

English Poets, 1660-1798

- **John Dryden** (1631-1700): Influential English poet, literary critic, and translator who dominated the Restoration Era (**Age of Dryden**).
- Wrote biting satires using the **heroic couplet** (a pair of lines in iambic pentameter that rhymes - **dominant poetic form** of 18th century).
- **Alexander Pope** (1688-1744): follower of Dryden in verse.
- ***The Rape of the Lock*** (1712): a poem satirizing a quarrel by comparing it to the epic world of the gods.

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- **Age of Reason** (18th Century): also known as the **Age of Enlightenment** - a term used to describe a phase in Western philosophy and cultural life centered upon the 18th century, in which Reason was the primary source and basis of authority.
- Source of critical ideas: Centrality of **freedom**, **democracy**, and **reason**: primary values of society. Thinkers and writers were held to be free to pursue the truth in any form.

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- ◎ However, the **Romanticism** movement (**second half of the 18th century**) argued that the **Enlightenment** elevated **reason** to an unnecessary status of a new authority.
- ◎ **Romanticism**: is a complex artistic, literary, and intellectual movement. It partly revolted against aristocratic social and political norms of the **Age of Enlightenment** and against the scientific account of nature. It was embodied most strongly in visual arts, music, and literature.

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- **Graveyard Poets: pre-Romantic** English poets of the **18th century** known for their gloomy portrayal of mortality, in the context of the graveyard.
- **Subjects:** life and death, the future world, and God. Descriptions are dark, sad, and filled with strange imaginations.
- **Poets:** Edward Young *Night Thoughts*
Robert Blair *The Grave*
Thomas Gray *Elegy Written in a
Country Churchyard*

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- ◎ **William Blake** (1757-1827): English poet and painter. Largely unrecognized during his lifetime, Blake's work is now considered influential in the history of both poetry and the visual arts.
- ◎ Considered mad for his personal views by contemporaries, later criticism regards Blake highly for his expressiveness and creativity and the philosophical and mystical ideas within his work.
- ◎ His poetry has been characterized as part of both the Romantic movement and "Pre-Romantic", for its largely having appeared in the 18th century. He was respectful of the Bible, but hostile to the Church of England.