Early Romantic Poetry
(1760-1789)

1. Augustan vs. Early Romantic poetry

**AUGUSTAN POETRY**

1. Impersonal material
2. Loud noble eloquence
3. Intellectual

**EARLY ROMANTIC POETRY**

1. Subjective material
2. Lyrical experience of life
3. Emotional
2. Main characteristics

- Poetry was essentially **reflective**.
- The experiences it dealt with were not presented for the sake of their immediate impact, but for the sake of **generalized reflections**.

J. Constable, *The Church Porch, East Bergholt* (1810)
2. Main characteristics

- Early Romantic poets reacted to the social changes taking place in the country with a re-evaluation of rural origins and a sense of melancholy and sadness.
3. Pastoral poetry

- Main representative: **William Cowper** (1731-1800) with his main work *The Task* (1785).

  “God made the country, man made the town”
3. Pastoral poetry

• Celebrated and praised country life for its simplicity and domesticity, free from the corruption of urban life.

George Morland, Door of a village inn, Late 18th century
3. Pastoral poetry

- Described **landscape details** and reflected upon them.

- **Nature** seen as a source of **innocence** and **delight**.

George Morland, *Door of a village inn*, Late 18th century
4. Nature poetry

Main representative: 
**James Thomson** (1700-1748).

His treatment of nature broke with the neoclassic view.
4. Nature poetry

Nature was seen in its **physical**, rather than abstract, details, no longer as static but **in motion**.

The observation of nature included **wild sceneries** and led to reflections on the character of **primitive man** who was contrasted with civilized man.

*John Martin, The bard, ca. 1817*
5. Ossianic poetry

James Macpherson (1736-1796) collected and published some of Ossian’s works in *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* (1760). The authenticity of the work was controversial.

François Pascal Simon Gérard, *Ossian*, 1801.
5. Ossianic poetry

- A cycle of poems by a legendary Irish warrior, called Ossian, who lived in the 3rd century.

- Wild, gloomy landscapes.

- Sense of melancholy and suffering produced by war or contrasted love.

François Pascal Simon Gérard, Ossian, 1801.
The most important work of this school was Thomas Gray’s *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*.

The vogue began with Edward Young (1683-1765) and his *Night Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality* (1742-1745).
6. Graveyard poetry

Melancholy tone.

Choice of **cemeteries, ruins, stormy landscapes** as the setting of poems.

The **tomb** as a symbol eliciting contemplation of death and immortality.

A hand coloured steel plate engraving from a painting by William Henry Bartlett of St Michael’s Church, Dumfries
7. Scots dialect poetry

Robert Burns (1759-1796)

- Myth of the natural genius, able to create poetry from everyday experience.
- Revived the English lyric.
7. Scots dialect poetry

Robert Burns (1759-1796)

- Explored the literary forms and legends of folk culture, and used the language really spoken by the common folk.