

English Poets

The Metaphysical Poets wrote about two subjects, love and God, some the one, some the other, and some both.

Whatever their subject, they all wrote with wit, intensity and passion, using metaphors and imagery which are often imaginative and startling in their ingenuity.

John Milton is probably England's greatest poet after Shakespeare, and a totally different one, with a deep moral purpose, who sought to "*justify the ways of God to man*" in his great epic poem ***Paradise Lost***. He wrote (or rather dictated) that poem in middle age, having gone blind and in political disgrace after the Restoration of King Charles II.

But prior to composing this masterpiece, he wrote shorter poems of great power:

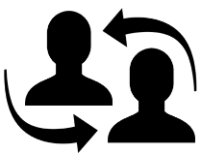
On the Morning of Christ's Nativity: written at the age of 21, this is one of the great Christmas poems.

L'Allegro and ***Il Penseroso***: two contrasting views of life – merriment or melancholy... Which does a young poet choose?

Lycidas: an elegy using the pastoral convention which strongly denounces the moral corruption of the time

Lyrical Ballads Revolution was in the air in the late 18th century – violent political revolution in France and the cultural revolution of Romanticism in Europe. In 1798, two young poets still in their twenties, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, published ***Lyrical Ballads***, a literally slim volume containing both their poetry, often written in collaboration with each other. Although the book did not make a great impression when first published, it was a poetic bombshell, with Wordsworth writing a poetic manifesto in which he committed himself to writing "*in the language of ordinary men*", in great contrast to the artifice of 18th century poetry.

Coleridge's great ballad poem ***The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*** is his



major contribution to the book, a small epic of guilt and redemption, whereas Wordsworth wrote of Nature, the poor and his own boyhood in the Lake District.

John Keats died of tuberculosis in Rome at the age of 26, as his mother and brother had before him. By that time he had become a major English Romantic poet, most of his great works being written in a single year, an *annus mirabilis* when he composed several of the great Odes of English poetry. His sensuous '*Keatsian*' style marks him out as unique.

The ***Dramatic Monologues*** of **Robert Browning** give a voice to some of the great artists of the Italian Renaissance in poems such as ***Fra Lippo Lippi*** and ***Andrea del Sarto***. ***My Last Duchess***, written in the voice of an arrogant and murderous Renaissance nobleman, is possibly the most sinister poem of the 19th century. Browning's poetic sensibilities were stimulated by his fifteen years in Italy, where he eloped with Elizabeth Barrett, a poet for many years better known than her husband. (Browning first contacted her in a fan letter "*I love your poetry, Miss Barrett, and I love you too.*")