London, 1802

POEM TEXT

Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour:
England hath need of thee: she is a fen
Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,
Have forfeited their ancient English dower
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;
Oh! raise us up, return to us again;
And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.
Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart:
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea:
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,
So didst thou travel on life's common way,
In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.

SUMMARY

The speaker addresses John Milton and wishes the poet were still alive, noting that England needs him because the country has become like a swamp full of still water. To that end, things like religion, militaristic pursuits, literature, home life, and the country's economic glory no longer align with England's prosperous history. The speaker suggests that he and his fellow citizens have lost sight of everything but themselves, so he calls upon Milton to uplift the people of England after returning from the dead, hoping the famous poet will remind British society of its values, how to live virtuously, and how to recover its sense of liberation and strength. Praising Milton, the speaker compares his soul to a star that stood out from all others in the sky, adding that Milton's voice sounded like the ocean. Still addressing Milton, the speaker depicts him as possessing an intrinsic goodness and dazzling sense of freedom that was worthy of heaven itself. With these qualities, the speaker upholds, Milton led an ordinary life while happily devoting himself to religion. But even with his godly traits, Milton was never above even the most humbling responsibilities.

THEMES

THE PAST AND SOCIETAL DECLINE

In "London, 1802," the speaker laments that 19th-century England has failed to maintain certain standards. These standards, the speaker believes, were perfectly exemplified by the 17th-century poet John Milton, a writer widely admired for his artistic innovation, religious devotion, and moral compass.

With this in mind, the speaker presents Milton as the model off of which England should base itself, believing that the nation should learn from Milton's integrity in order to reverse what the speaker sees as the country's unfortunate decline. By celebrating Milton and the values of a bygone era, then, the speaker criticizes 19th-century England while upholding that the past can (and should) inform the way people think about the present.

The speaker's concerns about the present are closely tied to the feeling that 19th-century England as a whole has become lazy and complacent. Suggesting that the nation is now "stagnant," the speaker implies that England has lost touch with its core values. Unlike when Milton was writing in the 17th century, the speaker upholds, the country no longer thrives in the arts or uplifts its religious principles, having stalled when it comes to "altar, sword, and pen" (religion, military pursuits, and literature, respectively).

Accordingly, the speaker calls upon Milton to restore things like "manners, virtue, freedom, [and] power" to the country, thereby implying not only that Milton represents these traits, but also that these are the very tenants that used to define England's greatness. In this way, the speaker celebrates the commendable aspects of the nation (suggesting that the country is at least *capable* of virtue) while still critiquing it for letting these things fall by the wayside.

Furthermore, the speaker believes that it shouldn't be particularly difficult for people to live up to Milton's standards. This is because these standards aren't that high in the first place, which is why the speaker chastises fellow citizens for failing to meet them. Milton, the speaker notes, lived in a "common way," suggesting that the virtue he embodies isn't actually all that rare, but rather unremarkable and commonplace.

And yet, the speaker makes it clear that these values have declined so much in British society that they are no longer "common." It should be relatively easy, the speaker implies, to live like Milton. However, that it now seems extraordinary to exemplify this kind of virtue underscores just how far British

society has fallen since Milton's time.

The speaker calls attention to England's societal decline in the hopes of restoring the country, but "London, 1802" isn't just about refreshing the nation's image. After all, the speaker also maintains that leading a virtuous life leads to contentment. Indeed, the very values that the speaker celebrates can create a sense of "cheerful godliness." This, in turn, means that British citizens have sabotaged their own happiness by letting their values slip.

To regain this happiness, it seems, the speaker's fellow citizens will have to look to the past and learn from honorable figures like Milton. With this in mind, Wordsworth's speaker illustrates the usefulness of turning to history for guidance, ultimately arguing that doing so will improve individual lives as well as society at large.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-14

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-3

Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour:
England hath need of thee: she is a fen
Of stagnant waters:

The speaker begins with apostrophe, calling out to the 17th-century poet John Milton. This is startling for a few reasons. "London, 1802" is a sonnet composed primarily in iambic pentameter, meaning its lines should have five sets of poetic feet that follow a da DUM rhythm. But this opening line is jarring because it begins with a trochee—DUM da, the inversion of an iamb.

Starting with "Mil ton!" jerks readers to attention, immediately inverting the unstressed-stressed pattern of iambic pentameter by using a strong stressed-unstressed metrical foot. This trochee ("Milton!") is then followed by a strong caesura in the form of an exclamation mark. This pause only adds to the emphasis placed on Milton's name, as if giving readers a moment to fully absorb the importance of the speaker's address. Overall, this is an abrupt and alarming beginning, one that communicates the speaker's passion—a passion that, in turn, communicates both a deep respect for Milton and a sense of desperation, as if the speaker is frantically eager to communicate with the famous poet.

As the first line continues to unfold, it becomes clear why the speaker wants so badly to invoke Milton. Indeed, the speaker wishes Milton were still alive, noting that England "need[s]" him. This assertion alerts readers to the speaker's dim view of the country, ultimately suggesting that England can't survive without the help of a long-dead poet.

To that end, the speaker believes that England has become a "fen," which is a low, marshy body of water. And, the speaker adds in the beginning of the third line, England is not just a fen, but a fen "of stagnant waters"—a metaphor that depicts England as having lost its energy and momentum ("stagnant" means that something isn't moving).

This is a rather straightforward metaphor that functions as a critique of England's lack of rigor or progress, but it's also worth further examining the speaker's use of the word "fen." A fen is a marshland, and marshlands frequently flood. With this in mind, the speaker subtly implies that the general integrity of England has eroded, much like the muddy banks of a swamp that endures periodic floods.

It's also worth noting that the speaker's depiction of England as a "stagnant" swamp aligns with the opposition many Romantic poets—like Wordsworth—felt toward the Industrial Revolution. Of course, most people think of Industrialization as a period of growth, change, and progress, but the speaker clearly sees it differently, suggesting that England "need[s]" a thoughtful poet like Milton to restore it to its pre-Industrial ways. This implies that the speaker doesn't think the country has made progress, but has stalled out despite its technological advancements and, more importantly, lost something valuable along the way—something Milton could restore to the nation if only he were still alive.

LINES 3-6

altar, sword, and pen,
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,
Have forfeited their ancient English dower
Of inward happiness.

Having established that England is no longer making meaningful progress, the speaker next lists all the ways in which the country has lost touch with its former greatness.

First, the speaker suggests that the country's religious devotion is in decline, using the word "altar" as a metonym to refer to religion as a whole. Considering that Wordsworth was a Romantic poet whose religious beliefs were intertwined with a deep appreciation of nature, it makes sense that the speaker criticizes the state of religion during the Industrial Revolution, a time during which society focused on mechanical and technological advancements instead of connecting with the natural world.

Going on, the speaker employs other metonyms, using the word "sword" to stand for England's military and "pen" to refer to the state of the country's literary output. In this way, the speaker suggests that the fundamental pillars that often make nations successful have become weak in England at the turn of the 19th century. This statement comes immediately after the metaphor outlining that England has become "stagnant." To

break it down in plain language, then, the speaker maintains that religion, militaristic pursuits, and literature have ceased all progress in England—a viewpoint that aligns with the Romantic belief that England is in decline despite its technological advancements.

The idea that "altar, sword, and pen" have come to a standstill is made evident by the fact that this list appears after a colon in the middle of line 3, suggesting that all three of these are examples of the ways in which England has become a "fen" of "stagnant waters."

The speaker also expands upon this idea in lines 4-6 by upholding that England has given up its economic power. Using "fireside" to refer to the country's average domestic situation, the speaker argues that home life in England is no longer characterized by the "heroic wealth" that used to be recognizable in citizens' impressive, respectable homes ("hall and bower"). That the speaker calls the riches of the past "heroic" is especially illustrative, since this phrase frames England's economic history as not only wealthy, but illustrious and inspiring. Consequently, the speaker reveals a strong nostalgia for the past.

It is perhaps because of this affinity for the past that the speaker develops a disparaging tone, suggesting that England hasn't simply lost its former glory, but "forfeited" it. This implies that the nation has actively given up the values that (according to the speaker) have always made it powerful and admirable. Worse, this means that the people of England have relinquished their capacity to experience personal happiness, which *should* come naturally to them simply because they are citizens of a country with a rich, respectable history.

It is this history, the speaker argues, from which citizens should benefit, since they have inherited it like a husband who collects a dowry after marrying a wealthy bride. Unfortunately, though, the speaker believes that the people of England have lost touch with the past and, thus, made it impossible for themselves to benefit from the country's otherwise rewarding history.

LINES 6-7

We are selfish men;
Oh! raise us up, return to us again;

The speaker continues to disparage the people of England in 1802, this time suggesting that they are "selfish." For the first time, though, the poem isn't just a critique of England, since it implicates the speaker, too. Indeed, the line, "We are selfish men" includes the speaker, thereby illustrating that the country's decline has had an effect on all of its citizens, even those who are (like the speaker) aware of the ways in which British society has fallen from greatness. This, it seems, is why the speaker is so eager to address this problem. Because the people of England have become so "selfish," the speaker wants Milton to "raise" them, helping them achieve a more humble and rewarding lifestyle.

By imploring Milton to do this, the speaker's reverence for the famous poet becomes even more pronounced. To that end, the line, "Oh! raise us up, return to us again," makes it clear that this poem isn't just a celebration of Milton's poetry. By saying this, the speaker addresses Milton as if he's a savior capable of returning from the dead to help the masses, thereby treating him like a religious figure, perhaps someone similar to Jesus Christ. In this moment, then, the speaker's reverence for Milton approaches the point of spiritual worship, and this only further emphasizes the extent to which the speaker respects the values Milton represents.

LINE 8

And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.

Having expressed a seemingly spiritual reverence for Milton, the speaker lists the values that the famous poet embodied. The speaker has already mentioned the specific institutions and practices that have declined since Milton's time (including religion, the military, and literature), but now the poem focuses on broader, more comprehensive matters.

Addressing Milton directly once again (more apostrophe), the speaker asks him to teach the people of England "manners, virtue, freedom, power." By asking for this, the speaker implies that these are the things 19th-century England lacks and that only somebody like Milton—a man from another era who was known for his discipline, religious devotion, innovation, and influence—could ever remind Englanders how to recapture the very traits that used to define the nation. The use of asyndeton in this list also makes it seem like it could perhaps continue on and on—that there are endless virtues that Englanders have lost and must regain.

The scope of the speaker's focus here is quite wide, ranging from small everyday behaviors ("manners") to larger, more philosophical concerns about "virtue" and "freedom." By asking Milton to help the people of England reacquaint themselves with both normal and lofty ways of moving through the world, then, the speaker indicates that British society needs a complete overhaul, one that would not only change how people live their daily lives, but also impact the moral core of the nation.

In order to accomplish this, England will have to look beyond itself, as even people like the speaker who are aware of society's decline find themselves turning to the great minds of history instead of instigating change themselves. As a result, the poem implies that England must reflect upon its past in order to move forward and regain its former strength.

LINES 9-11

Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart:
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea:
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,

In the poem's ninth line, the speaker transitions from focusing

on 19th-century England and its many disappointments to focusing on Milton's many positive attributes. The poem's form is important here. Again, this is a sonnet, and its stanza can be broken down into an initial eight-line octave and then a six-line sestet. Typically, this sestet offers some sort of turn in the poem, perhaps a response or counter to the previous lines.

This is true here. Whereas the octave that begins "London, 1802" outlines the ways in which British society is in decline, the sestet (beginning with the ninth line) cements the idea that adopting Milton's values will solve England's problems.

Beginning the sestet with a simile that compares saying Milton's soul to "a Star," the speaker once more portrays him as if he's larger than life, elevating him beyond the level of a well-known poet. According to this mindset, Milton becomes a celestial being, and readers see the extent to which the speaker idolizes him, especially when the speaker adds that Milton's soul "dwelt apart"—a statement that suggests that Milton was unmatched and unique.

In fact, it is because Milton's soul was so unique that the speaker now calls upon him, knowing that nobody in 19th-century England possesses Milton's qualities—qualities the speaker believes necessary in order to restore British society to what it once was. As if to emphasize the fact that Milton was and perhaps always will be unmatched, the speaker presents another simile comparing Milton's voice to the sea, thereby associating Milton's poetry with a raw and natural power. The use of asyndeton again in line 11 ("naked heavens, majestic, free") picks up the poem's pace, implying the speaker's readiness and excitement to praise Milton's character.

The author of *Paradise Lost*, John Milton had a profound influence on literature, using epic poetry to reimagine the Biblical story of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from Eden. Given that *Paradise Lost* was already considered a pivotal and influential piece of poetry by the time Wordsworth wrote "London, 1802," it makes sense that this poem's speaker presents Milton—and specifically his voice—as so powerful.

More than that, though, the poem attributes a sense of purity to Milton, deeming him worthy of heaven while also associating him with elements of the natural world. For instance, the idea that Milton's soul was like a star can be interpreted as a sign that he was a celestial being who was larger than life, but this simile *also* ties him to elements of the natural world (or, in this case, the natural universe). In this way, he takes on both divine *and* naturalistic qualities.

As a Romantic poet, Wordsworth believed that divinity could be found in the natural world itself. This is why the speaker admires Milton's spirituality *alongside* his connection to nature, portraying him as both heavenly and grounded in nature. In the same way that Wordsworth sees spirituality and nature as one, then, the speaker's seemingly nonreligious celebration of Milton eventually comes to resemble holy worship, exemplifying the tendency in Romantic poetry to elevate respect and appreciation to the level of the divine.

LINES 12-13

So didst thou travel on life's common way,
In cheerful godliness;

"London, 1802" applauds Milton's purity, morality, and general integrity. In these lines, though, the speaker suggests that the many qualities that deem Milton worthy of praise aren't quite as extraordinary as readers might think. In fact, the speaker notes that Milton traveled "on life's common way," indicating that Milton's virtue should be seen as *ordinary*.

Throughout the poem, the speaker has treated Milton as unique and unmatched, but it now becomes clear that the speaker expects everyone to demonstrate the same virtues as the revered poet. In this sense, Milton deserves praise not necessarily because he was better than everyone else, but because he managed to live a normal, commonplace life while maintaining admirable values.

This sentiment shines through when the speaker adds that Milton not only traveled "on life's common way," but did so "in cheerful godliness," highlighting the fact that Milton moved through everyday life with an unbothered and happy kind of piety. This means that Milton was able to weather life's many mundanities and disappointments without ever letting his religious beliefs or commitment slip.

Considering that "London, 1802" is a critique of England's inability to maintain its values, Milton's unwavering devotion to his spiritual beliefs serves as an important reminder that people should always remain true to their guiding principles—even when leading unremarkable, ordinary lives.

LINES 13-14

and yet thy heart
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.

As the poem concludes, the speaker draws a contrast between Milton's "cheerful godliness" and the fact that he willingly took on difficult and unglamorous burdens. Having already considered the nature of Milton's soul (likening it to a unique and individual star), the speaker now personifies the famous poet's heart, presenting it as a woman who never turns away from even the "lowliest," most humbling "duties."

This aligns with line 12's assertion that Milton traveled "on life's common way" but never let this interfere with his ability to embrace a sense of unbothered piety, proving himself capable of withstanding life's many difficulties without losing sight of his values. This, it seems, is partially due to his heart, which never shies away from tasks that others might consider beneath them. In fact, the speaker uses a reflexive phrase in the last line, noting that Milton's heart puts "the lowliest duties" on itself (or on "herself," to continue the speaker's personification of the

heart as a woman). This suggests that Milton not only puts up with life's various difficulties, but actively and knowingly takes on such challenges.

It's worth noting that Milton composed *Paradise Lost* while living in poverty. By that point in his life, he was fully blind and therefore had to dictate the entire epic poem, making for a long and arduous process that lasted six years. Because the speaker of "London, 1802" respects Milton so deeply and sees him as an embodiment of all things good, it's reasonable to argue that the speaker regards *Paradise Lost* as a difficult project that Milton took upon himself in order to benefit others.

Under this interpretation, the epic poem is a product of Milton's willingness to take on even the "lowliest duties," (like dictating complicated verse for six years while living in poverty) in the service of a greater good: the literary arts and their engagement with Christianity.

More generally, though, the praise the speaker directs toward Milton's heart touches upon the simple idea that greatness isn't always glamorous. To that end, there are certain responsibilities that come with greatness, an idea accentuated by the emphasis placed on the word "duties" in the middle of the final line. In the context of this line, the word's first syllable ("du-") forms the stressed syllable of an anapest (da da DUM). The line scans like this:

The low**liest** du**ties** on her**self** did **lay**.

Because "London, 1802" is primarily in iambic pentameter (recall that an iamb has a da DUM beat pattern), readers might expect another iamb to follow the first metrical foot. Instead, though, the speaker *delays* the next stressed syllable, making it all the more significant when it finally lands on the first half of "duties." As a result, the speaker calls attention to the notion that living virtuously often means accepting humbling and challenging responsibilities.

Given that the poem chastises British society for failing to live up to the standards of Milton's era, it becomes evident that the speaker believes 19th-century England has stopped embracing the "lowl[y] duties" that Milton unflinchingly took upon himself. In turn, the country has become a pool of "stagnant waters" out of a lack of not just virtue, but also humility.

SYMBOLS

JOHN MILTON

The subject of the poem, Milton represents what the speaker sees as England's former glory. More specifically, Milton exemplifies all the values that have failed to make their way into 19th-century England—values having to do with religious devotion, purity, and duty.

Invoking Milton in the very first line, the speaker argues that England would be better off if the famous poet were still alive, thereby indicating that Milton was a perfect embodiment of everything the country now lacks. This is why the speaker asks Milton to give the people of England "manners, virtue, freedom, [and] power." That the poem focuses so intensely on Milton as a symbol of the country's historical greatness underlines the human tendency to look to the past in order to find a productive way forward. In this sense, Milton is more than a representation of England's former splendor, but also a guiding presence the speaker hopes will lead the nation into a better future.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-2
- Lines 7-14

THE NATURAL WORLD

For Romantic poets like William Wordsworth, the natural world is inseparable from divinity and religion. Accordingly, nature functions in "London, 1802" as a symbol of godliness and purity.

To praise Milton, the speaker compares him to natural elements, likening his soul to a bright and powerful star and his voice to the sea. These similes present Milton as wholesome and significant, starkly contrasting the way the speaker characterizes 19th-century England.

Whereas the speaker uses the beauty and power of nature to describe Milton, the speaker calls upon uglier images of nature to depict England in 1802. Indeed, the speaker calls England a "fen / Of stagnant waters," representing it as a marshy swamp. Considering that the Romantic poets believed divinity was wrapped up in nature, this is an especially startling image, since it suggests that England has failed to harness the beauty of the natural world.

In this way, the natural world symbolizes Milton's purity and a certain religious harmony while also reminding readers that society is in decline and has lost touch with the simple, fundamental gifts of life. With this in mind, the poem's celebration of nature launches a subtle critique of the Industrial Revolution, chastising England for focusing on the industrial world instead of reaping what there is to gain from the environment.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 2-3:** " she is a fen / Of stagnant waters:"
- **Lines 9-10:** "Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart: / Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea:"

POETIC DEVICES

APOSTROPHE

The very first word of the poem is a moment of apostrophe, as the speaker immediately calls out Milton's name. The title of the poem clarifies that it takes place in 1802, but John Milton died in 1674, meaning that he couldn't possibly respond to the speaker's address. In this regard, the speaker treats Milton as a muse, a person the speaker would like to summon for both creative and spiritual guidance.

Milton is an especially appropriate muse, since his magnum opus, *Paradise Lost*, opens with an invocation of a heavenly muse, whom Milton hopes will help him tell the story of the "Fall of Man." Apostrophe is a very common poetic device in epic poetry, as speakers often call upon divine figures to help them navigate their way through the rest of the poem.

Of course, "London, 1802" is a sonnet, not an epic poem, but it's no mistake that it uses apostrophe to mimic the beginning of an epic poem. After all, the speaker wants society to model itself after John Milton, so it makes sense that the poem emulates Milton's poetic style. By addressing Milton in the same way that Milton addresses a heavenly muse in *Paradise Lost*, the speaker gets that much closer to living and behaving like the famous poet himself.

After calling out, "Milton!", the speaker continues throughout the rest of the poem to address the famous poet, ultimately framing him as both a muse and a savior of sorts, asking him to "raise up" and "return" from the dead in order to restore British society to its former greatness.

Where Apostrophe appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-3
- Lines 7-14

CAESURA

There are a number of caesuras in "London, 1802," and some are more prominent than others. To that end, it's worth keeping in mind with a poem like this that scansion can be subjective and that some readers might feel a pause where others do not.

Having said that, there are several obvious moments in which the speaker uses a caesura to emphasize something or to mark a shift in tone. The first and most glaring example of this comes after the poem's first word, when the speaker exclaims, "Milton!" This is an especially arresting moment because the caesura that follows this exclamation adds to the already blunt and hard sound of Milton's name, which is a trochee ("Mil**ton**").

Right away, then, readers sense the significance the speaker has attached to Milton. The caesura following Milton's name stretches out for a moment as if creating the kind of startled silence that arises after a person shouts for somebody else's attention. In turn, the poem begins with a sense of urgency, an eagerness to communicate with Milton.

In lines 2 and 3, caesuras appear in more subtle ways, or, at the very least, they don't create the same kind of startling pause that the caesura after "Milton!" creates. Instead, the caesuras in lines 2 and 3 simply prepare readers to process certain figures of speech, as is the case in the second line when the speaker uses a colon to present a metaphor of England as a "fen" of "stagnant waters."

Similarly, yet another colon appears in the third line, creating a caesura that separates the metaphor of England as a "fen" from the speaker's upcoming use of metonymy: "altar, sword, and pen." In other words, the caesuras in these two lines enable the speaker to employ a series of dense poetic language without losing the reader.

Other caesuras in the poem also work to separate one idea from the next, as is the case in line 6 when the speaker goes from considering the decline of England at large to accepting a certain amount of personal responsibility by asserting, "We are selfish men." Another shift spurred by a caesura appears in line 13, when the speaker complicates the poem's vision of Milton by pausing after praising his "cheerful godliness" and continuing after the caesura with the words "and yet."

Taken with the caesura, these words catch readers off-guard, making it seem as if the speaker is about to contradict the idea of Milton's greatness. However, the speaker has merely taken a *new* approach to praising Milton, ultimately noting that Milton's indisputable greatness never made him feel above even the "lowliest duties." In this moment, the caesura (in combination with the words "and yet") encourage readers to pay close attention, momentarily breaking from the poem's overall tone but only to force readers to more thoroughly consider Milton's virtues. In this manner, the caesura helps the speaker briefly disorient readers in the hopes of keeping their attention sharp for the final line of the poem.

Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "!"
- **Line 2:** ":"
- **Line 3:** ":"
- **Line 6:** "."
- **Line 7:** "!," ","
- **Line 9:** ","
- **Line 11:** ","
- **Line 13:** ";"

END-STOPPED LINE

Half of this sonnet's 14 lines are end-stopped. In combination with the many caesuras, this gives the poem a halting rhythm. The end-stopped lines that also contain a caesura have an

especially fragmented rhythm, as is the case in line 6. The caesura that follows "Of inward happiness" draws attention to the words that follow—namely, "We are selfish men." The fact that this phrase is end-stopped with a semi-colon allows it to sit as its own thought within the poem, a complete sentiment.

Overall, this slows readers down as they try to read through the line and connect it to the next line. Indeed, the phrase, "We are selfish men" exists in and of itself in a way that disrupts the general rhythmic flow. In keeping with this, the next line doesn't continue to build upon the ways in which the people of England are "selfish," instead calling out to Milton to help fix this problem.

Although the majority of the end-stopped lines chop up the poem's rhythm (which is the case for lines 1, 6, 7, 9, and 10), one of the most significant instances of this poetic device is used in an entirely different way. Indeed, the full stop that comes at the end of line 8 doesn't disrupt the poem's rhythm, but rather helps establish the poem's form. This is because it marks the end of the sonnet's octave and ultimately signals the upcoming sestet. Consequently, the period that comes after the word "power" is formally important, enabling the speaker to shift focus.

To that end, the speaker uses the octave to outline all of the problems with 19th-century England and then uses the sestet to concentrate on Milton's admirable qualities. Because "London, 1802" is a Petrarchan sonnet, readers might expect a turn (or "volta") to appear in the first line of the sestet, but the main change between the octave and the sestet in this poem is simply that the speaker shifts gears slightly to concentrate more intensely on Milton. As a result, the fact that the last line of the octave is end-stopped is especially significant, since it helps separate the two sections.

Where End-Stopped Line appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** ":"
- **Line 3:** ","
- **Line 4:** ","
- **Line 6:** ";"
- **Line 7:** ";"
- **Line 8:** "."
- **Line 9:** ":"
- **Line 10:** ":"
- **Line 11:** ","
- **Line 12:** ","
- **Line 14:** "."

ENJAMBMENT

Unlike the caesuras and end-stopped lines in "London, 1802," the use of enjambment encourages readers to quickly move from one line to the next. Taken alongside the caesuras and end-stopped lines, though, this creates a push-and-pull feeling.

For instance, the poem's first instance of enjambment comes at the end of line 2 with the phrase "she is a fen / Of stagnant waters." This occurrence of enjambment comes shortly after the caesura in line 2 (between "thee" and "she"), and this ultimately encourages readers to sail through the rest of the line at a faster pace.

However, the speed that comes along with the continuation of the phrase on line 3 is once more halted by a caesura, this time in the middle of the line (between "waters" and "altar"). Because of the way this enjambment pairs with the surrounding caesuras, the poem takes on an unpredictable rhythm that disrupts the normally smooth flow of iambic pentameter.

The same push-and-pull rhythm appears shortly after the enjambment between line 5 and 6, as the sentence spills over from the fifth line to the sixth, only to hit the roadblock of yet another caesura (which appears in the middle of the line between "happiness" and "we"). In this way, a pattern emerges in which enjambment in "London, 1802" tends to lead to a caesura—that is, until the final enjambment, which bucks the expectations established by the rest of the poem by leading not to a caesura, but to the final end-stopped line, thereby subtly surprising readers with a smooth and uninterrupted line that mirrors the unbothered manner in which Milton accepted and took on even the "lowliest duties."

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 2-3:** "fen / Of"
- **Lines 5-6:** "dower / Of"
- **Lines 13-14:** " heart / The"

EUPHONY

The poem's octave does not flow freely in terms of rhythm or sound, which makes the euphony of line 9—the first line of the sestet—all the more noticeable. Throughout the octave, the speaker employs strings of consonant words like "altar, sword, and pen" and frequently disrupts the poem's rhythm.

By contrast, the first line of the sestet is musical and rhythmic. In fact, it is one of the poem's only lines of perfect iambic pentameter, even though iambic pentameter is the sonnet's primary meter:

> Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart:

To add to this pleasant rhythmic quality, an /s/ sound repeats several times in the first half of the line, employing sibilance to create a satisfying sense of connectivity between the words (this sibilance continues in the following line):

> Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart:
> Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea:

To build upon this connectivity, there is also an internal rhyme in line 9 between the words "star" and "apart" (though this is a slant rhyme, not a perfect rhyme).

This euphony at the beginning of the sestet has quite an effect, since it reflects a certain attitude change. Whereas the octave concerns itself with all the ways that British society is in decline, the sestet is devoted to singing Milton's praises. It makes sense, then, that the octave is full of consonant words and stuttering rhythms while the sestet—and particularly its first line—is musical and pleasing to the ear. In this sense, the poem adapts to the subject matter, using euphony to match the speaker's fond feelings toward Milton.

Where Euphony appears in the poem:

- **Line 9:** "Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart:"
- **Line 10:** "Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea:"

METAPHOR

One of the most important figures of speech that appears in "London, 1802" is the metaphor the speaker uses to describe England. Upholding that England is a "fen" of "stagnant waters," the speaker portrays the country as having reached a standstill.

This use of the word "fen" has a distinctly negative connotation, since it communicates dirtiness, murkiness, and uselessness (since there's not much one can do with marsh water). By presenting this metaphor in the poem's second line, the speaker illustrates early on why British society needs somebody like Milton, whom the speaker clarifies later in the poem is "pure as the naked heavens"—an image of divine cleanliness that starkly contrasts the swampy, sorry state of a "fen."

In keeping with this, the metaphor of England as a marsh makes sense of the speaker's disdain for the country and what it has become, ultimately cuing readers into not only the speaker's low opinion of British society in the 19th century, but also the idea that the nation is stewing in its own muck.

It's also worth noting that the speaker uses a metaphor instead of a simile in this moment. This choice emphasizes the speaker's negative feelings about 19th-century England, since the metaphor upholds that England isn't just *like* a swamp, but *is* one—a distinction that underscores the speaker's unabashed willingness to disparage the country without reservation.

Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Lines 2-3:** " she is a fen / Of stagnant waters:"

SIMILE

The similes the speaker uses when describing what Milton was like when he was alive help build a sense of admiration for the famous poet. The two similes the speaker uses to describe Milton don't appear until the first two lines of the sestet (lines 9 and 10). By this point in the poem, the speaker has already made it clear that England needs someone like Milton to reverse its decline and restore it to its former glory.

However, the speaker doesn't focus on Milton's positive qualities in the sonnet's first eight lines, instead concentrating on the ways in which England has let itself slip. In a way, then, the similes that appear at the beginning of the sestet serve as a justification of sorts for why Milton would be a good person for the people of England to model themselves after. In other words, the speaker uses these somewhat outlandish similes to argue why British citizens should respect and take after Milton.

What's more, comparing Milton to a star enables the speaker to present the famous poet as a mighty and extraordinary person, treating him as a celestial body. Interestingly enough, though, the simile in line 10 grounds this image with a more immediate comparison by suggesting that Milton's voice sounded like the sea.

Taking these two similes together, the speaker elevates Milton while also using elemental imagery to portray him as bound to nature—a quality that Romantic poets like Wordsworth admired and thought of as inherently divine. In turn, the similes used to describe Milton in "London, 1802" capture the speaker's deep respect for the famous poet and the common Romantic fascination with nature's beauty and power.

Where Simile appears in the poem:

- **Line 9:** "Thy soul was like a Star,"
- **Line 10:** "Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea:"

CONSONANCE

Consonance runs throughout the poem. One of the most prominent instances of this is the repetition of the /w/ sound in lines 3 through 6:

> Of stagnant waters: altar sword, and pen,
> Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,
> Have forfeited their ancient English dower
> Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;

The /w/ sound appears in every one of these four lines, creating a muscular, substantial sound that works its way through the octave. This communicates a sense of rigor that the speaker embodies, as if the speaker's language reflects the strength and discipline that England so sorely lacks in 19th-century England. To enhance this effect, there are other consonant sounds that twist through these lines as well, including the /h/ sound (found in "hall," "have," and "happiness"), the /g/ sound (found in "England" and "stagnant"), the /t/ sound (found in "waters,"

"altar," and "forfeited"), and the /r/ sound (found in "waters," "altar," "sword," "fireside," "heroic," "bower," "forfeited," "dower," and "inward").

Of course, these different sounds vary in terms of how prominently they jump out of the poem. For instance, although the /r/ sound appears often throughout the above lines, it isn't as strong as the /w/ sound or the /t/ sound. Either way, though, it's worth noting that even the consonance found in the /r/ sound drops off in the sestet.

Indeed, the sestet has significantly less consonance than the rest of the sonnet, or at least employs a different *kind* of consonance. To that end, lines 9 and 10 signal a shift away from the general mood of the octave by making use of sibilance, repeating the /s/ sound:

> Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart:
> Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea:

Sibilance is a form of consonance in that it encompasses the repetition of the /s/ sound (sometimes /sh/ and /z/ sounds are included as well). But the /s/ sound is a very particular form of consonance, one that is a bit more slippery, soft, and soothing. Consequently, the consonance at the beginning of the sestet is markedly different from the consonance found in the octave, highlighting a shift in tone as the speaker transitions from bemoaning England's decline to celebrating Milton.

Interestingly, though, the more muscular consonance of the octave returns in the last two lines of the poem, as the speaker repeats an /l/ sound and an /h/ sound. This, in turn, reflects the subject of these final lines, which uphold that Milton never shied away from any kind of responsibility. To illustrate that the famous poet wasn't afraid of living an arduous but virtuous life, then, the speaker uses true consonance instead of continuing to employ the softer, subtler effects of sibilance.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "England," "fen"
- **Line 3:** "stagnant," "waters," "altar," "sword," "and pen"
- **Line 4:** "Fireside," "heroic wealth," "hall," "bower"
- **Line 5:** "Have," "forfeited," "dower"
- **Line 6:** "inward," "happiness," "We," "selfish"
- **Line 7:** "raise," "us," "return," "us," "again"
- **Line 8:** "give," "manners," "virtue," "freedom," "power"
- **Line 9:** "soul," "Star," "dwelt," "apart"
- **Line 10:** "hadst," "voice," "sound," "sea"
- **Line 13:** "heart"
- **Line 14:** "lowliest," "duties," "herself," "did," "lay"

ASYNDETON

As previously mentioned, the poem has quite a few caesuras and end-stopped lines that give it a halting rhythm, but it also has moments of acceleration. This is made evident by the speaker's use of asyndeton in lines 8 and 11. Forgoing the use of any coordinating conjunctions, the speaker lists the things Milton could restore to England if he were to return from the dead, saying:

> And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.

The lack of conjunctions between this line's final four words quickens the overall pace, swiftly leading readers to the full stop at the end. This is how the speaker concludes the octave (again, the first eight lines of the sonnet), and the breathless quality of the asyndeton gives a preview of the attitude that will soon follow in the sestet.

Indeed, the speaker lists "manners, virtue, freedom, power" in a seemingly fervent manner, not bothering to connect the words with conjunctions. Although the majority of the octave has centered upon England's negative qualities, this final line conveys a feeling of excitement about the positive things Milton could bestow upon the country if he were to return from the dead. In turn, it is this same sense of excitement that carries over into the sestet, as the speaker transitions from complaining about England to praising Milton.

Asyndeton also appears in line 11, when the speaker celebrates Milton by saying that he was "pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free." It is somewhat difficult to firmly situate this line, since it connects with both the line before it and the one after it. This means that the speaker could be saying that Milton's *voice* is "pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free," since line 10 is about Milton's voice and ends with a colon. However, line 12 seems to function as a continuation of line 11, such that what the speaker says about Milton being "pure" and "majestic" and "free" pertains to the way he traveled "on life's common way," not to the quality of his voice.

Either way, this slight ambiguity is heightened by the asyndeton that appears in "heavens, majestic, free." After all, if the line had even just one conjunction, it would read entirely differently and most likely seem more attached to line 10 than line 12. Imagine, for instance, that the poem read, "Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea: / Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, and free." The insertion of "and" makes the line sound much more conclusive and, therefore, tied to line 10. As it stands, though, the flowing, list-like quality of "heavens, majestic, free" creates the possibility that this line is leading elsewhere, not ending.

As such, asyndeton in "London, 1802" plays two different roles: it emphasizes the speaker's excitement *and* creates ambiguity that ultimately forces readers to think more carefully about how the lines are put together. In this sense, then, asyndeton speeds up the pace of the poem in the octave but slows readers down in the sestet.

Where Asyndeton appears in the poem:

- **Line 8:** "manners, virtue, freedom, power."
- **Line 11:** "heavens, majestic, free,"

PERSONIFICATION

At first, it seems as if the speaker has personified England in line 2 by referring to the country as a "she." However, this brief moment of personification quickly turns into a metaphor, as the speaker upholds that England has become a "fen." This metaphor all but erases or overrides the portrayal of the country as a woman, thereby undercutting the use of personification in service of an even more specific image. Instead of depicting England as a woman, the speaker decides to present the country in a less glamorous way.

The fact that the speaker is unwilling to assign human qualities to England reflects the poem's negative attitude toward the country. In contrast to this, the speaker unhesitatingly uses personification in reference to Milton's heart in the poem's final two lines. Milton's heart, the speaker suggests, is a woman who takes it upon herself to face even the "lowliest duties."

This use of personification creates a nice contrast to the speaker's depiction of England as a swamp of "stagnant waters"—or, more specifically, to the speaker's unwillingness to assign human attributes to England. Unlike British society (which the speaker implies has become lazy and complacent), Milton's heart never shies away from difficulty. This is why the speaker sees Milton's heart as worthy of personification, whereas England deserves little more than a metaphor that portrays it as a fetid swamp.

Because of this contrasting dynamic, personification as a poetic device plays an interesting role in "London, 1802." Considering the difference between the speaker's descriptions of England and Milton, it becomes clear that the decision to *not* use personification is perhaps just as important and revealing as the decision to use it.

Where Personification appears in the poem:

- **Lines 13-14:** "thy heart / The lowliest duties on herself did lay."

METONYMY

Instead of saying in a straightforward way that England's religious, militaristic, and literary pursuits have become "stagnant," the speaker uses three metonyms to refer to each of these important aspects of society.

First, the speaker uses the word "altar" to draw readers' attention to the current state of religion in 19th-century England. In doing so, the speaker presents an important piece of religious imagery (the "altar," which is a table used during communion services) and lets it stand for religion as a whole. Similarly, the speaker takes other meaningful objects like a "sword" and a "pen" and presents them as embodiments of broader institutions—institutions the speaker clearly sees as integral to a successful and respectable society.

Notably, all three of these objects are precious, illustrious, or (at least in the case of the pen) useful. As a result, the speaker conveys a sense of respect for religion, the military, and the literary arts simply by associating them with reputable objects.

By using metonymy, then, the speaker is able to quickly communicate an attitude of reverence for the core pillars of society without completely derailing the poem. Instead of going on at length about religion or the military or literature, the speaker uses carefully chosen metonyms to underline the importance of these things without distracting readers from the overall message of the poem, which is that 19th-century England has lost sight of the essential institutions and practices that used to make the nation great.

Where Metonymy appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** " altar, sword, and pen,"

VOCABULARY

Fen (Line 2) - A marsh that often floods. The speaker is especially interested in the unmoving, eroded quality of "fens," using the word to capture England's lack of progress and overall decline.

Stagnant (Line 3) - Still and unmoving. Applied to bodies of water, "stagnant" refers to a lack of current. In the context of the poem, the word also captures the speaker's dismay that England is no longer making meaningful progress.

Altar (Line 3) - A raised surface in a place of worship, upon which various religious rituals take place. In the Christian church, bread and wine are laid on the altar during communion services. In the poem, "altar" is used as a metonym to refer to the entire Church of England and the state of religion in the country at large.

Fireside (Line 4) - A place beside the fire. The word is often used to refer to a person's home or domestic life. Along with the other aspects of life in England, the speaker of "London, 1802" believes that domestic life is in decline.

Bower (Line 4) - A "bower" is a nice living space, sometimes in a castle. In the context of the poem, the word refers to the impressive and respectable homes in England that the speaker believes have lost their former respectability.

Dower (Line 5) - Money or assets intended to support a widow (or widower). Traditionally, a groom or his family gives the bride a dower to support her in the event of his death. However, the

word is often used interchangeably with "dowry," which is the money or property a bride's family presents to a groom at the time of marriage. Both definitions work in the context of the poem, which frames England's glory as something to which society is entitled, though the speaker laments that 19th-century society has given up its own inheritance of greatness and, thus, happiness.

Virtue (Line 8) - To have "virtue" is to adhere to a certain moral standard. The use of the word in the poem bears moral implications, but it also refers to a more general sense of respectability.

Dwelt (Line 9) - To dwell is to remain in one place. In the poem, the speaker uses the past tense of the word ("dwelt") to suggest that Milton's soul existed "apart" from everyone else, suggesting that he stood out as unique and individual.

Lowliest (Line 14) - The word "lowly" means humble and meek. In this context, the speaker uses it as a superlative to suggest that Milton took on the *most* unglamorous and self-effacing "duties" possible.

Lay (Line 14) - The past tense of the verb "to lie," "lay" has a somewhat uncommon meaning in the poem, since the speaker is not using it to describe the act of lying down. Instead, the word refers to the fact that Milton's heart actively accepted various burdens. In other words, Milton's heart draped itself in unglamorous "duties," heaping responsibility after responsibility upon itself.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"London, 1802" is an Italian sonnet, otherwise known as a Petrarchan sonnet. Following the conventional form of an Italian sonnet, the poem has 14 lines. The first 8 lines are known as the octave, which is made up of two four-line quatrains. The next six lines make up the sestet, which itself is composed of two three-line tercets.

What's more, the poem's turn (or "volta") appears in the first line of the sestet, which aligns with the standard structure of an Italian sonnet. Normally, the turn features a solution to the problem (or "proposition") outlined in the octave. This is more or less the case in "London, 1802," as the speaker laments the dismal state of 19th-century England in the octave and then transitions in the sestet to celebrating Milton, uplifting the famous poet and his way of life, presenting it as the antidote to England's decline.

However, it's worth noting that the turn in "London, 1802" isn't quite as stark or unexpected as the turn in other Italian sonnets, since it's clear from the beginning that the speaker reveres Milton. In this way, the turn is just a continuation of (or a return to) the celebratory attitude laid out in the very first line of the poem.

METER

"London, 1802" is written in iambic pentameter. An iamb is a poetic foot with an unstressed-stressed syllable pattern, and pentameter means there are five of these iambs—five da DUMs—per line. That said, very few of the poem's lines perfectly adhere to this metrical pattern. Throughout, trochees (the inverse of an iamb, stressed-unstressed) disrupt the iambic rhythm characteristic of the Italian sonnet.

This disruption appears with the very first word of the poem: "Milton!" The effect of this word is quite strong, since the line begins with a trochee but soon falls into the steady flow of iambic pentameter. The scansion of line 1 looks like this:

Milton! || thou shouldst be living at this hour

There is a caesura after the opening word. This intensifies the feeling of falling forward created by the trochee ("Milton"), as if the reader has been tipped into the caesura's silence. From there, though, the speaker continues in iambic verse, following a reliable pattern for the rest of the line.

However, that iambic rhythm breaks again at the beginning of the second line, since "England" is yet another trochee. In a way, the poem's second trochee establishes a *different* pattern, mirroring the rhythm of the first line so that both lines substitute iambs with trochees at the beginning of the line. But unlike the first line, the second line does not have a caesura after the opening trochee, instead going immediately into an iambic rhythm.

If it seems like the poem might continue in perfect iambic pentameter from here on out, the caesura after "thee" in the second line makes it clear that this is not the case, especially since the metrical foot directly after the caesura is yet another trochee:

England hath need of thee: || she is a fen

Of course, caesuras do not necessarily disrupt the flow of iambic pentameter in and of themselves, but in this case they make it possible for the speaker to begin new phrases using trochees. This fragments the poem's rhythm, causing readers to fight their way through each line. A similar formula appears in line 6, which features a caesura followed by a trochee:

Of inward happiness. || We are ...

Because there are so many trochees and so many caesuras in the octave, the perfect iambic pentameter of line 9 (the first line of the sestet) sounds especially smooth and musical:

Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart:

This creates a sense of relief, as if praising Milton's soul has soothed the speaker's frustration with England—a frustration that has been building up throughout the octave. Accordingly, this calls attention to the sonnet's turn, when the speaker stops complaining about England to focus on Milton's rejuvenating qualities.

The sestet's second line (line 10) is also in perfect iambic pentameter, further reinforcing the shift to a more relaxed, happier tone. This, however, is not to say that there aren't any metric substitutions in the sestet, since line 11 (for example) includes a trochee at the beginning of the line instead of an iamb ("Pure as"). Overall, though, the poem's final 6 lines are much smoother than the lines that make up the octave, effectively underscoring the fact that "London, 1802" is a celebration of an honorable man, not just a harsh criticism of England.

RHYME SCHEME

"London, 1802" follows the standard rhyme scheme of an Italian sonnet, though it's worth noting that the rhyme scheme for the sestet often varies in Italian sonnets. Still, "London, 1802" adheres to convention. Its rhyme scheme is:

ABBAABBACDDECE

As previously mentioned, the sestet's rhyme scheme in an Italian sonnet often differs, so this particular pattern isn't necessarily the form's definitive rhyme scheme. All the same, the poem follows in the tradition of the Italian sonnet, though the frequently disjointed rhythm of the lines often subverts—or at least obscures—this otherwise perfect rhyme scheme. Throughout the octave, for example, the various caesuras and trochees where readers expect iambs often call attention away from the final word in each line, thereby distracting from rhymes that might otherwise sound stronger or more obvious.

In contrast, the first line of the sestet uses an internal slant rhyme ("star" and "apart") that actually calls attention to the speaker's rhyming. In a poem that largely buries its own rhyme scheme, this is a significant change, one that emphasizes line 9's euphony and, in doing so, spotlights the turn (or "volta"), as the speaker transitions from choppily lamenting England's decline to musically praising Milton.

SPEAKER

There is not enough contextual information in "London, 1802" to clarify the speaker's gender or identity. Regardless, it's clear that the speaker is an English citizen who is deeply upset by the current state of the nation. Moreover, the speaker worships the deceased 17th-century poet John Milton, calling upon him to restore the country to what it once was.

This attitude suggests that the speaker is the kind of person who appreciates history and even idealizes the past, seeing it as something that can and should inform the present. Furthermore, it's worth noting the speaker's similarities with William Wordsworth himself, especially since Wordsworth—like many Romantic poets—essentially worshipped Milton and his poetry.

This possibly suggests that the speaker and Wordsworth are one in the same, but there isn't quite enough information about the speaker to fully justify making such a claim. As it stands, then, the speaker emerges as somebody who simply embodies Wordsworth's respect for Milton and his (Wordsworth's) appreciation of the natural world. This becomes particularly evident in the sestet, when the speaker praises Milton using naturalistic imagery, combining a reverence for the famous poet with the spiritually inflected worship of nature that characterized the Romantic movement.

SETTING

The poem's title establishes that it takes place in London in 1802. This situates it roughly in the middle of the Industrial Revolution. England was a driving force when it came to industrialization, but the speaker is uninterested in the country's technological advancements. Given that England developed so rapidly during the Industrial Revolution, the speaker's assertion that the country has become "stagnant" is particularly noteworthy, since this viewpoint is at odds with the general opinion that the country thrived under industrialization. Uninterested in this kind of progress, the speaker cares more about the spiritual, artistic, and moral integrity of the nation than anything else, idolizing John Milton because he represents the values of pre-Industrial England.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

"London, 1802" was first published in William Wordsworth's 1807 collection, *Poems, in Two Volumes*. It therefore appeared alongside other poems that have become quite famous, including "Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802," "The Solitary Reaper," "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," and "The World Is Too Much With Us."

The poems Wordsworth composed during this time exhibit his characteristic appreciation of nature, his devotion to beauty, and his thoughts about England at the turn of the 19th century. In particular, "The World Is Too Much With Us" is similar to "London, 1802" in that it expresses misgivings about the impact of the Industrial Revolution on England. "Westminster Bridge," on the other hand, looks at London in a different way, choosing to focus first and foremost on the city's beauty. In this way, these three sonnets build a complex image of life in London in the early 1800s, combining Wordsworth's dim view of

industrialization with his tendency to look for beauty in the world.

Wordsworth published *Poems, in Two Volumes* nine years after *Lyrical Ballads*, which he wrote with Samuel Taylor Coleridge. *Lyrical Ballads* appeared in 1798 and established Wordsworth as one of the founding members of the Romantic movement in poetry, especially since his Preface to the Lyrical Ballads served as a manifesto to the movement, laying out his and Coleridge's intention to focus on the beauty of the natural world and to compose poetry that "takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility."

This is the exact approach Wordsworth applies to "London, 1802" and the other poems in *Poems, in Two Volumes*. In terms of critical reception, though, *Poems, in Two Volumes* was reviewed poorly when it was first published, as critics took issue with the language Wordsworth used to convey his ideas. However, the poems in this collection are now considered some of Wordsworth's finest, since they demonstrate what it might look like to write poems in which emotion is "recollected in tranquility."

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Industrial Revolution began around 1760 and lasted for roughly 60 to 80 years. This means that "London, 1802" takes place in the middle of this period, when England had already made a number of technological advancements. Indeed, England saw great progress in its production of textiles with the invention of machines to help expedite the process of working with wool and cotton. The nation's metalworking industry also improved, enabling it to more efficiently create iron and steel products that ultimately pushed the country's infrastructural changes, setting the railroad industry up for success and rapid advancement.

In the midst of all of these manmade developments, Romantics like William Wordsworth worried about society's deteriorating interest in the natural world, believing that humanity had lost hold of its spiritual connection to simple beauty. This is the sentiment expressed in "London, 1802," as the speaker suggests that England has stalled out despite the fact that, historically speaking, 1802 was a time of great progress and change.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- A Reading of the Poem — Listen to a clear, slow, and concentrated reading of "London, 1802." (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oxIcwI90y4k)
- Preface to Lyrical Ballads — Read Wordsworth's "Preface to Lyrical Ballads," an essay that greatly influenced the trajectory of Romantic poetry. (https://faculty.csbsju.edu/dbeach/beautytruth/Wordsworth-PrefaceLB.pdf)
- The Industrial Revolution — Watch an informative BBC documentary about the Industrial Revolution and its impact on England. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GYln_S2PVYA)
- More Information about John Milton — Learn about John Milton's life, his writing, and how he influenced the course of British literature. (https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Milton/Divorce-tracts)
- Wordsworth's Life and Work — Read an overview of William Wordsworth and his life as a Romantic poet. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/william-wordsworth)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER WILLIAM WORDSWORTH POEMS

- Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802
- I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud
- She Dwelt among the Untrodden Ways
- The Solitary Reaper
- The World Is Too Much With Us

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