

ROMANTIC POETRY

1. everyday vs. literary historical meaning of the term 'Romantic'
2. as a period in literary history: 1789-1832 – a period of revolution and repression (High Romanticism): the historical background
 - French Revolution first sympathetically received in England;
 - Jacobin takeover: France declared a Republic; looked at as a threat to England: cruel repression of republican and revolutionary voices (under prime minister William Pitt);
 - January 1793: Louis XVI beheaded, England declares war on France;Internal tensions rising:
 - Irish revolt against the English rule (1798): cruelly suppressed by Pitt;
 - the agricultural revolution
 - the industrial revolutionConsequences
 - Luddites, or frame breakers (from 1811);
 - The Peterloo massacre (1819);
 - The problem of the rotten boroughs;
 - 1832: first Reform Bill.

William Blake (1757-1827)

Family: second child (of five) of a London hosier, lived most of his life in London

Education: Blake did not go to school; at the age of 10 he was sent to drawing school; at 14 he was apprenticed to an engraver, James Basire (influence of Gothic architecture and art); later also studied at the Royal Academy

His **life** was uneventful. The dates below largely mark his poetic achievements. (Apart from the almost 400 plates for his own illuminated books he produced 1,400 designs for commercial projects, and over 1,000 pictures for patrons.)

1779. employed as an engraver

1780. met Fuseli and Flaxman (the influence of Swedenborg's thought)

1782. married Catherine Boucher

1783. *Poetical Sketches* – his first published work (and the only one published in the traditional way; in all his subsequent publications he used his idiosyncratic way of printing)

1789. *Songs of Innocence, The Book of Thel*

1790-93. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* etched – prose overture to his canon of prophetic works

Revolutionary poems/prophecies: *The French Revolution* (1791), *America: A Prophecy* (1793), *The Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793)

1794. *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (although he went on printing the *Songs of Innocence* separately after 1794, no separate issues of *Experience* survive)

1797-1804. *The Four Zoas* written but not engraved

1800-1803. the Blakes lived at Felpham, Sussex under the patronage of William Hayley

1804-1808. *Milton*

1804-1820. *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion*

His **reputation** was not very high in his own time. (22 copies of *Songs of Innocence*, 27 copies of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* survive; of *Jerusalem* 5 copies survive; in 1809 his exhibition was a failure)

Wordsworth said: 'There is no doubt that this poor man was mad, but there is something in the madness of this man which interests me more than the sanity of Lord Byron and Walter Scott.'

He was rediscovered by the Pre-Raphaelites. Swinburn appreciated his poetry, W. M. Rossetti published his poems in 1874.

In 1893 William Butler Yeats edited his poems in three volumes.

Throughout the 20th century Blake's reputation grew steadily: Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* (1947), Harold Bloom, *Blake's Apocalypse* (revised edition, 1970), David V. Erdman, *Blake: Prophet Against Empire* (third edition, 1977).

The Four Zoas (summary outline of the mythic action)

The Giant Albion's fall from Eternity into a nightmarish dream and his gradual reawakening from it.

The four Zoas are Albion's primary attributes, and his fall consists in the war between these four attributes (which are presented as Titans with human personalities):

Urizen – cold reason

Orc (Luvah in Eternity) – wild emotion

Los (Urthona in Eternity) – imagination

Tharmas – instinct

Songs of Innocence and of Experience: Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul (1794)

- opposition cannot be reduced to that between a child's and an adult's view;
- Innocence represents a self-sufficient world while Experience makes sense only *as* the loss of Innocence;
- this loss is described as a Fall (cf. 'Introduction' to *Experience* and 'Earth's Answer');
- Innocence and Experience perhaps best interpreted as mutually satirical of each other.

INTRODUCTION
(Songs of Innocence)

Piping down the valleys wild,
Piping songs of pleasant glee,
On a cloud I saw a child,
And he laughing said to me:

"Pipe a song about a Lamb!"
So I piped with merry cheer.
"Piper, pipe that song again;"
So I piped: he wept to hear.

"Drop thy pipe, thy happy pipe;
Sing thy songs of happy cheer!"
So I sung the same again,
While he wept with joy to hear.

"Piper, sit thee down and write
In a book, that all may read."
So he vanished from my sight,
And I plucked a hollow reed,

And I made a rural pen,
And I stained the water clear,
And I wrote my happy songs
Every child may joy to hear.

INTRODUCTION
(Songs of Experience)

Hear the voice of the Bard!
Who Present, Past, and Future sees,
Whose ears have heard
The Holy Word
That walk'd among the ancient trees,

Calling the lapsed Soul,
And weeping in the evening dew,
That might control
The starry pole
And fallen fallen light renew!

'O Earth, O Earth return!
Arise from out the dewy grass;
Night is worn
And the morn
Rises from the slumberous mass.

'Turn away no more:
Why wilt thou turn away?
The starry floor
The wat'ry shore
Is giv'n thee till the break of day.'

THE LAMB

Little Lamb who made thee
Dost thou know who made thee
Gave thee life & bid thee feed.
By the stream & o'er the mead;
Gave thee clothing of delight,
Softest clothing woolly bright;
Gave thee such a tender voice,
Making all the vales rejoice:
Little Lamb who made thee
Dost thou know who made thee

Little Lamb I'll tell thee,
Little Lamb I'll tell thee:
He is called by thy name,
For he calls himself a Lamb:
He is meek & he is mild,
He became a little child:
I a child & thou a lamb,
We are called by his name.
Little Lamb God bless thee.
Little Lamb God bless thee.

EARTH'S ANSWER

Earth rais'd up her head,
From the darkness dread & drear.
Her light fled:
Stony dread!
And her locks cover'd with grey despair.

Prison'd on watry shore
Starry Jealousy does keep my den
Cold and hoar
Weeping o'er
I hear the Father of the ancient men

Selfish father of men
Cruel jealous selfish fear
Can delight
Chained in night
The virgins of youth and morning bear.

Does spring hide its joy
When buds and blossoms grow?
Does the sower?
Sow by night?
Or the plowman in darkness plow?

Break this heavy chain,
That does freeze my bones around
Selfish! vain,
Eternal bane!
That free love with bondage bound.

William Wordsworth
(1770-1850)

1. Blake and the problem of the *new mythology*

2. Successful modern answer to the problem of the lack of mythology was given by William Wordsworth: *demythologizing mythology*

“[With Wordsworth] We begin *de novo* on a *tabula rasa* of poetry.” (from W. Hazlitt, ‘The Spirit of the Age’)

Blake on Wordsworth:

‘I fear Wordsworth loves nature, and nature is the work of the Devil. The Devil is in us as far as we are in nature.’

‘I see in Wordsworth the Natural Man rising up against the Spiritual Man Continually, & then he is No Poet but a Heathen Philosopher at Enmity against all true Poetry or Inspiration.’

Wordsworth: a poet of nature and of self-consciousness

3. his life:

- happy childhood in the Lake District, though he lost his parents early (his mother when he was 8, his father when he was 13)
- studies in Cambridge
- the effect of the French Revolution: 1790 – walking tour of the Alps; 1791-92 – spent a year there, associated himself with the moderate Girondists, fell in love with Anette Vallon and fathered their child, Caroline
- pangs of conscience on his return for abandoning his mistress and child and his political friends; financial difficulties, eased by a legacy of £900 in 1795
- Coleridge’s neighbour 1797-98
- his great decade: 1797-1807 in the Lake District
- from 1799 he settled with Dorothy at Grasmere, married happily in 1802
- after his great decade his poetic inspiration left him; he became a champion of the established order and a faithful member of the Church of England; he was made Poet Laureate in 1843 but his poetry produced in this period is inferior to his early masterpieces
- *The Prelude* (completed by 1805 but only published posthumously in 1850), intended as a prologue to the three-part philosophical poem *The Recluse* of which only the first section of the first part and the middle part (*The Excursion*, publ. 1814) were finished

4. 1798: *Lyrical Ballads with a Few other Poems*

1800: second, extended edition with a ‘Preface’

the 1802 version of the ‘Preface’ – the main issues discussed:

- topics and *language* of poetry
- the creative process: What is a poet? What is his function?

The principal object, then, proposed in these Poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect; and, further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature: ...

Low and rustic life was generally chosen, because, in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings coexist in a state of greater simplicity, and, consequently, may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated; (...) The language, too, of these men has been adopted (purified indeed from what appear to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust) because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived; and because, from their rank in society and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse, being less under the influence of social vanity, they convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions. Accordingly, such a language, arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings, is a more permanent, and a far more philosophical language, than that which is frequently substituted for it by Poets, who think that they are conferring honour upon themselves and their art, in proportion as they separate themselves from the sympathies of men, and indulge in arbitrary and capricious habits of expression, (...)

(...) For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: but though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who, being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply. For our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings; (...)

5. demythologizing mythology: growing up as the loss of Paradise

Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood

The Child is father of the Man: And I could wish my days to be Bound each to each by natural piety.	
I	V
There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream, The earth, and every common sight To me did seem Apparelled in celestial light, The glory and the freshness of a dream. It is not now as it hath been of yore;— Turn wheresoe'er I may, By night or day, The things which I have seen I now can see no more.	Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting; The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star, Hath had elsewhere its setting And cometh from afar; Not in entire forgetfulness, And not in utter nakedness, But trailing clouds of glory do we come From God, who is our home: Heaven lies about us in our infancy! Shades of the prison-house begin to close Upon the growing Boy, But he beholds the light, and whence it flows, He sees it in his joy; The Youth, who daily farther from the east Must travel, still is Nature's priest, And by the vision splendid Is on his way attended; At length the Man perceives it die away, And fade into the light of common day.
II	
The rainbow comes and goes, And lovely is the rose; The moon doth with delight Look round her when the heavens are bare; Waters on a starry night Are beautiful and fair; The sunshine is a glorious birth; But yet I know, where'er I go, That there hath past away a glory from the earth. (...)	