

History of English Literature 3 - Lecture 1: THE ART OF WILLIAM BLAKE

William Blake (1757-1827)

engraver, printer, painter, poet, musician
outstanding artist, forerunner of Romanticism? madman? visionary?
from the age of 4: visions (God's face, spirits, prophets, angels)
drawing school, engraver's workshop, Royal Academy of Arts

Poetical Sketches (1783) – self-printed not sold, conventional, traditional
Songs of Innocence & Songs of Experience 1789; 1793; together 1794
self-printed and self-illustrated
to visualise his words or verbalise his images?
simple lyrics (songs)
strong musicality, regular rhythm, highly emotional (though simplified)
"to show the two contrary states of the human soul" (subtitle) – dramatic poems!
Biblical allusions – "everything I knew was in the Bible" --- in his paintings as well

His sources – besides the Bible, the classics: Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton
18th century poets (Pope, Swift, Dr. Johnson)
Gothic poetry of Thomas Gray, Macpherson's *Ossian*
philosophy of Plato, Bacon, Newton, Locke, Berkeley
mysticism of Paracelsus, Jacob Boehme, or the Swedish Swedenborg
political views of William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, Thomas Paine + the French Revolution

His novelties

reacting against the 18th century neoclassical context (copying, imitating)
highly original, radical views, "revolutionary"
attacked society (institutions) and strict rules
for individualism: imagination, freedom, self-realisation
he created his own mythology in his prophecies
T. S. Eliot on Blake: "[his mind] unclouded by current opinions"; terrifyingly sincere and "eccentric" ("Blake")
visionary-poets: W. Blake – W. B. Yeats (*A Vision*) – T. S. Eliot

"Introduction" to *Songs of Innocence*

conversation of an angelic child and a piper
topic of the songs (music, singing, poems): Lamb of God
joyful, childlike rhythm (nursery rhymes)
everyone can enjoy
heavenly state (freedom)

of Experience

conversation (?) of the Earth and the Bard
topic: Fall and redemption of the Earth (humanity)
dignified, dark tone, irregular rhythm
chosen people can understand
worldly realm (imprisonment)

"London"

shows the general imprisonment and exploitation of mankind

"charter'd streets" and "charter'd Thames"
"marks of weakness, marks of woe"
"mind-forged manacles"
child-labour (chimney sweepers)
young soldiers, prostitutes suffer
Apocalyptic vision of the city, of humanity (coloured in red and black) with a perfect though harsh rhythm
only hope in the illustration: young child opens the door to an aged man clad in green

"The Lamb"

the child addresses a lamb (Lamb of God)
metaphor of the God of Love
"who made thee?"
simple language, rhythm, rhymes
meek, mild, child-like
heavenly innocence (Biblical allusions)

"The Tyger"

the Bard (?) addresses the tiger
symbol of evil (+++)
"did he who made the Lamb make thee?"
framing "fearful symmetry"
classical allusions
world of experience
"fearful symmetry"; "fire of thine eyes"; "burning bright"; "deadly terrors";
reference to Prometheus and Icarus, and Satan's fall

His prophecies (from 1790s)

so-called "illuminated" books (cf. illustrated and 'enlightened')
The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (1794): a friendship of an angel and a devil, philosophical
America, a Prophecy (1793) and *Europe, a Prophecy* (1794): visionary history of humanity
The First Book of Urizen (1794): parody of Genesis with the God of reason (cf. horizon or 'your reason')
Vala, or the Four Zoas (1804) with four gods and goddesses
Milton (1808); *Jerusalem* (1820)

+ New Jerusalem Hymn from *Milton*: The unofficial 'national anthem' of England
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=041nXAA714>)

The Marriage of Heaven and Hell

satire and prophecy with two framing poems and 5 fancies (visions) – 7!
in "The Arguement", Rintrah the outcast prophet speaks (other prophets: Ezekiel, Isaiah)
the reasoning angel vs. the creative devil
the Devil/artist works with Hell's "corroding fires" (cf. Blake's engraving acid bath) ---
--- destructive but purifying "melting the apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid"
man is also closed in his circles and body: imagination means a way out of your prison, opening the doors (spiral/vortex!)

History of English Literature 3 - Lecture 2: Introduction

Historical Data

George III (1760-1820): colonization, parliamentary reforms: the King's Friends; War of Independence (1775-1783), Declaration of Independence (1776);

1789: "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" in France!

1805: Nelson's victory at Trafalgar in Spain

1815: Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo (Wellington)

1819: Peterloo Massacre: masses fight for their rights (+ poor conditions due to the Napoleonic Wars) – cavalry attacked the crowd

George IV (1820-1830) – Regency era (extravagant lifestyle: eating, drinking, building)

William IV (1830-1837)

1832: Reform Act + reforms: child labour restricted, slavery abolished in the British colonies

Queen Victoria (1837-1901) ---

Age of Revolutions

- great changes from 1760s: destruction of the countryside, overpopulation of urban areas (industrial and agrarian revolution)
- harsh division bw. the class of the workers and the bourgeois capitalists (social changes) – see Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*
- great impact of the French revolution: political, ideological changes, e.g. Tom Paine, William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Blake

William Godwin

Presbyterian clergyman

ardent believer in justice and equality (*An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness*, aka *Political Justice*, 1793)

against violence and war

perfect society could be achieved if all restraints upon people were removed

attacked institutions + questioned marriage

his wife: Mary Wollstonecraft, first feminist (*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 1792)

their daughter: Mary Godwin, later Mary Shelley (*Frankenstein*, 1818)

Thomas Paine ("English Voltaire")

British pamphleteer, radical thinker, American politician

"Common Sense": published in America, in January 1776 before the Declaration of Independence - popular and influential! – called for revolt and freedom from British rule
Congress named secretary to the Committee for Foreign Affairs (1777-79)

Rights of Man: defending the French Revolution and criticising British society (aristocracy) – banned, in 1794, imprisoned (almost executed)

The Age of Reason in 1790s – banned, back to America

Romanticism vs. Romantic Period

tendency vs. time-bound trend/style

"romantic" as emotional, sensational, particular, individualistic, rebellious

key terms: freedom, imagination, creativity, originality, exploration --- novelties

as a period in Europe (France, Germany, England), it roughly marks the first half of the 19th century (**1800-1850**)

nationalism? radicalism?

1750-1800: pre-romantic (before "Augustan")

Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into (the Origin of Our Ideas of) the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757): midway between neoclassical and romantic views; sublime: "the productive of the strongest emotion which the **mind** is capable of feeling"

The Romantic Period (1798-1850/70s) ---

Age of the Romantic Triumph (1798-1832)

in 1798 publication of *Lyrical Ballads* - W. Wordsworth's and S. T. Coleridge's poems – cf. "the Lake Poets", less radical – **First Generation**

Shelley, Byron, Keats as the **Second Generation** of poets, more radical

also "golden age" in fiction:

Walter Scott, Jane Austen, the Brontës, Charles Dickens, W. M. Thackeray, Thomas Hardy

Romantic Period (1798-1870)

(Romantic proper till 1832)

--characterised by the mixture
of romantic and realistic features (1850-70)--

Realistic Period (1870-1914)

Victorian Age - period of great contrasts

great economic progress

development of the iron- and steel industry, communication system

prosperity of the middle-class, big 'Victorian' families

the growing of the British Empire

unhealthy living of the workers

mass poverty, workhouses, child-labour

unemployment due to the appearance of machines

1832: **Reform Act** was issued, gave political rights (franchise) to the middle-class (men) -
- bourgeoisie

Values of the Victorian Middle-Class

utilitarianism: principle of usefulness (Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, Adam Smith)

hypocrisy of business spirit, profit-oriented capitalism

sense of responsibility: moralising attitude towards the lower classes

snobbery: imitating the manners of the aristocracy (e.g. Jane Austen's and Thackeray's novels)

Evangelicalism: Bible-reading, obedience – great shock of Darwin's *Origin of the Species* (1859) with the idea of evolution, survival of the fittest and natural selection

Late Victorian Period (1870-1901)

time of disillusionment and pessimism

--- see in Hardy's realistic fiction (cf. fatalism in *Tess of d'Urbervilles*)

great variety of trends:

symbolism (W. B. Yeats' poems)

aestheticism (Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*)

Gothic (Bram Stoker's *Dracula*)

sci-fi (H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine*)

psychological novel (Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*)

Artists: Painters and Architects

John Constable: landscape paintings

J. M. W. Turner: impressionistic landscape and history paintings (machines!)

William Blake, the visionary +++

the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB) in 1840s – Dante Gabriel Rossetti

John Nash – Buckingham Palace (1820s): neo-classical; Brighton Pavilion (Regency: decorated + oriental)

Joseph Paxton – Crystal Palace (1851), for the Great Exhibition in London; cast-iron and plate-glass – destroyed in the 1930s

History of English Literature 3 - LECTURE 3: WILLIAM WORDSWORTH (1770-1850)

childhood in the Lake District
St. John's College, Cambridge (degree in 1791)
juvenilia from 1780s, conventional 18th century landscape poetry
in 1790s William Godwin's influence
travelled to France, admired the Alps + the French Revolution (but not the terror!)
meeting Coleridge (1795), working together till 1810 (debates, conflicts, different paths;
reconciliation in 1828)
"Poet Laureate" (1843-1850) – after Robert Southey (3rd Lake Poet)

His Works

Lyrical Ballads (1798, first edition); 1800 (second edition) + "Preface" (critical piece)
1798: "Tintern Abbey"; "Lines Written in Early Spring"
1800: "Lucy poems"
Poems, in Two Volumes (1807):
 "Daffodils"
 "Composed upon Westminster Bridge"
The Prelude: from 1805 till his death; life-work + autobiographical

Features of His Poems in his "Preface" to the Second Edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1802)
the volume is an "experiment"
topics are "incidents and situations from **common life**"
simple language "really used by men"
with a "certain colouring of **imagination**"
"essential passions" and "elementary **feelings**" of "low and rustic life" are shown

Definition of 'new' poetry
"for all good **poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings**" (!!)
"poetry is the image of man and nature"
importance of childhood and natural feelings
lack of complicated imagery
poetic diction is close to prose (cf. "prosaisms")

"Tintern Abbey" - Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798

Intro: location of his favourite landscape, nothing to do with the Gothic abbey – river Wye

philosophical, sensational and spiritual – sublime!

I. **meanings of nature**: healing therapy, moral guidance and sublime wisdom

II. **pleasures of nature** in his boyhood (animalistic), in youth (poetic) and in maturity (moral)

autobiographical ending: shared memory of three humans – the landscape will preserve it!

I (the poet) – my friend (Coleridge) – my sister (Dorothy): past – present – future get connected

"Daffodils"
his emotional responses to a natural landscape and its beauty

harmony, tranquillity, joy
memories, shared with Dorothy (her journal entry was the source, 2 years)
past recollection and present meditation + creation
simple language, repetitions
central metaphor: "inward eye"
dancing flowers, gold-coloured multitude of star-like daffodils, cloud-like mind

"Lucy Poems" (Ballads)
to Dorothy, his sister (?)
love poems, about the loss of the beloved
simple diction
emotional, passionate
Lucy stands for simplicity, purity and beauty of nature (metaphors, similes)
perfect rhythm: natural + classical
Lucy poems (**SYLLABLE-COUNTING:** natural, simple; fourteener: 8+6)

She 'dwelt a'mong the un'trodden 'ways - 4 str.
Be'side the 'springs of 'Dove, - 3 stresses
A 'Maid whom 'there were 'none to 'praise - 4 str.
And 'very 'few to 'love: - 3 stresses

The Prelude

OR, GROWTH OF A POET'S MIND; AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL POEM
"to compose a philosophical Poem, containing views of Man, Nature, and Society"
"addressed to a dear friend, most distinguished for his knowledge and genius" (S.T. Coleridge)
in blank verse
self-exploration and self-reflexivity
spiritual and moral guidance of nature (see in "Tintern Abbey")
14 books of *The Prelude*

++ Essays upon Epitaphs

work of mourning – elegiac quality of Wordsworth's poetry
questions of voice and face in poetry (reading!)
metaphorically, to give 'living' (sur)face to the 'dead' words - *prosopopeia* (Paul de Man)
the poet like a ghost or a living dead
as if we had a voice-from-beyond-the-grave
"[...] an eye/ Which, from a tree, a stone, a withered leaf,/ To the broad ocean and the
azure heavens/ Spangled with kindred multitudes of stars,/ Could find no surface where its
power might sleep." (from *The Prelude, 3rd book*)

HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE 3 -Lecture 4: Samuel Taylor Coleridge

S. T. Coleridge (1772-1834)

the other Lake Poet

Wordsworth's friend, debates, reconciliation

more a philosopher than a poet

"a passive dreamer"

in *Lyrical Ballads*, only 4 poems

by 30 he had become an opium addict

influenced by German philosophy (Kant)

creative "shaping spirit" + magical power of imagination

His Works

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner in LB (1798)

"Kubla Khan" - with *Christabel* and *The Pains of Sleep* (1816)

so-called "conversation poems":

"Frost at Midnight",

"Dejection: an Ode";

Critical work: *Biographia Literaria*

"Kubla Khan" (1816)

"or, a vision in a dream, a **fragment**"

in 1797, his reading about the Tartars and Kubla's palace in Purchas' *Pilgrimage*, an oriental travel book (17th century)

"**Tartars**" stand for uncivilised, violent people in English lit. from 16th century

sleeping (falling into an opium dream? reverie?) then writing --- interrupted

dreams speak symbolic language (Freud) --- in our shared symbols, archetypes of 'the collective unconscious' (Jung)

"Kubla Khan" is a recollection of archetypes

"Kubla Khan"

symbols (archetypes): walled garden of Xanadu, the sacred river, the fountain in the mountains, the ocean/sea, the chasm, caverns

characters: Godlike Kubla, the Abyssinian maid, the mad poet

"**the pleasure dome**" is to connect the different regions, contrasts of up vs. down; sunny vs. icecold; life vs. death

"Kubla Khan"

two pleasure domes (or three):

Kubla's decreed one to be built + the poetic "dome in air" ++ the reader's own source of inspiration: "a damsel with a dulcimer" – music!

poetic creation in ecstasy / trance – "Beware! Beware!" (+ "milk of Paradise" for opium and Platonic reference) --- architecture, music, poetry

Coleridge's new ideas: 1. difference bw. the inner form vs. the outer form
organic form

should be grown out/ created of the ideas in **inspiration**
(e.g. "Kubla Khan")

delight of the whole

or **outer shape**
superadded features: metre, rhythm, rhymes

2. reference to the layers of our soul: **the surface and the hidden layers** (cf. ‘the conscious’ and ‘the unconscious’ for Freud)

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner

7 parts, Argument, marginal glosses

Latin epigraph by Thomas Burnet, 17th history book writer on the wonders of the universe (“I believe with ease there are many invisible beings in the universe”)

ballad: ballad-stanza: abcb; mystery, gaps in the story (Gothic); dialogues; repetitions; frame

frame: wedding - a wedding guest is spelled to listen to the tale of the ”bright-eyed Mariner”

The Tale

voyage starts but storm comes

”The ice was all around.” (Part I, line 60)

the Albatross saves them but he kills the bird (“that made the breeze to blow”)

then silence and thirst

the dead bird is hung around his neck (Part II)

”the skeleton of a ship” with the Spectre-Woman and her Deathmate, casting dice – on them

all the crew die, he survives (Part III)

for seven days he is alone, cannot die; tries but cannot pray

he sees the water snakes and blesses them unaware - he is able to pray now, the bird falls off (Part IV)

rain and angel sent from Heaven, the ship moves on with the ”spirited” dead crew members

he faints, two spirits discussing his sin and penance (Part V)

due to the singing ”seraph-band”, he reaches his home town – the ship sinks (Part VI)

the ”fiendish” looking mariner asks the hermit to ”shrieve him”

he tells his story to him – then again and again to others till eternity –

that’s his destiny + message of love to the Wedding Guest

From Part VII

“He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.”

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner

the **Wandering Jew** who hit Christ on his way to Calvary

the **Flying Dutchman** who casts dice on his soul with the devil

characters of Death and Life-in-Death

symbol of the **genius** and redemption: the Albatross (cross-bow!)

isolation vs. love for God’s creatures (water snakes)

sin and punishment

life-**quest** with isolated vessels

sea archetype & soul-voyage

Samuel Taylor Coleridge,

Biographia Literaria (1817)

formless book, mixture of autobiography, literary theory and metaphysical speculation
he reacts against neoclassicism, but does not totally agree with Wordsworth's ideas on new poetry

Coleridge's poetry

"interest of novelty" and imagination

incidents and agents are supernatural, "or at least **romantic**"

the immediate purpose of poetry is to give pleasure

the poetic genius "brings the whole soul of man into activity" by his imaginative power

Wordsworth had interest in ordinary life + used common language of common men

Coleridge on **imagination**: cf. Latin *Imaginatio*

"synthetic and magical power"

it can *fuse* and build images into one whole

From "Dejection: an Ode"

"My genial spirits fail;

And what can these avail

To lift the smothering weight from off my breast?"

Coleridge is "the ancient mariner" **allegorically**

gradually killing his poetic genius by taking drugs but he is destined to speak about his sufferings in his "rime" (dejection or depression)

his own **epitaph**:

"Stop, Christian passer-by! - Stop, child of God,

And read with gentle breast. Beneath this sod

A poet lies, or that which once seemed he.

O, lift one thought in prayer for S.T.C.;

That he who many a year with toil of breath

Found **death in life**, may here find **life in death**!

Mercy for praise - to be forgiven for fame

He asked, and hoped, through Christ.

Do thou the same!"

History of English Literature 3 – Second Generation of the Romantics: Byron and Shelley (Lecture 5)

Lord George Gordon Byron (1788-1824)

born club-footed

attended Cambridge University

had romances with several women, many of them married + bisexual love affairs and debts

rumours of incest with his step-sister from whom he had a baby

affair with Shelley's half-sister Claire → left England in 1816, never to return

he had gone to fight for freedom against the Ottoman Empire → he died in Greece of a fever in 1824 (malaria)

Byron vs. Byronism ---

poet of the suffering ego (spleen)

sophisticated and well-educated

scandalous, aristocratic way of life

hated England for its tyranny

ardent believer of freedom and justice (for the Luddites, Carbonari movement in Italy, against the Habsburgs, for the Greeks against the Turks)

he had become a Romantic hero, a rebel, a Satanic figure --- Byronic hero

WORKS

Hebrew Melodies (1815): "She Walks in Beauty"

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage (1816-8) – first Byronic hero

"Prometheus" (1816)

"Song for the Luddites" (1818)

Don Juan (1819-1824)

"Periods" (20 years) – I. 1807-1815

attacked romanticism, he was **neoclassical!**

imitative style

more concerned about himself, not social problems

a **satirist** though a romantic one

for him nature meant spontaneity (vs. for Pope: order)

in his heroic poems, the **heroes are defeated**

e.g. *Hebrew Melodies* – love lyrics

"SHE WALKS IN BEAUTY"

not necessarily a love poem, but a celebration of the subject's beauty

wrote this poem about his wife Harriet's cousin

he met her at a **funeral** hence the allusions to darkness, with the light referring to her beauty

nowhere in the poem does Byron mention or allude to love

--- **feminine rhymes**: 'eloquent – 'innocent

--- **masculine rhymes**: 'brow – 'glow – be'low

Allegory of Beauty: abstraction of Beauty - mysterious veiled beauty

before Byron: blonde beauties --- cult of dark haired ones

II. Period: 1815-1818

more **social concerned** but conflicts

sceptic about the solutions

self-knowledge and insights lead to nihilism
in heroic poems, **the heroes have to defend themselves**
in "Darkness", death rules over the world
"Song for the Luddites": riot of the machine-wreckers, self-defence
"Prometheus": the Titan knows a secret, his defence is his silence in his eternal suffering
CHILDE HAROLD'S PILGRIMAGE (1816-18)

CHILDE HAROLD'S PILGRIMAGE

lengthy narrative poem

the travels and reflections of a world-weary young man disillusioned with a life of pleasure and revelry, looks for distraction in foreign lands (Albania, Spain, Greece, Portugal)
an expression of the melancholy and disillusionment felt by a generation weary of the wars
the work provided the first example of the **Byronic hero**
the poem has four cantos written in Spenserian stanzas, which consists of eight iambic pentameter lines followed by one alexandrine and has rhyme pattern ABABCBCC

III. Period: 1818-1824

strongly **social, critical and radical** poetry

shows social conflicts, attacking God, humanity, the church and state oppressions

had created his "poetic" personality, **self-realisation as the Byronic hero**

finally, **heroes are rebellious – they fight!**

before: heroes were defeated, then defended themselves, now with attacking attitudes

Don Juan (1819-1824): satirical and comical epic

DON JUAN

based on the legend of Don Juan

portraying Juan not as a womanizer but as someone easily seduced by women

Byron's masterpiece

two first cantos were published anonymously

he completed 16 cantos, leaving the 17th unfinished

in ottava rima: abababcc

Don Juan

cynical realism, spleen

Don Juan's lyricism + Byron's satirical tone

Seville, voyage, island, Turkey, Russia, Britain

love affairs, innocent love (Haidée)

psychologically, love is shown as a sentimental illusion, desire gives its basis

Don Juan transcends the norms and standards of society

Don Juan hardly develops as a personality

story as an excuse for Byron to satirise his own age

to show the irrationalities of the world

technique: juxtaposition of the serious and the comic (climax vs. anti-climax)

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY (1792-1822)

LIFE

born in Sussex in an aristocratic family

studied at Oxford University

he was expelled because of a radical pamphlet, "The Necessity of Atheism"

married to 16-year-old girl
some years later (still married) ran away with Mary Godwin, daughter of William Godwin
in 1818 Shelley and Mary left England and settled in Italy
died while sailing in the Bay of Spezia, Italy

MAIN WORKS

"Ozymandias" (1818)
"Ode to the West Wind" (1819)
Prometheus Unbound (1820) – a lyrical drama dealing with the theme of intellectual rebellion
A Defence of Poetry (1821) – an unfinished essay concerning the importance of poetry
(published in 1840)

His Ideas

before 1815, political poems and pamphlets (Godwin's influence)
man can be changed if his circumstances are changed
rational improvement of the material environment

after 1815, he became an idealist and spiritualist under Plato's influence
+ Rousseau's natural education and emotions
our world is transitory, we should transcend it to reach the Spirit of Love
Love as a cosmic force (*Christ, spiritus mundi*)
all matter alive – electricity of the mind survives!
to truly love the world means to reform it

THEMES

his restless spirit
his refusal of social conventions and political oppression;
his faith in a better future
he believed in freedom and love → the remedies for the faults and evils of society
through love man could overcome any political, moral and social conventions

"Ozymandias" (1817)
persona introduces a traveller who tells about the remnants of Rammeses II's statue in the desert (in Egypt)
symbol of tyranny but a "colossal wreck" remains
the sculptor's (slave!) passions, his hand and heart's art is to survive
dramatic irony bw. arrogance and reality
verbal irony of the words on the pedestal
cosmic irony of humanity and eternity (sand)
all commemorated in the poem!
"a poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth" (*A Defence of Poetry*)

"ODE TO THE WEST WIND"

personal and historical tragedies in the background
Horatian ode: grand lyric poem in elegant style and intellectual tone
5 stanzas, 5 sonnets rhyming in **terza rima** (ababcabcdedee)
theme: human weakness vs. vital regeneration of nature
the wind as the ancient symbol of life-animating forces and evocative power
importance of love as life-force

not self-love, not self-pity, but love of humanity + hope in the future
believe in the manifestation of something beyond
revolutionary: to scatter his burning words, like ashes from an unextinguished hearth, among mankind

"ODE TO THE WEST WIND"

- I: **apostrophe** to "O wild West Wind" – "oh, hear!"
earthly images (leaves, seeds, buds) + rich in colours
contrast of autumnal and springtime nature while the wind connects the 2 seasons ("destroyer and preserver")
- II: **sky-imagery** (clouds, rain, lightning)
contrast of the energy of the approaching storm vs. the dying year + the wind gives connection
- III: summer in the Mediterranean
sea images (isle, bay, waves, ooze, pumice)

IV. poet wishes to be subjected to the wind's power
3 motives: leaf-cloud-wave
like a prayer to the divine wind
in his youth (boyhood), he had more energy, more freedom – more "like thee"
vs. now troublesome age (27) + thorns of Christ

V: to get dynamism from the wind
the poet is to be used as an instrument ("Make me thy lyre")
to be spirited by the wind ("Be my spirit")
dying age (wither'd leaves, ashes) vs. a new birth (fire!)
prophetic & optimistic ending refers to the natural cycle (winter – spring)

THE POET'S TASK (*A Defence of Poetry*)
the poet is **a prophet and a legislator** who is to give social rules and **moral** lessons in his poetry
his task is to help mankind to reach an ideal world of **harmony and beauty**, free from tyranny and destruction (+ **freedom**)
the expression of imagination is understood as **revolutionary creativity**, meant to change the reality of our material world

History of English Literature 3 - Lecture 6: John Keats (Second Generation of the Romantic Poets)

LIFE

born in London in 1795 of middle-class family
parents died early, grandma brought him up
educated at a medical school
early passion for reading poetry, hard **self-education** (the classics, Italian Renaissance, English Renaissance: Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton)
a miserable love story with Fanny Brawne owing to his poverty and bad health (tuberculosis)
died in 1821 in Rome

MAIN WORKS (1817-1819) – 3 years!

”On first Looking into Chapman’s Homer” (1816) – early sonnet
Endymion (1818) – a long, mythological poem
The Eve of St Agnes (1818) – characterised by romantic features
”La Belle Dame Sans Merci” (1818) – a ballad with medieval themes and form
Great Odes of 1819: ”Ode to a Nightingale”, ”To Autumn”, ”Ode on a Grecian Urn” (1820)
Hyperion (1820) – begun in 1818 and published in 1820

HIS POETRY

his lyrical poems are not fragments of a spiritual autobiography, like the lyrics of Shelley and Byron
less philosophical, less revolutionary/radical
more of his **sensibility** + inferiority complex
life is continuous soul-making
personal experience behind the odes of 1819 but it is not their substance
the common Romantic tendency to identify scenes and landscapes with subjective moods and emotions is rarely present in his poetry

THE POET’S TASK: ”negative capability”

openness towards others
”when man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact and reason” (from a letter)
poet is able not to appear in his poems, **letting the objects reveal themselves** (becoming subjects), e.g. an urn is speaking to us, or a bird is given human voice, a season is to present itself
liberating, self-opening and forgetting, being enriched with the beauties of the world
model: Shakespeare’s impersonal tone

”On first Looking into Chapman’s Homer”
a reader’s first account of Homer in English translation (from 16th century)
like a travelling, a discovery of a new planet or a new continent (not Cortez but Balboa reached first the Pacific, Cortez discovered Mexico City)
totally new perspective is found – like from a peak of a mountain
interconnectedness of different cultures in different times: Classical Greek world; 15th century Italian Renaissance (Petrarchan sonnet form!); 16th century English Renaissance, 16th century Spanish-Mexico and 19th century English romantic - **poetic union of diversities**

”Ode on a Grecian Urn” – **Stanza 1**

- pattern of oxymorons / contrasts
urn is static and silent
deities
virginal ("still unravished bride")
"flowery tale", "sylvan historian"

Stanza 2: musicians' playing + lovers under the trees

heard (sensual, real) melodies vs. unheard melodies (spiritual)
real trees vs. the eternal painted ones
human love vs. immortalised kiss of the young lovers

Stanza 3 - enthusiastic beauties of the artistic world:

"happy boughs", "happy melodist", "happy love" of **eternal Spring**

VS. human passion with its desire and pain, sorrow

the poetic voice has become one with the depicted world of the urn

Stanza 4: new scene of the sacrifice

the heifer is not killed, fate is not fulfilled (?)

empty painted town vs. desolate Greek town in reality

Stanza 5

the urn is addressed ("O Attic shape!"))

refers back to the first stanza: **immortalised human in the images**

”Cold Pastoral”: lively tale but frozen; dead object but eternal work of art (teasing us) – paradoxical

an ironical "friend to man" utters the ending:

*"Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."*

”ye” – we as mortals are looked down on

wise maxim gives the essence of art, not of life

art triumphs over time but man cannot

death is the truth of our life – it is an **urn!**

our limited human time gives beauty and meaning to the moments (lovers will have children, the trees will have fruits etc.)

KEATS on IMAGINATION

„I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the heart's affections and the truth of the imagination. **What the imagination seizes as beauty must be truth** - whether it existed before or not - for I have the same idea of all our passions as of love: they are all, in their sublime, creative of essential beauty ... O for a life of sensations rather than thoughts.”

Keats's belief in the supreme value of imagination made him a romantic poet + forerunner of aestheticism

”La Belle Dame Sans Merci”

ballad (abcb, frames, gaps, dialogues, mystery)

4 voices: the story-teller, ”the wretched wight”, the lady, the kings and princes

in the **autumnal landscape**, the young lad is wandering

melancholy love story with a ”fairy” lady: they met, made love, she said ‘something’, then disappeared

beforehand he had a **nightmare** of the previous lovers of the lady whom she had spell over as well (”thrall”)

he cannot find peace ever since

or, he killed the lady (or, the lady died) – ”I shut her eyes”

or, he was killed and he is a ghost (the lady was a sorceress)

or, it is about **misunderstanding in love, in dreams, in poetry + poetic seduction of ”la belle dame sans merci”**

KEATS on BEAUTY

strikes his imagination

is perceived by **all the senses** involved in the process

this ‘physical beauty’ is caught in all the forms nature acquires

physical beauty can also produce a much deeper experience of joy, which introduces a sort of **‘spiritual beauty’** that is the one of love, friendship, poetry

these two kinds of beauty are closely **interwoven**, since the former, linked to life, enjoyment, decay and death is the expression of the latter, related to eternity

+ **earthly imagery + interest in the exotic, medieval fantasies**

History of English Literature 3 - Lecture 7: Victorian Poetry (Alfred Lord Tennyson, Robert Browning, Elisabeth Barrett Browning, Dante Gabriel Rossetti + PRB)

Victorian Period: Early (1832-1848), Mid (1848-1870), Late (1870-1901)

period of stability, prosperity and clarity

age of **photography**: precision + realism + mass production

moralising attitude, didactic tone, sense of propaganda

conflicts between scientific discoveries (evolution!) and faith --- **double-faced**

industrialization and **growing social consciousness** about reform movements for better working conditions for women and children

determinism: the environment defines man

from 1870s darkening tone in fiction, **escapism** in poetry

Victorian Poetry

socially concerned, but still **romantic** in style (emotional)

sense of duality: **world vs. art**

responsibility vs. escapism

moralising vs. artistic (form!)

realistic vs. dream-like quality

historical-contextual vs. medieval nostalgic + classical themes

religious scepticism and devotional poetry (more mystical faith)

more realistic, emotions such as isolation, despair and general pessimism

less emphasis on imagery, more on rhythm and meter

John Ruskin (1819-1900) + PRB

admired the past and true craftsmanship

medieval artisans had pleasure and liberty in their work (Gothic sculptures)

attacked commercialism, mechanisation, industrialisation, and mass production – all these meant a threat to art and culture

anti-utilitarian

Biblical morality

influence on Victorian poetry (Robert Browning, Alfred Lord Tennyson)

---PRB

Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood

protested against Victorian ugliness and formalism

idolised medieval art before Raphael (15th c.)

nostalgic sense of community (brotherhood)

symbolic, visionary style (also mysticism)

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, poet-painter

John Everett Millais

John William Waterhouse

Edward Burne-Jones

W. Holman Hunt

William Morris: father of English applied arts, socialist, also a poet

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882)

poet-painter

Ruskin was more realistic, Rossetti was for symbolism

sensuality, mysticism, Arthurian legends

deliberate simplicity (numbers, sensory details)
autumnal, melancholy ballad-mood
strongly religious (mysticism)
medieval, archaic decorations
beautiful sounding + musical

+ his sister, Christina Rossetti – PRB poetess (love sonnets)

D. G. Rossetti, "The Blessed Damozel" (1847)

sophisticated, egocentric love poetry
hectic, languid and mannered
dreamy atmosphere
influenced by Poe's "The Raven" (1845) --- a sequel
sorrow of the lover + sense of Platonic love
religious belief in Heaven (+Christ, Mary, numbers of 3, 7)
the Lady is up there, leaning out, even talking to him
with the promise, they will be together ("we two will...")
she gives heavenly inspiration to the poet

Sir Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892)

Evangelical middle-class family + **melancholy**, depression and alcoholism, opium-addiction
his nervous instability, sensibility
childhood reading: Sir Thomas Melory's *Morte d'Arthur* – 15th c. collection of **Arthurian legends**
Byron was his favourite in his youth + Keats's influence
Cambridge, with Arthur Hallam joined the Apostles
1832 – *Poems* (Edgar Allan Poe was fascinated by them); bad reviews; 1842 - *Poems*: success!
in 1833, Hallam died, he started to write **elegies**: "In Memoriam" (till 1850)
Idylls of the King (1880s) – Arthurian legends
Poet Laureate (from 1850) and the embodiment of his age

Tennyson's poetry

he felt called upon to celebrate a quickly changing industrial and mercantile world
but he loved the unaltered rural England
this conflict is typically Victorian: **inner thoughts vs. duty**
melancholic attitude, medieval atmosphere
escapist into death or a dream world
he had a lyric gift for sound and cadence (seductive!)
see, "The Lady of Shalott" (1832; revised 1842)
classical, mythological topics ---
--- see, "Ulysses" (1842) and "The Lotos-Eaters" (1832; revised 1842)

"Ulysses" (1842)

dramatic monologue of the aged king, Odysseus – to his fellow-travellers ("Come, my friends")
bored, idle at home ("hoard, sleep, feed", "aged wife")
in the happy past: **adventures** – "I am become a name"
he leaves his kingdom, Ithaca to his son, Telemachus

to travel till death, "to seek a newer world" (knowledge!)

personal allegory: Tennyson, the responsible moralist vs. the escapist artist
Dante's influence (Odysseus in *Inferno*)

"The Lady of Shalott" (1842/1832)

based on an old Italian romance (*Donna di Scalotta*) + on the story of the **Lily Maid of**

Astolat in Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* – Arthurian legend

a lady dies for love of Lancelot (Shallot, Camelot, Lancelot)

+ **the web, the island, mirror**

4 parts and 19 nine-lined stanzas (rhyming AAAABCCCB) – feminine rhymes!

first 2 in the present, last 2 in the past

each part ends with a speech

I: the reaper's whispering gossip about the fairy lady

II: the lady's "I am half sick of shadows"

III: "the curse is come upon me"

IV: Lancelot's remark on her face / parchment: "I am"

"The Lady of Shalott" – symbolic elements & arts

I: the river to Camelot; island with a tower – there lives a mysterious lady, **singing**

II: she is weaving pics seen in her mirror!; artistic **embroidery**; cursed not to turn, not to live & love – eternally in the present

III: (in the past) Lancelot appears – his image + reflection on the water flashing in the mirror; active male, star like ("bearded meteor"); she turns! – the mirror cracks!

IV: (in the past) she starts her journey in a boat; writes her name + singing her **death song**; arrives dead in Camelot – **parchment (poetry)**

"The Lady of Shalott" - interpretations

A/ it shows **a female world** (cf. feminine rhymes)

Shallot is like shadow – love fantasy

secluded passive lady looking (down) on a male world of action – archetype in fiction (e.g. Miss Havisham)

female, mysterious vs. male, active

B/ parody of medieval courtly love

reversed love-affair

the lady dies for the knight

C/ about art vs. life

"ivory tower" of art (embroidery, singing, poetry) vs. outside world of materialism

Platonic view of art: "reflection of reflections" (mirror!); shadows of shadows

conflict between art and life – the artist's desire for social involvement and his/her doubts about whether such a commitment is viable for someone dedicated to art → **Tennyson's personal dilemma**

++D/ psychologically, **narcissistic** mirror-stage is presented (Freud, Lacan)

development of the self: my image (Imago) vs. the Others

mirror is the Lady's eye – the world is shown

the river represent the life-flow

in her death, the lady reaches oneness with the world (Freudian "oceanic feeling" + "unio mystica") - escape

Robert Browning (1812-1889)

dramatic monologues: *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842), *Dramatic Romances* (1846) - in the series of *Bells and Pomegranates* (1840s)

Men and Women (1855), *Dramatis Personae* (1864)

liked the Italian Renaissance (painters, musicians)

The Ring and the Book (1869-9): the psycho-historical novel in verse (narrative poem); **a murder story** is told by 12 people – 12 versions (truth is relative, polyphonic)

Pippa Passes (1841): little girl's singing connects life stories
children's literature, e.g. *The Pied Piper of Hamlin* in *Dramatic Lyrics*

"My Last Duchess" (1842)

dramatic monologue – "poet's task is to give voices to mankind"

not soliloquy told alone on the stage - there is a **silent listener!**

a **"dramatic romance"**: a short story compressed into 56 lines

a cold-hearted Renaissance duke of refined taste killed his first wife – speaking to an envoy to arrange his second marriage

the (implied) reader is asked to imagine the situation – like another silent listener

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

wealthy gentry family (sugar plantations in Jamaica)

poetess, invalid

studied Greek literature, deeply religious

married to Robert Browning, lived happily with her Robert in Italy

popular **love sonnets**: confessional, passionate, spiritual (Italian sonnet-form) ---

--- *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850)

"The Cry of the Children" (1842) – poem against child-labour + abolitionist: "Runaway"
(poem)

Aurora Leigh (1856): autobiographical novel in verse

"How Do I Love Thee?" (1845)

Sonnet XLIII from Sonnets from the Portuguese (published 1850)