels.” In the first phase of his work as a novelist, Scott wrote about the [Scotland](#) of the 17th and 18th centuries, charting its gradual transition from the feudal era into the modern world in a series of vivid human dramas. *Waverley* (1814), *Guy Mannering* (1815), *The Antiquary* (1816), *Old Mortality* (1816), *Rob Roy* (1817), and *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818) are the masterpieces of this period. In a second phase, beginning with *Ivanhoe* in 1819, Scott turned to stories set in medieval [England](#). Finally, with *Quentin Durward* in 1823, he added European settings to his historical [repertoire](#). Scott combines a capacity for comic social observation with a Romantic sense of landscape and an epic grandeur, enlarging the scope of the novel in ways that equip it to become the dominant literary form of the later 19th century.