

Romanticism

The Romantic era is often placed in the years between the American Declaration of Independence in 1776 and the Great Reform Bill of 1832. However, opinions differ on the exact starting and end points. It was a time of revolutions and of industrialisation, which brought about changes in the political and social order but also in people's minds. On the one hand, English society was future-oriented and there was a widespread belief in progress. Advances in science and technology, for instance the first railways and the telegraph, were embodiments of this positive sentiment. On the other hand, many people felt lost because systems of beliefs and values changed. Some of the Romantic poets, predominantly Lord Byron (1788–1824) and Percy Shelley (1792–1822), were highly critical of their society. Others, like John Keats (1795–1821), withdrew into alternative worlds of the imagination in their poetry. And while the whole country was gripped by a move away from the country and to the cities where people hoped to find employment in factories, the Romantics advocated a return to nature for quiet contemplation and a confrontation with the self.



John Constable, *Hampstead Heath with London in the distance*

AWARENESS

- 1 Are you affected by poetry at all? Why (not)?

COMPREHENSION

- 2 How does the lyrical I characterise London?

ANALYSIS

- 3 Which poetic techniques (Reference Library, pp. 309f.) are used to describe London?
- 4 What can you say about the form of the poem (especially keeping in mind what is written on p. 107 about the sonnet form)?

OPINION

- 5 Do you think the picture of London in the poem is an adequate representation of the city at that time? Why (not)?
- 6 Why might Wordsworth (as a Romantic poet) have chosen this particular view of London?

PROJECTS

- 7 Find out why one sonnet form is called 'Petrarchan' (<http://petrarch.petersadlon.com/laura.html>).
- 8 Try to find Dorothy Wordsworth's diary entry on the web and compare it to the poem. How could the relationship between the two texts and the different dates they give relate to the composition of Romantic poetry as described above? (<http://www.cie.org.uk/CIE/WebSite/UCLESData/Documents/A%20Level/Other%20Docs/Notes%20on%20AS%20Anthology%20-%20amended%2030-10-2006.pdf>)

6

Myth or Reality?

**AWARENESS**

- 1 Compare these images of London (as well as the other postcards reprinted in this chapter) with your own impressions of the city and / or with films about London that you may have seen.

ANALYSIS

- 2 Which aspects of London do each of the three postcards reprinted here highlight?
- 3 Why might the producers of the postcards have selected the specific buildings represented there?
- 4 Do the postcards create a certain 'myth' (or myths) of London?

OPINION

- 5 Why might someone want to choose these postcards to send home from a trip to London? Would you want to do so?
- 6 Who would be a suitable target group for the cards?
- 7 How do you view the relationship between the images of London presented here and the texts discussed so far?

"New York, New York"; "New York"

There are countless poems and songs about New York City. The best known song is the theme song from Martin Scorsese's 1977 film *New York, New York*, with music by John Kander and lyrics by Fred Ebb, sung in the film by Liza Minelli. Two years later, this song was most famously recorded by Frank Sinatra, and it has become a highly popular celebration of New York, played at many social events. – Among the poems, Edward Field's "New York," which appeared in the same year as Scorsese's film as the opening text of his collection *A Full Heart* (1977), evokes a much more complex image of "the city that never sleeps." – "New York, New York," from <http://www.brave.com/bo/lyrics/nyny.htm>; "New York" from *New York Observed: Artists and Writers Look at the City, 1650 to the Present*, ed. by Barbara Cohen, Seymour Chwast and Steven Heller (New York: Harry M. Abrams, 1987), p. 116.

"New York, New York"

- 1 Start spreading the news
I'm leaving today
I want to be a part of it, New York, New York
These vagabond shoes
- 5 Are longing to stray
And make a brand new start of it
New York, New York
I want to wake up in the city that never sleeps
To find I'm king of the hill, top of the heap
- 10 These little town blues
Are melting away
I'll make a brand new start of it
In old New York
If I can make it there
- 15 I'll make it anywhere
It's up to you, New York, New York.
I want to wake up in the city that never sleeps
To find I'm king of the hill, top of the heap
These little town blues
- 20 Are melting away
I'll make a brand new start of it
In old New York
If I can make it there
I'll make it anywhere
- 25 It's up to you, New York, New York.



Inside the Trump Tower

"New York"

- I live in a beautiful place, a city
people claim to be astonished
when you say you live there.
They talk of junkies, muggings, dirt, and noise,
missing the point completely.
- I tell them where they live it is hell,
a land of frozen people.
They never think of people.
- Home, I am astonished by this environment
that is also a form of nature
like those paradises of trees and grass
but this is a people paradise
where we are the creatures mostly
though thank God for dogs, cats, sparrows, and
roaches.
- This vertical place is no more an accident
than the Himalayas are.
The city needs all those tall buildings
to contain the tremendous energy here.
The landscape is in a state of balance.
We do God's will whether we know it or not:
Where I live the streets end in a river of sunlight.
- Nowhere else in the country do people
show just what they feel –
we don't put on any act.
- Look at the way New Yorkers
walk down the street. It says,
I don't care. What nerve,
to dare to live their dreams, or nightmares,
and no one bothers to look.
- True, you have to be an expert to live here.
Part of the trick is not to go anywhere, lounge about,
go slowly in the midst of the rush for novelty.
Anyway, beside the eats the big event here
is the streets which are full of love –
we hug and kiss a lot. You can't say that
for anywhere else around. For some
it is the sex part they care about and get –
there's all the opportunity in the world if you want it.

- 40 For me it is different:
 Out walking, my soul seeks its food.
 It knows what it wants.
 Instantly it recognizes its mate, our eyes meet,
 and our beings exchange a vital energy,
 45 the universe goes on Charge
 and we pass by without holding.



The Woolworth Building (1913; 241 meters)

Vocabulary

Song: 10 **little town blues:** blues, i.e. low spirits, melancholy bred by living in a boring little town – **Poem:** 4 **mugging** (n.): an attack on s.o. in which they are robbed in a public place – 15 **roach** (n.): (AmE infm. for) **cockroach**, a large black insect often found in old or dirty houses – 25 **to put on an act:** to play a role – 32 **to lounge about** (v.): to spend time doing nothing – 34 **the eats** (n. pl.): (infml.) food, esp. for a party – 45 **to go on charge:** to take in a charge of electricity, here used metaphorically

Explanations

4 **junkie** (n.): (sl.) a person who habitually takes a drug such as heroin and is dependent on it. Attempts to end the sale and use of drugs through law enforcement began in 1973, when a new law was enacted which mandated minimum prison terms for offenses that earlier had been punishable only by probation. This law greatly increased the number of drug offenders in prison, but it did not diminish the use of drugs. During the 1970s cocaine regained popularity, and when in the mid-1980s there surfaced a smokable form of cocaine known as 'crack,' it was generally realized that cocaine was a dangerous drug leading to violence and paranoia. The fear of the effects of crack triggered an increased emphasis on law enforcements, which filled the courts and prisons with drug offenders. When in the 1980s it became clear that AIDS was being spread rapidly by shared hypodermic needles, attention shifted again to intravenous drug users. In the mid-1990s it was estimated that there were 500,000 drug addicts in New York, including 200,000 heroin addicts.

AWARENESS

- 1 Imagine a young person from Germany preparing to move to New York to make "a brand new start of it." Sketch her/his feelings, expectations, fears, etc.

COMPREHENSION

- 2 What are the implications of ll. 14f. and 23f. of the song?
- 3 What does Field mean when he maintains that one has to be "an expert" (l. 31) to live in New York City?

OPINION

- 4 Is the song just a sentimental variation of the myth of a new beginning, or is it confirmed by reality? Give reasons for your position.

ANALYSIS

- 5 Analyze the form of Field's poem.
- 6 Sum up the major steps of Field's arguments in prose.

PROJECT

- 7 Get hold of the text of 50 Cent's "Rotten Apple" and compare his image of New York with that of Sinatra's song and Field's poem (<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/50cent/rotten-apple.html>).



A back alley in the Lower East Side