The Lives and Works of the
English Romantic Poets
Part I
Professor Willard Spiegelman

THE TEACHING COMPANY ®
Willard Spiegelman, Ph.D.
Hughes Professor of English, Southern Methodist University

Willard Spiegelman received his A.B. degree from Williams College (1966), magna cum laude and with highest honors in English. He did graduate work at Harvard, where he held Woodrow Wilson and Danforth fellowships and received an A.M. and a Ph.D. (1967, 1971). Since 1971, he has taught at Southern Methodist University in Dallas and has been a visiting professor at Williams (1987–1988). Dr. Spiegelman has won fellowships from the Guggenheim and Rockefeller Foundations and the National Endowment for the Humanities. In 1985–1986, he was the first Scholar-in-Residence at the Unterberg Poetry Center of the 92nd Street YMHA in Manhattan. At SMU, he has twice won an outstanding teacher award and was, in 1981, the first recipient of the Perrine Prize of Phi Beta Kappa for distinguished intellectual achievement.

Dr. Spiegelman is the author of two books about the English Romantic poets: Wordsworth’s Heroes (University of California Press, 1985) and Majestic Indolence: English Romantic Poetry and the Work of Art (Oxford, 1995). He has also written The Didactic Muse: Scenes of Instruction in Contemporary American Poetry (Princeton, 1989) and dozens of scholarly articles on English and American poetry. A new book on contemporary poetry is in the making. A frequent contributor to the Leisure & Arts page of the Wall Street Journal, Dr. Spiegelman writes about music, art, architecture, and dance. Dr. Spiegelman’s earlier course of lectures with the Teaching Company is entitled How to Read and Understand Poetry.
# Table of Contents

**The Lives and Works of the English Romantic Poets**  
**Part I**

- **Professor Biography** ................................................................. i
- **Course Scope** .............................................................................. 1
- **Lecture One**  Romantic Beginnings ........................................ 2
- **Lecture Two**  Wordsworth and the *Lyrical Ballads* ................ 4
- **Lecture Three**  Life and Death, Past and Present ....................... 6
- **Lecture Four**  Epic Ambitions and Autobiography ...................... 8
- **Lecture Five**  Spots of Time and Poetic Growth ......................... 10
- **Lecture Six**  Coleridge and the Art of Conversation .................... 12
- **Lecture Seven**  Hell to Heaven via Purgatory .............................. 14
- **Lecture Eight**  Rivals and Friends ............................................. 16
- **Lecture Nine**  William Blake: Eccentric Genius ......................... 18
- **Lecture Ten**  From Innocence to Experience ............................... 20
- **Lecture Eleven**  Blake’s Prophetic Books ..................................... 21
- **Lecture Twelve**  Women Romantic Poets ................................... 24
- **Poems** .......................................................................................... 25
- **Timeline** ...................................................................................... 59
- **Glossary** ....................................................................................... 61

Note: Because of production limitations, we are unable to include some of the longer selections of the Romantic poets discussed in these lectures. We urge students to seek these out on their own.
**The Lives and Works of the English Romantic Poets**

**Scope:**

This course is an introduction to the phenomenon of Romanticism and to the six major English poets who have become known as the leading representatives of a certain kind of thinking and writing that flourished around the turn of the nineteenth century. Focusing on the works of two generations of poets—William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and William Blake, followed by George Gordon (Lord Byron), Percy Shelley, and John Keats—the lectures will describe and analyze the distinctive artistic achievements of men who permanently altered the course of English and American poetry.

The course begins with an introduction to the meanings of Romanticism, a complex term that has many implications and covers a wide range of artistic and philosophical ideas. It is associated, above all, with the historical periods of the American and French Revolutions and the aftermath of the latter in the figure of Napoleon Bonaparte. From 1789, when the French Revolution began, until the final defeat of Napoleon and the Congress of Vienna, in 1815, the European continent was in a state of turmoil, and Great Britain was either preparing for war or engaging in it with the forces of France. It is in this milieu that our six poets came of age.

The first generation (Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Blake) all shared in the excitement generated in the 1790s by the promise and hopes of the Revolution. The second generation (Byron, Shelley, and Keats), twenty years later, grew up in a political atmosphere of conservatism and repression at home. National and political events influenced all these poets, although many of their greatest works, especially those we revere today, were not political in nature. All of them were also influenced by ideas of liberation, whether conceived politically or with regard to the inner life of the individual.

The course will focus on general themes and ideas that bind the poets together. But, even more, it will focus on their literary and stylistic accomplishments. Four lectures on Wordsworth will examine his radical experiments in poetic diction (in *Lyrical Ballads*); his new psychological and inward turn (in “Tintern Abbey” and the “Intimations” ode); and his epic autobiographical poem, *The Prelude*, which was not published until after his death in 1850. The following three lectures, on Wordsworth’s collaborator, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, trace the rivalry and friendship of the two men. These lectures also address Coleridge’s application of philosophical principles that he inherited from contemporary German thinkers whose works he read, translated, and plagiarized. The first half of the course continues with three lectures on the unique achievement of William Blake, poet, printmaker, and eccentric mythmaker, who was less appreciated in his own time than he is now. The first half of the series ends with a look at the popular women poets of the age who followed a path that was simultaneously parallel to, and separate from, that followed by their male contemporaries.

The second half of the series is dedicated to Byron, Shelley, and Keats, all of whom left England and died abroad, young. They came of age at the time of the Congress of Vienna, and the England of their youth was a time of political conservatism. Byron was the notorious aristocratic libertine of his age, and he was as famous for his life as for his work. As a gloomy Calvinist rebel and as a sophisticated, worldly aristocrat, he had two sides to his temper that are reflected in his poetry. Shelley was famous during his short life as a lyrical and political poet; his reputation has undergone the most striking changes in the almost two centuries since his death by drowning. Keats, the youngest of the Romantics, was less well regarded during his life than posthumously. A perennial favorite with readers of all ages, Keats demonstrated a precocious maturity in the poetry he wrote during the three packed years of his creative life. The series ends with a look at the legacy of these poets as it has been transmitted both chronologically and geographically: we move from Victorian England to nineteenth- and twentieth-century America to examine the way the English Romantics affected the course of subsequent poetry. In many ways, we are still living in the long shadow cast by the giant presence of these poets from two centuries back.
Lecture One

Romantic Beginnings

Scope: Talking about beginnings is always difficult and is, in fact, a Romantic dilemma. This lecture will attempt to highlight the intellectual, artistic, and political phenomena that go under the heading of Romanticism and will introduce the main themes and techniques of the subsequent lectures.

Romanticism has become a code word for liberation and freedom on many levels, especially with respect to the individual and to society. The poets we shall study in this course, whatever else separates them from one another, were all influenced by the power of the French Revolution and its aftermath. Redefining the limits and styles of English poetry, they brought to literature some of the new philosophical and psychological ideas of German and French writers and thinkers. After a general introduction, the lecture concludes with a comparison of poems by Alexander Pope and William Wordsworth.

Outline

I. This course covers the English Romantic poets.
   A. Primarily, we will study poems by the now canonical six major poets: William Wordsworth; Samuel Taylor Coleridge; William Blake; George Gordon, Lord Byron; Percy Shelley; and John Keats.
   B. We will devote some attention to the lives of the poets and to their historical period, but our primary focus will be on their poetic styles and innovations.
   C. These were not the most popular poets of the day. In fact, various woman poets, who have recently been recuperated by critics, were far more popular than most of these men (see Lecture Twelve).
   D. Tastes change, and canons evolve. The Romantics endured a downturn in their reputations during the first half of the twentieth century, to be revived beginning in 1950 or thereabouts.

II. What was Romanticism?
   A. The difficulty of ascertaining beginnings and boundaries is a Romantic dilemma and theme.
   B. The word “Romantic” had many meanings:
      1. It was used with reference to the Middle Ages, to suggest something wild, gothic, irregular.
      2. It became a synonym for modernity (in Germany).
      3. It suggests an interest in nature, which comes from the importance of landscape and changes of fashion in landscape gardening.
      4. The rise of Romanticism is associated with the rise of nationalism.
   C. One can discriminate among many “Romanticisms,” all having partial pertinence.

III. There are several central Romantic conceptions of nature and the universe.
   A. The doctrine of “organicism” is associated with Romanticism.
      1. The universe and the work of art are both like living things.
      2. This represents a change from a more mechanistic worldview.
   B. Nature is a complex issue in Romanticism.
      1. Nature may be seen as beneficent, maternal, and nurturing.
      2. Equally, it might appear as oppressive and deceptive.

IV. The Romantics viewed history and society in several important ways.
   A. The French Revolution was the crucial event of the period.
   B. According to Wordsworth, in the decade of the 1790s and the early years of the Revolution, “Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive.”
   C. By the second generation and the decade of 1810–1820, the political mood of England (and Europe in general) had changed considerably.
   D. After the defeat of Napoleon (1814) and the Congress of Vienna (1815), a new age of conservatism brought changes in English society.
V. The Romantics had differing views of the self.
   A. We like to think of the Romantics as glorifying the human being, especially the individual “self.” Self-consciousness is a high human good.
   B. At the same time, there is a counter-tendency to escape from the self. Consciousness is a burden more than a glory.

VI. The Romantics were concerned with the role of the poet and the nature of literature.
   A. In the Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1800), Wordsworth calls the poet a “man speaking to men” and writes on behalf of the democratization of poetry’s diction.
   B. Blake, on the other hand, defended the human imagination as the supreme value, and the poet as a visionary seer.
   C. Shelley famously announced, “Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.”

VII. We end with two exemplary, representative poems.
   A. Alexander Pope, “Engraved on the Collar of a Dog which I gave to his Royal Highness” (1737).
      1. The poem is witty and epigrammatic.
      2. It maintains the fiction of the speaking voice.
      3. It concerns the nature of writing and reading, talking, and listening.
      1. The insect is personified.
      2. The poem deals with figures of sleep and death.
      3. The butterfly stands for the poet’s own childhood.
      4. We notice the importance of the poem’s form.
      5. Wordsworth broaches the nature of time and eternity.

Questions to Consider:
1. Can you recognize Romantic dilemmas or themes in contemporary literature and thought?
2. What are the limits of attempting to understand poems as reflections of biographical and historical circumstances?
Lecture Two
Wordsworth and the Lyrical Ballads

Scope: Wordsworth was the most parodied writer of his time, because he was also the most radical. This lecture will examine some of the statements of principle from his preface to the second edition (1800) of Lyrical Ballads, the book he composed with Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the most important volume of Romantic poetry. Wordsworth’s stated aim was to democratize both the subjects and the diction of poetry to realize his premise that the poet “is a man speaking to men.” Some of these poems are remarkably straightforward and simple; others have still waters that run very deep.

Outline

I. William Wordsworth lived from 1770 to 1850.
   A. Wordsworth came from a solid middle-class background.
      1. He was young when his parents died; he was separated from his siblings.
      2. His university career was not particularly distinguished.
   B. The French Revolution changed his life.
      1. At the start, he was an enthusiast.
      2. In France, he became involved with a French widow, Annette Vallon; he may have been involved in radical political activity in France.
      3. Wordsworth suffered considerable confusion and uncertainty in the years 1793–1798.
   C. The 1795 meeting with Coleridge influenced Wordsworth’s poetic life.
      1. Their collaboration resulted in Lyrical Ballads (1798).
      2. Coleridge helped Wordsworth in his commitment to the long philosophical poem.
   D. Wordsworth married (1802), became a father, and settled into a comfortable middle age.

II. We turn now to an introduction to the poetry.
   A. It has been said that there were two Wordsworths.
      1. Simplicity is a goal in Lyrical Ballads.
      2. Wordsworth and Coleridge agreed on different contributions to the volume.
      3. The lyric and the ballad are different poetic forms.
   B. The early poems involve some easy exchanges.
      1. “Expostulation and Reply.”
      2. “The Tables Turned.”
   C. But there are more complicated poems, as well.
      1. In “The Two April Mornings,” Wordsworth uses metaphor, simile, repetition, and replacement in human memory as poetic figures of speech.
      2. We see in “The Fountain” Wordsworth’s enduring concern for loss.

III. We move to two examples of Wordsworth’s startling originality.
   A. “Nutting” (1798).
      1. This blank verse poem deals with childhood and freedom.
      2. It deals equally with criminality.
      3. Wordsworth’s diction is a key to the depth of his ideas.
      4. The poem impresses on us both the importance and the irrelevance of a moral.
   B. “Composed upon Westminster Bridge” (1802).
      1. We know the exact biographical circumstances of the poem.
      2. Although this poem demonstrates Wordsworth’s love of nature, we also discover rich depths of paradoxical imagery: nakedness and clothing, city and nature, human beings and the city, life and death.

Questions to Consider:
1. Can you trace the relationship between “simplicity” and “depth” in Wordsworth’s poems?
2. How does Wordsworth confront the natural world in his work?
Lecture Three
Life and Death, Past and Present

Scope: This lecture focuses, first of all, on a small group of elegies, called the “Lucy” poems, about a fictional girl who died. Wordsworth’s poetic achievement in this sequence is remarkable because it demonstrates his interest in “border states,” the boundaries between sleep and waking, death and life, one person and another. Remarkably simple and startlingly deep, the poems tap into Wordsworth’s distinctive genius. We then move to a brief examination of two longer lyrical meditations, “Tintern Abbey” and “Ode: Intimations of Immortality,” which develop Wordsworth’s ideas about the growth of the individual soul and reflect his interest in psychology and the ways a human life involves a constant awareness of loss and compensation.

Outline

I. This lecture deals with a series of short poems and two of Wordsworth’s great longer poems.

II. The so-called “Lucy” poems were composed in the winter of 1798–1799, which Wordsworth spent with his sister in Goslar, Germany.

   A. “She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways” looks simple but is actually confusing.
      1. Lucy inhabits a private realm, isolated and unnoticeable.
      2. Wordsworth’s similes are placed, significantly, in the poem’s center.
      3. The “star” and the “violet” have differing connotations and meanings when applied to the dead girl.
      4. The emotion is restrained and austere.

   B. “Strange Fits of Passion I Have Known” is an odd poem, part narrative, part reminiscence.
      1. The poet approaches his lover’s cottage in a kind of trance.
      2. The moon seems to be supervising his dreaming.
      3. He has a premonition of her death.
      4. An original concluding stanza, now omitted, suggests a far different ending, and emotional response, for the poem than the one we currently have.

   C. “Three Years She Grew in Sun and Shower” makes Lucy into a piece of the natural world.
      1. Nature seems to be the poet’s rival for the girl’s affections.
      2. Newtonian physics has a role in her education.
      3. Lucy seems to be absorbed into the river, as it is absorbed into her own beauty.
      4. A place comes to represent the person whom the poet associated with it.

   D. “A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal” is the shortest and most perplexing of the Lucy poems.
      1. The structure is important. In two stanzas, we have the girl alive, then dead; and we have the poet asleep and now awake.
      2. Was he correct or incorrect in his earlier assumption about Lucy’s immortal status?
      3. The poem is a perfect piece of ambiguity.

III. “Tintern Abbey” (1798) was Wordsworth’s final and climactic contribution to the volume of Lyrical Ballads.

   A. The scene of Wordsworth’s walk was a destroyed abbey, which in 1798, was frequented by gypsies and homeless people.
   B. The Industrial Revolution was beginning to pollute the Wye River.
   C. Looking back, the poet announces that in his youth, five years previously, nature was to him “all in all.”
   D. Now, he has come to appreciate “the still sad music of humanity.”
   E. At poem’s end, he addresses his sister, standing before him. She is a mirror or repetition of what he once was.
   F. The poem’s main theme is remembering and recollecting.

IV. “Ode: Intimations of Immortality” (1804) was begun in 1802, but Wordsworth got as far as the end of the fourth stanza before reaching an impasse.

   A. Coleridge showed him the way, with his own “Dejection: An Ode” (see Lecture Eight).
B. A youthful feeling of wonder at nature has been lost. All objects of sense have lost the freshness of a dream with which they had been clothed in the poet’s imagination.

C. Now he is reminded of loss by looking at a series of single, isolated objects: a flower, a tree, a field.

D. He must try to figure out some compensation, some way out of his loss.

E. He first contemplates the Platonic myth of preexistence and birth as the beginning of a process of forgetting.

F. He thinks of the child as the best philosopher.

G. Finally, he gives thanks for the doubts he has entertained.

H. These allow him to glory in the metaphorical “new-born brightness” of each day and to gain an adult perspective on the depredations of time and the compensations of experience.

Questions to Consider:
1. Can you trace the nature of grief and Wordsworth’s literary treatment of it throughout the Lucy poems?
2. What changes and what matters of consistency can you discover between the 1798 “Tintern Abbey” and the 1802–1804 “Intimations” ode?
3. How does a choice of poetic form affect the poem’s meaning?
Lecture Four
Epic Ambitions and Autobiography

Scope: This is the first of two lectures on Wordsworth’s epic autobiography, *The Prelude*, which he worked on during his great creative decade (1787–1805), then tinkered with for the rest of his life. It is a long work that Wordsworth resisted publishing during his lifetime. Its themes and styles indicate the distinctive nature of his poetic genius. Writing about himself gives him a way of writing about everyone, because he takes his own life as reflective of the human condition. In this way, he is able to satisfy his double need to “express” or explore the depths of his psychology and to say something general about human nature. He moves from his own self to a consideration of the relationship between nature and humankind.

Outline

I. Wordsworth was renowned for his special brand of egotism.
   A. Keats referred to the “Wordsworthian or egotistical sublime.”
   B. His coldness was one cause for his gradual detachment from Coleridge.
   C. But his sense of “blank misgivings” was also a cause of his greatest poetry.

II. Like all great poets, Wordsworth had great ambitions from the start. These involved, in his case, the writing of an epic.
   A. The pattern of the poet’s career was set in the first century B.C.E. by Virgil, whose work offered subsequent European poets a model for their own achievements.
   B. From Virgil through Dante, Spenser, and Milton, the achievement and the language of epic passed down from the classics to the modern age.

III. Wordsworth began his great work, *The Prelude*, in 1798, without knowing what direction he was heading.
   A. He wrote the bulk of the poem by 1805 and spent the remaining years of his life fussing with it.
   B. The poem was published posthumously, in 1850 and now exists in its original (1805) form and its first published form (1850).

IV. Wordsworth considered *The Prelude* to be merely a preamble to a work (which he called *The Recluse*) that was never finished.
   A. Instead, we have several fragments, plus *The Excursion* (1814), Wordsworth’s longest finished poem.
   B. Without his knowing it, *The Prelude* managed to convey everything Wordsworth wished to say.

V. Wordsworth’s first dilemma in the poem was his choice of subject.
   A. He considered following the path of Milton.
   B. He thought of something from English history or some incident from European history.
   C. In Book I of the poem, he goes through his various possibilities before drooping down in despair, in a state of isolation and confusion.
   D. In his manuscript, Wordsworth begins wondering whether his education in nature had led him to such a disappointment and thinks back to childhood days. He begins to write autobiographically.

VI. The section known as “The Boy of Winander” (in Book V) was published separately and gives us a sense of Wordsworth’s characteristic forms of memory.
   A. The boy was originally Wordsworth himself, as we know from the manuscript.
   B. He represents an ideal education in and through nature.
   C. The boy is an artist-in-the-making.
      1. He blows “mimic hootings” to the owls on the other side of the lake.
      2. But he dies.
VII. Wordsworth has discovered his own subject by thinking about himself. He begins to write his autobiography.
   A. As a genre, autobiography is distinctly modern.
   B. It also has connections to Christianity, because a Christian must constantly examine himself or herself in the hope of proving something about salvation.

VIII. Wordsworth uncovers the crucial moments of his youth in what he labels “spots of time.”
   A. These all come from early childhood.
   B. They demonstrate the ways in which the external world impresses itself on the child and the ways in which the mind is ultimately in charge of the external world.

Questions to Consider:
1. Is it legitimate to label Wordsworth an egotistical poet because of his ambitions?
2. Can you notice connections between religious and psychoanalytic modes of “confessing” and “remembering”?
Lecture Five
Spots of Time and Poetic Growth

Scope: One of Wordsworth’s great poetic claims is his insistence on memory as a human subject. In this he clearly foreshadows Freud, that great Romantic at the other end of the nineteenth century. From our memories come the possibility of psychological strength and even, broadly speaking, a kind of salvation. In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth deals with the “spots of time,” those recollections from early childhood that provide any adult with the necessary imaginative strength to become a whole and integrated personality.

Outline

I. *The Prelude* is a difficult poem to read, owing to its style and its subject.
   A. There is a prejudice against the very idea of a “long” poem if you think of poems as short and lyrical.
   B. In fact, however, Wordsworth was a role model to many nineteenth-century readers who found in his work a model for their own and, in his sense of moral education through nature, a way to achieve their own independence and intellectual maturity.
      1. Ralph Waldo Emerson, John Ruskin, Matthew Arnold, and George Eliot were all great admirers.
      2. John Stuart Mill credits reading Wordsworth with saving him from a nervous breakdown when he was a young man.

II. Wordsworth’s early memories, his “spots of time,” are like independent poems woven into the fabric of a longer work.
   A. They often involve acts of criminality.
      1. Stealing birds’ nests.
      2. Stealing a rowboat and rowing away from shore until the mountain seems to mount up and follow him.
   B. These incidents result in a guilty conscience and a heightened sense of imagination. These are the beginning, really, of the poetic power.

III. The spots of time, and much of the narrative of Wordsworth’s life, center on his experiences of the “sublime,” of feelings that take him beyond the normal range of human experience.
   A. In the skating episode of Book I, we see a paradigm for many of Wordsworth’s experiences.
      1. He is with friends but is then separated from them.
      2. He follows the arc of a star, stops short on his heels, and enters a state of vertigo.
      3. He puts himself into a kind of trance.
   B. The last book of the entire poem ends with a major “sublime” moment, involving an epiphany, or revelation, almost an apocalyptic one.
      1. Wordsworth is climbing Mount Snowdon in Wales with a friend to see the sunrise.
      2. They march together but gradually fall into their individual reveries.
      3. Looking down, Wordsworth is struck by a sudden burst of light, and he looks up to see the moon shining through the mist and clouds.
      4. He takes the moon as an emblem of a mighty mind conquering its environment.
      5. The entire episode is a like a vision of the end of the world.

IV. *The Prelude* is both an epic, tracing Wordsworth’s restoration following his nervous breakdown when he was in his mid-twenties, and ends on an appropriately grateful note.
   A. He is grateful for his early upbringing in nature, which has given him a strong imagination.
   B. He also thanks the individuals—his wife, a friend who left him a modest legacy, and especially Coleridge, to whom the poem is officially (like a letter) “addressed”—who have been helpful to him.
      1. This proves his belief that “love of nature leads to love of man.”
      2. It also puts *The Prelude* in the line of post-Miltonic epics in English, especially by its subtle use of literary echoes to Milton’s great poem.

Questions to Consider:
1. What are the differences between our expectations of a long poem and our expectations of a short one?
2. How do the individual “spots of time,” or childhood memories, operate individually and collectively?
3. What is the relationship between memory and imagination?
Lecture Six
Coleridge and the Art of Conversation

Scope: This first of three lectures on Coleridge focuses on one kind of poem, which he labeled the “conversation” poem, a specialty of his and Wordsworth’s, in which the poet generates philosophical ideas from a contemplation of a real-life situation in a specific place and time. Coleridge himself was famous as both a great talker and a great procrastinator; his vast plans for philosophical and poetic projects were mostly unfulfilled, yet he exerted a major influence on the course of English poetry and English philosophical thought in the nineteenth century. “The Eolian Harp” and “This Lime Tree Bower My Prison” are among Coleridge’s most typical and successful experiments with the language of conversation in poetry.

Outline
I. Samuel Taylor Coleridge was a master of both prose and poetry, like T. S. Eliot and Matthew Arnold.
   A. His great poems are few in number but highly influential.
   B. He is the greatest critic in English literature.
II. A brief summary of Coleridge’s life explains some of the obsessions and habits of his work.
   A. He was the youngest of twelve children and was an early and voracious reader.
   B. Early on, he developed a sense of privilege but also of isolation.
   C. He had a strongly developed sense of original sin.
   D. His university career was not especially distinguished.
   E. His early marriage was a disaster and he spent much of his married life in love with Wordsworth’s sister-in-law, Sara Hutchinson.
   F. He supported himself by doing freelance journalism and public lectures.
III. Coleridge was a man full of plans and ideas, most of which never reached fruition.
   A. Everyone who met or heard him called him a master of talk, of the art of conversation or of holding forth.
   B. This conversational mastery had a major impact on the kinds of poems he wrote and, consequently, on the development of English Romantic poetry.
IV. The Romantic nature lyric, of which “Tintern Abbey” is Wordsworth’s most famous example, would not have been possible without Coleridge’s development of the genre.
   A. “The Eolian Harp” (1795) is an early model of the type.
      1. It begins in a specific setting and is addressed to the poet’s wife.
      2. It goes through several ideas about the relationship of the human mind to the outside world.
      3. The sense of unity that Coleridge longs for in the poem is his goal for both human life and the work of art.
      4. But a more conventional side of his temperament keeps him from being as intellectually adventurous as he might wish to be.
      5. The poem both praises and dispraises the workings of Coleridge’s own teeming, creative brain.
   B. “This Lime Tree Bower My Prison” (1797) is the strongest poem of this sort, and “Tintern Abbey” would not have been possible without Coleridge’s example.
      1. It begins with Coleridge left behind while Charles Lamb and other friends go out for an afternoon walk.
      2. The title image is an enclosure of both freedom and imprisonment.
      3. Coleridge vicariously imagines the sights that his friends are viewing.
      4. Consequently, he relieves himself from his depression by imagining himself into the experience of another person.
      5. The poem dramatizes what Emerson would later call the law of compensation. It does so through metaphors and other means of making connections.
C. The Romantic nature lyric demonstrates the Romantics’ interest in making connections, between people, between objects in the natural world, and between people and those objects. For Coleridge, especially, the poems represent his belief that there is a “one life within us and abroad.”

Questions to Consider:
1. How does your knowledge of Coleridge’s life contribute to your appreciation of his poetry?
2. What similarities and differences can you notice between Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s “conversation” poems?
Lecture Seven
Hell to Heaven via Purgatory

Scope: This lecture covers Coleridge’s three most “gothic” poems, which represent a different kind of Romanticism from the conversation poems. He and Wordsworth wanted, in *Lyrical Ballads*, to compose poetry that was ordinary and realistic and to compose poetry that was exotic and “imaginative.” “Christabel,” “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” and “Kubla Khan” are all different stylistic experiments; all show the range and depth of Coleridge’s wide reading. Most important, all are mysterious and unfinished. Coleridge, devisor of many plans, has left us with great poetic fragments, which lack the kind of conclusive ending that we often value in art.

Outline

I. Coleridge’s belief in the “esemplastic” imagination led him to design works of art that attempted to reconcile oppositions into organic unity.
   A. His greatest trilogy of poems, “Christabel,” “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” and “Kubla Khan,” is a journey from damnation through purgatory to a version of a paradisiacal world.
   B. But all of these poems are incomplete in one way or another.
   C. Consequently, we see a different facet of the Romantic or Coleridgean imagination: no matter how hard he tries to make finished or integrated works of art, he often comes up short, leaving his readers with fragments of the whole.

II. The “gothic” style was extremely popular in England at this time.
   A. Coleridge claimed that fairy tales and other romantic, exotic works help to develop a thirst for “great” and “whole” things rather than little parts.
   B. The gothic also offered one model for poems in the *Lyrical Ballads*.
   C. It allowed Coleridge to balance the conventional, or Christian, side of his imagination, with the more radical, or heterodox side.

III. “Christabel” tells a tale of crime and seduction, but it was never finished, for reasons we can only imagine.
   A. The heroine’s name combines those of two important victims, Christ and Abel.
   B. Coleridge wanted to show how “the virtuous of this world save the wicked.”
   C. He attempted to do so in a very peculiar, not entirely original, verse form.

IV. “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” led off the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads*. It is a tale of crime and punishment, which comes to a successful artistic end (unlike “Christabel”), even though the Mariner himself is fated to go around the world forever, repeating his tale.
   A. The poem’s ending preaches a Sunday school moral that is inadequate to explain the events that have occurred.
   B. The poem is a “framed” narrative, with the Mariner telling his tale to a Wedding Guest, whom he stops outside a church.
      1. Ordinary social and human life has been shattered.
      2. The Wedding Guest is affected by the tale and remains, like the Mariner, something of an outsider for the rest of his life as a result of hearing the tale.
   C. The killing of the albatross by the Mariner is an event entirely unprovoked and unexplained.
      1. It seems like something from a work of French existentialist literature.
      2. It is a gratuitous insult to the “one life within us and abroad.”
      3. It demonstrates original sin.
      4. It gives the Mariner his distinctive identity.
   D. The Mariner must atone for his sin, and his blessing of the water snakes begins his penance and his forgiveness for his original crime.
E. The poem’s ending, in which the Mariner tells his tale to the Hermit and the Pilot and, afterwards, to the Wedding Guest, turns even this mysterious work into something like a “conversation” poem.

V. “Kubla Khan” is the most famous fragment poem in English and has always been printed with Coleridge’s explanatory note, complaining of his inability to finish the poem owing to the arrival at his cottage of a person from Porlock who had come on business. This is generally now thought by critics to be an excuse that Coleridge attaches to the poem.

A. Kubla’s Xanadu is a version of paradise, “decreed” by its creator and miraculously containing many opposing natural details.

B. Kubla himself becomes a version of God or of an artist.

C. The third stanza of the poem seems to be of an entirely different order from the first. Here the poet has a second vision, this time of a female artist, who sings and plays on a dulcimer.

D. The poem, although officially a “fragment,” is in fact complete. It is a depiction of the artistic imagination at work.

Questions to Consider:
1. What can you say about Coleridge’s “moral universe”?
2. Can a poem be a fragment and a complete whole at the same time?
Lecture Eight
Rivals and Friends

Scope: It has long been thought that Wordsworth would never have developed as he did had he not fell under the influence of Coleridge. Their creative collaboration and friendship are probably the greatest example of the complex interaction between two geniuses in all of English literature. Coleridge admired and envied Wordsworth in equal doses. We can take the measure of Coleridge’s feelings by examining one poem that came out of, then fed back into, one of Wordsworth’s: namely, “Dejection: An Ode,” which Coleridge wrote after reading the first four stanzas of Wordsworth’s “Immortality” ode and which then inspired Wordsworth to finish his poem. In addition, we shall look at the strange response to Wordsworth’s Prelude, entitled “To William Wordsworth,” in which Coleridge is both awed and humbled by his friend’s great achievement.

Outline

I. Coleridge is perhaps the most immediately sympathetic of the Romantic poets because of his weaknesses, as well as his strengths.
   A. He was extremely generous as a friend, however needy he also was.
   B. His character was most tested in his relationship with Wordsworth, whom he helped to mold and whom he came to both love and envy.

II. Coleridge always felt his own inadequacies most strongly in relation to Wordsworth’s successes, as well as to Wordsworth’s happier domestic life.
   A. Artistically speaking, Wordsworth was able to write more quickly and with greater sense of purpose and to complete his projects.
   B. But Coleridge was also able to see clearly his friend’s defects and his artistic virtues.
      1. The Biographia Literaria, a unique and peculiar work, is the first and, in some ways, the most important literary criticism of Wordsworth.
      2. Coleridge thought that some of Wordsworth’s claims for the poet’s job were simply ludicrous.
      3. At the same time, he could see the beauties of Wordsworth’s verse.

III. In the poem “To William Wordsworth,” Coleridge measures his own achievement against that of his friend, who had just completed The Prelude, his great philosophical and autobiographical poem.
   A. As he listens to Wordsworth recite the poem, Coleridge is full of respect and self-doubts.
   B. He must wonder, “Where is my great epic poem? Why have I failed to do this?”

IV. His greatest poem of “failure,” so to speak, is “Dejection: An Ode,” written in 1802 as a response to the first four stanzas of Wordsworth’s “Intimations” ode.
   A. This is a perfect example of a Romantic nature lyric. It begins with natural details—a storm is brewing—and circles back to the outside world at the end.
   B. It is also addressed to Sara Hutchinson, the woman with whom Coleridge was in love.
   C. It is a poem that brilliantly depicts a state of clinical depression, which Coleridge ascribes to his own Hamlet-like character, his capacity for too much abstract thinking.
      1. In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, this condition would have been called “acedia” or “accidie,” a sin of spiritual torpor or dryness.
      2. For Coleridge, any great pain would be preferable to this state of non-feeling.
   D. Coleridge feels he has lost the joy that he had when a youth, a joy that is also the requirement for great creative achievement.
      1. He calls this power the “shaping spirit of Imagination.”
      2. He connects it to original blessedness, as opposed to original sin.
   E. At the poem’s end, he comes to focus solely on Sara Hutchinson, having lost all hope for himself and his own achievement.
V. One last poem, a sonnet entitled “Work Without Hope” (1825), shows why Coleridge is really a master of failure.
   A. It expresses his sense of sterility and hopelessness.
   B. It places the poet in contrast to everything else in the natural world.
   C. Yet it does so with great creative control.
   D. Coleridge sounds like T. S. Eliot’s Prufrock, cut off from human beings, nature, and all personal gratification.

Questions to Consider:
1. Trace the relationship between envy and admiration in Coleridge’s responses to Wordsworth.
2. Analyze as closely as you can the various stages of Coleridge’s “dejection.”
3. Consider how one can be a success at failure.
Lecture Nine

William Blake: Eccentric Genius

Scope: Blake is the classic eccentric in English literature, a man as famous in the history of printmaking (or the visual arts in general) as he is in poetry. He not only devised a new way of printing his own work, relying on a process he termed “relief etching,” but he also integrated pictures and text in a way that hearkens back to medieval illuminated manuscripts. Among his other achievements, Blake also invented a whole mythology in his prophetic books, with characters drawn from neither the Bible nor classical mythology. We begin our discussion of Blake’s poetry by examining his wonderful Songs of Innocence.

Outline

I. William Blake is the major eccentric in the English literary tradition.
   A. He was equally important as a poet and a visual artist, primarily as an engraver of his own work.
   B. His work was not conventionally printed or distributed; for these reasons, and for his symbolic obscurity, he was not widely read or known until the twentieth century.
   C. His rise in popularity can be traced, in part, to the radical sixties in Britain and America, when he was looked on as a kind of hippie precursor.

II. Blake was primarily a Londoner, born and bred.
   A. He came from the urban middle classes; his father was a hosier.
   B. He was apprenticed to an engraver at the age of ten, after which he briefly entered the Royal Academy.
   C. His sense of art and of his own purpose was at odds with the conventional aesthetic norms of the time.
   D. Mostly, he worked quietly in London with his wife and lived at the center of radical political circles.

III. As a radical, but also as a man of his own age and place, Blake deserves our attention in several ways.
   A. In terms of religion, although he was far from a conventional Christian, he was deeply pious.
   B. Not a university man, he was self-educated and created what was essentially his own highly idiosyncratic mythology in his vast epic prophetic poems.
   C. He also mastered certain verse forms that we associate with the eighteenth century, rather than the Romantic age of the nineteenth century: specifically, epic, satire, children’s literature, epigrams, and hymns.
   D. Blake was an accomplished lyric poet as a teenager, as his early song, “How sweet I roamed from field to field,” demonstrates.

IV. The Songs of Innocence and Experience, published first singly, then together, is Blake’s most famous work and the best introduction to his style, ideas, and techniques.
   A. He developed for these books his own new way of engraving, which was a return in part to the manuscript tradition of the pre-print Middle Ages.
      1. The text of the poems and their illustrations are intertwined. It is impossible to understand one without the other.
      2. Blake would do an engraving, then print from a copper plate, afterwards hand-coloring the finished pages with pen and watercolor.
   B. The two books are meant to show “the two contrary states of the Human Soul.”
      1. Innocence and experience exist in a sequence, the way a child moves from the earlier to the later state.
      2. They also exist simultaneously within any human soul, as a pair of productively warring “contraries.”

V. The best way to think of Blake as an artist and thinker is as a revolutionary, a dialectician, and an ironist.
   A. He supported the American and French Revolutions and seldom wavered in his enthusiasm for radical political activities.
   B. He was also a radical in terms of his religion and his attitudes toward sexuality.
C. As a dialectician, he is in the line established by Plato and extending through Immanuel Kant and Karl Marx.
   1. For a dialectician, truth is always achieved by the warfare between, and the reconciliation of, opposing forces, whether as ideas or social classes.
   2. For Blake, “without contraries is no progression” (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*).

VI. As an ironist in the eighteenth-century tradition, Blake often makes it hard to know how we should understand or hear his poems. This is especially true with regard to the *Songs of Innocence and Experience*.

A. In “The Piper,” we have a dialectical movement from laughter, to tears, to a combination of the two.
   1. It is a pastoral poem that traces the move from oral performance to writing.
   2. It is also a child’s nursery rhyme that is a version of historical progress.
   3. The pastoral note in many of these poems is a traditional one, combining the figures of shepherd from Greco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian literature (e.g., “The Shepherd”).

B. In other poems from this volume, the tone is harder to ascertain (e.g., “The Lamb,” “The Ecchoing Green”).

C. Sexuality becomes a subject, even in a state of innocence (e.g., “The Blossom”).

D. Above all, in terms of social protest and irony, we have Blake’s poems of outrage, which will prompt different responses from adults and children.
   1. “Holy Thursday” asks us to “cherish pity,” but Blake clearly finds this attitude indefensible.
   2. “The Chimney Sweeper” features a speaker who mouths Christian pieties, which we are clearly meant to hear as hypocritical platitudes designed to keep the poor in their place.
   3. “The Little Black Boy” asks us to see through the establishment’s use of religious faith to justify social oppression.

Questions to Consider:
1. Can you think of individuals who succeed in two different art forms equally?
2. How can we ascertain the proper “tone” for any of Blake’s poems?
3. Can a poet be, simultaneously, deeply religious and politically radical?
Lecture Ten
From Innocence to Experience

Scope: Blake imagined innocence and experience as “two contrary states,” which exist not just sequentially in any individual, who moves from childhood to adulthood, but also simultaneously. Each “state” has its distinctive conditions, themes, and styles. “The Tyger,” “London,” and from a different manuscript, “The Mental Traveller” are poems that exemplify the conditions and dilemmas of experience.

Outline

I. The Songs of Experience (1794) continues and deepens the themes and techniques of The Songs of Innocence (1789); these poems are clearly meant to be read in tandem with the earlier poems.
   A. “The Tyger” is probably the most famous poem in the volume.
      1. It poses a serious theological question about the nature of power and evil in the universe.
      2. The illustration, however, tells a slightly different story.
      3. Ironically, but also appropriately, Blake is himself a symmetrical “framer” in his poem.
   B. Other poems in the volume deal with the theme of sexuality but now differently from Blake’s treatment in Songs of Innocence.
      1. “Ah, Sunflower” dramatizes the plight of sexual repression.
      2. “My Pretty Rose Tree” is an anecdote about sexual fidelity.
   C. Repression and its evils become another major theme throughout Blake’s work.
      1. “The Garden of Love” shows the effects of denial and repression, especially with regard to orthodox religion.
      2. “London,” probably the greatest poem in the volume, shows the interrelationship among political, religious, and economic forms of oppression.
      3. In all these poems, simple social outrage is complicated by Blake’s irony, his diction, and some subtle undercurrents of feeling.

II. As he was working on the two volumes of Songs, Blake was also writing in other poetic forms and beginning to develop the mythologies that he would expand in his large prophetic books.
   A. “The Crystal Cabinet” is a ballad dealing with sexual initiation and its tragic consequences.
   B. Its hero is left upon a wild, like a weeping babe.
   C. The same figure appears in Blake’s ballad “The Mental Traveller.”
      1. Here we have a human, a political, and a religious fable all in one.
      2. The poem alludes to such figures as Jesus, the Norse god Loki, and the Greek Prometheus, all of whom are sacrificial figures.
      3. It also portrays various cycles of birth, growth, senescence, and death, which have connotations on various levels.
   D. In “Auguries of Innocence,” Blake honed his skill as a writer of epigrams.
      1. This series of proverbs is an example of Blake’s commitment to eighteenth-century aesthetics, in spite of its radical content.
      2. Blake preaches a doctrine of imaginative or visionary openness, which will lead him to the greater revelations and drama of his prophetic books.

Questions to Consider:
1. What is the relationship between social oppression and psychological and emotional repression?
2. How many of Blake’s poems might be recommended to children?
Lecture Eleven
Blake's Prophetic Books

Scope: Blake’s most important, lifelong project was the composition of vast epic poems that were virtually unread and unstudied until the middle of the twentieth century. We now recognize them as his major achievement. This lecture will prepare you for those “major” prophecies by looking at three shorter poems in which Blake begins to explore the themes, styles, and characters, of his more ambitious epics. “The Book of Thel” is the story of a young virgin who is terrified of life; “Visions of the Daughters of Albion” is one of the first pleas for free love in English poetry; and “The Book of Urizen” gives us, in miniature, Blake’s myth of the four creatures (“zoas”) who make up any individual man. It is a story of creation and the fall, modeled on biblical stories but with Blake’s own odd twist.

Outline

I. Blake’s major work was the creation of a new mythology, a project that involved his energies between 1795 and 1804 and that achieved a culmination in The Four Zoas, unpublished during his lifetime.
   A. The mythology involves a quartet of brothers (“zoas” is the Greek word for living creatures) who exist, sometimes in harmony, sometimes in turmoil, with one another.
   B. These figures reappear in Blake’s later epics, Milton and Jerusalem.

II. In the 1790s, Blake began working on trial runs for the longer prophetic books.
   A. “The Book of Urizen” describes the action of the title character, who combines the traits of an Old Testament Jehovah and rationalist philosophers (whom Blake hated), such as Newton, Locke, and Bacon.
   B. The book is a version of the biblical Genesis and Exodus.
      1. It is a tale of creation.
      2. It is also a tale of a fall from harmony into chaos and disorder, both psychologically and cosmically.
   C. Blake was beginning to trace the dialectical movement of all revolutions: one generation’s rebel becomes the next generation’s orthodox ruler.

III. “The Book of Thel” (1789) is a delicate work that traces the soul’s birth into experience.
   A. Thel (Greek for “desire”) is a girl who is shown a vision of life.
   B. In a series of conversations with natural elements, she is told what life is like.
   C. Having been shown a vision of a life that leads eventually to death, Thel refuses to be born.
   D. The delicate poem dramatizes the failure of the human will.

IV. The “Visions of the Daughters of Albion” (1793) reveals Blake as a proto-feminist.
   A. The poem dramatizes the interrelations among slavery, economics, and the sexual repression of marriage.
   B. It is one of the earliest and most important defenses of free love.
      1. Its female protagonist, Oothoon, is ruined by two men: she is raped by the slave trader Bromion, then rejected by her fearful husband, Theotormon.
      2. She is the first character in Blake to mention the name “Urizen” as the embodiment of jealous patriarchal oppression.
      3. She claims in true Blakean fashion that “everything that lives is holy.”
      4. But her pleas are unheard, and she sits at the end of the poem bound together with the two men. The dialectic has gone nowhere. There has been no progression.

V. Blake’s most unusual work is the prose satire The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, a prophecy of both Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud.
   A. The terms of the title are turned upside down. Everything is seen and taken ironically.
      1. Heaven refers to conventional wisdom and goodness but is really a code word for repression.
      2. Hell represents everything energetic and explosive, imaginative, and creative.
3. The two terms or forces must always exist in a harmonious battle with one another, because no progression can be achieved without contraries.

B. Blake uses the terminology and some of the philosophy of the religious mystic Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772), who predicted a restoration of a balance between good and evil.

C. The book is, among other things, a diary or travelogue, in which Blake reports his experiences in a new underground country.
   1. He uses many literary forms, especially the anecdote and the epigram.
   2. He recounts his meetings with angels and devils and his own participation in the experience of a new order.
   3. He concludes that “opposition is true friendship,” and he paves the way for the more revolutionary Romantic movement of the nineteenth century.

Questions to Consider:
1. Consider the relationship between mythology (especially original myth-making) and epic poetry.
2. Is The Marriage of Heaven and Hell a poem? Does it have unity, or is it merely a miscellany of various episodes?
Lecture Twelve
Women Romantic Poets

Scope: At the halfway point of the series, we stop for a moment to take a brief look at some of the women poets, who were undoubtedly more popular (and commercially more successful) than the six male figures whom we now label the central figures of the age. Of these, two representative poets are Felicia Hemans (whom we now remember as the author of “Casabianca”) and Charlotte Turner Smith, both of whom were admired by their male contemporaries and influenced by them. If there is a female side to Romanticism, it contains both domestic themes and political ones.

Outline

I. We come to the midpoint of this series of lectures, to the break between the so-called first and second generations of English Romantic poets.
   A. Blake, Coleridge, and Wordsworth were all working at the top of their form in the 1790s, a decade of radical political and social activity.
   B. The promise of the French Revolution encouraged liberal thought throughout Europe.
   C. By the time of the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo and the Congress of Vienna, the forces of political reaction and social conservatism, as well as a fear and hatred of all things French, had overtaken most of Europe and Great Britain.
   D. Byron, Shelley, and Keats came of age during the second decade of the nineteenth century, in which the Peterloo Massacre (August 16, 1819) became a symbol for repressive tyrannies at home.

II. To bridge the gap between the two generations of poets, it is appropriate to take a look at the most popular (rather than the most “influential,” in terms of literary history) writers of the day: the woman poets.
   A. Women were a mainstay of the reading public, especially with regard to fiction.
   B. Excluded from higher education, the women who became writers were largely self-taught or had the advantages of forward-thinking parents.
   C. The women authors were more popular and earned more money than the six Romantic poets we now teach as the core of the Romantic movement.

III. Felicia Dorothea Browne Hemans (1793–1835) was one of the most popular authors of the century, in both Britain and America.
   A. Educated at home, she had the good fortune to have supportive parents and a prodigious memory.
   B. Her work caught the eye of young Percy Shelley.
   C. Her literary output was large and varied.
   D. Her popular poems both support and subtly criticize some Romantic and national pieties.
      2. The patriotic poem values loyalty and filial devotion at least as much as patriotism.
      4. “The Graves of a Household” keeps everything at a very general level, but it depicts the dissolution of a family through immigration and warfare.

IV. Charlotte Turner Smith (1749–1806), of a slightly older generation, had a wide cultural and artistic education but entered upon a disastrous marriage and was forced to earn a living to support herself and her many children.
   A. Her output was also wide and varied and extremely popular. Her sonnets were extraordinarily received and influenced the young Wordsworth and Coleridge.
   B. She also wrote ten novels.
   C. Her poems include experiments in several genres and prove her to have had a curious and wide-ranging intellect.
D. Two examples of her poems demonstrate her characteristic strengths and weaknesses. The first is one of her typical sonnets.
   1. “On Being Cautioned Against Walking on an Headland” is a good example of Smith’s handling of sonnet conventions.
   2. It also depicts a standard Romantic character—the madman or lunatic—who is both the opposite of, and the stand-in for, the poet.
   3. The structure and syntax of the sonnet show her relationship to what Coleridge called “the one life within us and abroad.”

E. “Beachy Head” (1807) proves that Smith not only influenced the young Wordsworth but was also, in turn, influenced by him.
   1. It is a learned “loco-descriptive” poem.
   2. It contains vast tracts of historical, botanical, and topographical details.
   3. It blurs the boundaries between the public and private realms.

Questions to Consider:
1. What makes a poem enduring? Or good? Or popular?
3. Is there such a thing as a “female” viewpoint?
Poems

From Lecture One (Wordsworth):

To a Butterfly

I’ve watched you now a full half-hour,  
Self-poised upon that yellow flower;  
And, little Butterfly! indeed  
I know not if you sleep or feed.  
How motionless!—not frozen seas  
More motionless! and then  
What joy awaits you, when the breeze  
Hath found you out among the trees,  
And calls you forth again!  
This plot of orchard-ground is ours;  
My trees they are, my Sister’s flowers;  

From Lecture Two (Wordsworth):

The Two April Mornings

We walked along, while bright and red  
Uprose the morning sun;  
And Matthew stopped, he looked, and said,  
“The will of God be done!”  
A village schoolmaster was he,  
With hair of glittering grey;  
As blithe a man as you could see  
On a spring holiday.  
And on that morning, through the grass,  
And by the steaming rills,  
We travelled merrily, to pass  
A day among the hills.  
“Our work,” said I, “was well begun,  
Then, from thy breast what thought,  
Beneath so beautiful a sun,  
So sad a sigh has brought?”

Here rest your wings when they are weary;  
Here lodge as in a sanctuary!  
Come often to us, fear no wrong;  
Sit near us on the bough!  
We’ll talk of sunshine and of song,  
And summer days, when we were young;  
Sweet childish days, that were as long  
As twenty days are now.

A second time did Matthew stop;  
And fixing still his eye  
Upon the eastern mountain-top,  
To me he made reply:  
“Yon cloud with that long purple cleft  
Brings fresh into my mind  
A day like this which I have left  
Full thirty years behind.  
“And just above yon slope of corn  
Such colours, and no other,  
Were in the sky, that April morn,  
Of this the very brother.  
“With rod and line I sued the sport  
Which that sweet season gave,  
And, to the churchyard come, stopped short  
Beside my daughter’s grave.
“Nine summers had she scarcely seen,  
The pride of all the vale;  
And then she sang—she would have been  
A very nightingale.

“Six feet in earth my Emma lay;  
And yet I loved her more,  
For so it seemed, than till that day  
I e’er had loved before.

“And, turning from her grave, I met,  
Beside the churchyard yew,  
A blooming Girl, whose hair was wet  
With points of morning dew.

“A basket on her head she bare;  
Her brow was smooth and white:

We talked with open heart, and tongue  
Affectionate and true,  
A pair of friends, though I was young,  
And Matthew seventy-two.

We lay beneath a spreading oak,  
Beside a mossy seat;  
And from the turf a fountain broke,  
And gurgled at our feet.

“Now, Matthew!” said I, “let us match  
This water’s pleasant tune  
With some old border-song, or catch  
That suits a summer’s noon;

“Or of the church-clock and the chimes  
Sing here beneath the shade,  
That half-mad thing of witty rhymes  
Which you last April made!”

In silence Matthew lay, and eyed  
The spring beneath the tree;  
And thus the dear old Man replied,  
The grey-haired man of glee:

“No check, no stay, this Streamlet fears;  
How merrily it goes!  
‘Twill murmur on a thousand years,  
And flow as now it flows.

“And here, on this delightful day,  
I cannot choose but think  
How oft, a vigorous man, I lay  
Beside this fountain’s brink.

To see a child so very fair,  
It was a pure delight!

“No fountain from its rocky cave  
E’er tripped with foot so free;  
She seemed as happy as a wave  
That dances on the sea.

“There came from me a sigh of pain  
Which I could ill confine;  
I looked at her, and looked again:  
And did not wish her mine!”

Matthew is in his grave, yet now,  
Methinks I see him stand,  
As at that moment, with a bough  
Of wilding in his hand.

The Fountain

“My eyes are dim with childish tears,  
My heart is idly stirred,  
For the same sound is in my ears  
Which in those days I heard.

“Thus fares it still in our decay:  
And yet the wiser mind  
Mourns less for what age takes away  
Than what it leaves behind.

“The blackbird amid leafy trees,  
The lark above the hill,  
Let loose their carols when they please,  
Are quiet when they will.

“With Nature never do they wage  
A foolish strife; they see  
A happy youth, and their old age  
Is beautiful and free:

“But we are pressed by heavy laws;  
And often, glad no more,  
We wear a face of joy, because  
We have been glad of yore.

“If there be one who need bemoan  
His kindred laid in earth,  
The household hearts that were his own;  
It is the man of mirth.

My days, my Friend, are almost gone,  
My life has been approved,  
And many love me; but by none  
Am I enough beloved.”
“Now both himself and me he wrongs,
The man who thus complains!
I live and sing my idle songs
Upon these happy plains;

“And, Matthew, for thy children dead
I’ll be a son to thee!”
At this he grasped my hand, and said,
“Alas! that cannot be.”

We rose up from the fountain-side;
And down the smooth descent
Of the green sheep-track did we glide;
And through the wood we went;

And, ere we came to Leonard’s rock,
He sang those witty rhymes
About the crazy old church-clock,
And the bewildered chimes.

Nutting

———It seems a day
(I speak of one from many singled out)
One of those heavenly days that cannot die;
When, in the eagerness of boyish hope,
I left our cottage-threshold, sallying forth
With a huge wallet o’er my shoulders slung,
A nutting-crook in hand; and turned my steps
Tow’rd some far-distant wood, a Figure quaint,
Tricked out in proud disguise of cast-off weeds
Which for that service had been husbanded,
By exhortation of my frugal Dame
Motley accoutrement, of power to smile
At thorns, and brakes, and brambles,—and, in truth,
More ragged than need was! O’er pathless rocks,
Through beds of matted fern, and tangled thickets,
Forcing my way, I came to one dear nook
Unvisited, where not a broken bough
Drooped with its withered leaves, ungracious sign
Of devastation; but the hazels rose
Tall and erect, with tempting clusters hung,
A virgin scene!—A little while I stood,
Breathing with such suppression of the heart
As joy delights in; and, with wise restraint
Voluptuous, fearless of a rival, eyed
The banquet;—or beneath the trees I sate
Among the flowers, and with the flowers I played;
A temper known to those who, after long
And weary expectation, have been blest
With sudden happiness beyond all hope.
Perhaps it was a bower beneath whose leaves
The violets of five seasons re-appear
And fade, unseen by any human eye;
Where fairy water-breaks do murmur on
For ever; and I saw the sparkling foam,
And—with my cheek on one of those green stones
That, fleeced with moss, under the shady trees,
Lay round me, scattered like a flock of sheep—
I heard the murmur and the murmuring sound,
In that sweet mood when pleasure loves to pay
Tribute to ease; and, of its joy secure,
The heart luxuriates with indifferent things,
Wasting its kindliness on stocks and stones,
And on the vacant air. Then up I rose,
And dragged to earth both branch and bough, with crash
And merciless ravage: and the shady nook
Of hazels, and the green and mossy bower,
Deformed and sullied, patiently gave up
Their quiet being: and unless I now
Confound my present feelings with the past,
Ere from the mutilated bower I turned
Exulting, rich beyond the wealth of kings,
I felt a sense of pain when I beheld
The silent trees, and saw the intruding sky.—
Then, dearest Maiden, move along these shades
In gentleness of heart; with gentle hand
Touch—for there is a spirit in the woods.
Earth has not anything to show more fair:
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty:
This City now doth, like a garment, wear
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;
Ne’er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
The river glideth at his own sweet will:
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still!

From Lecture Three (Wordsworth):

She Dwelt among the Untrodden Ways

She dwelt among the untrodden ways
Beside the springs of Dove,
A Maid whom there were none to praise
And very few to love:

A violet by a mossy stone
Halfhidden from the eye!
—Fair as a star, when only one
Is shining in the sky.
She lived unknown, and few could know
When Lucy ceased to be;
But she is in her grave, and oh,
The difference to me!

Strange Fits of Passion Have I Known

Strange fits of passion have I known:
And I will dare to tell,
But in the Lover’s ear alone,
What once to me befell.

When she I loved looked every day
Fresh as a rose in June,
I to her cottage bent my way,
Beneath an evening-moon.

Upon the moon I fixed my eye,
All over the wide lea;
With quickening pace my horse drew nigh
Those paths so dear to me.

And now we reached the orchard-plot;
And, as we climbed the hill,
The sinking moon to Lucy’s cot
Came near, and nearer still.

In one of those sweet dreams I slept,
Kind Nature’s gentlest boon!
And all the while my eyes I kept
On the descending moon.

My horse moved on; hoof after hoof
He raised, and never stopped:
When down behind the cottage roof;
At once, the bright moon dropped.
What fond and wayward thoughts will slide
Into a Lover’s head!

“O mercy!” to myself I cried,
“If Lucy should be dead!”

Three Years She Grew in Sun and Shower

Three years she grew in sun and shower,
Then Nature said, “A lovelier flower
On earth was never sown;
This Child I to myself will take;
She shall be mine, and I will make
A Lady of my own.

“Myself will to my darling be
Both law and impulse: and with me
The Girl, in rock and plain,
In earth and heaven, in glade and bower,
Shall feel an overseeing power
To kindle or restrain.

“She shall be sportive as the fawn
That wild with glee across the lawn
Or up the mountain springs;
And hers shall be the breathing balm,
And hers the silence and the calm
Of mute insensate things.

“The floating clouds their state shall lend
To her; for her the willow bend;
Nor shall she fail to see
Even in the motions of the Storm
Grace that shall mould the Maiden’s form
By silent sympathy.

“The stars of midnight shall be dear
To her; and she shall lean her ear
In many a secret place
Where rivulets dance their wayward round,
And beauty born of murmuring sound
Shall pass into her face.

“And vital feelings of delight
Shall rear her form to stately height,
Her virgin bosom swell;
Such thoughts to Lucy I will give
While she and I together live
Here in this happy dell.”

Thus Nature spake—The work was done—
How soon my Lucy’s race was run!
She died, and left to me
This heath, this calm, and quiet scene;
The memory of what has been,
And never more will be.

A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal

A slumber did my spirit seal;
I had no human fears:
She seemed a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years.

No motion has she now, no force;
She neither hears nor sees;
Rolled round in earth’s diurnal course,
With rocks, and stones, and trees.

Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood (excerpts)

The Child is father of the Man;
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.

IV
Ye blessed Creatures, I have heard the call
Ye to each other make; I see
The heavens laugh with you in your jubilee;
My heart is at your festival,
My head hath its coronal,
The fullness of your bliss, I feel—I feel it all.
Oh evil day! if I were sullen
While Earth herself is adorning,
This sweet May-morning,
And the Children are culling
On every side,
In a thousand valleys far and wide,
Fresh flowers; while the sun shines warm,
And the Babe leaps up on his Mother's arm—
I hear, I hear, with joy I hear!
—But there's a Tree, of many, one,
A single Field which I have looked upon,
Both of them speak of something that is gone:
The Pansy at my feet
Doth the same tale repeat:
Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?

VII
Behold the Child among his new-born blisses,
A six years' Darling of a pigmy size!
See, where 'mid work of his own hand he lies
Fretted by sallies of his mother's kisses,
With light upon him from his father's eyes!
See, at his feet, some little plan or chart,
Some fragment from his dream of human life,
Shaped by himself with newly-learned art;
A wedding or a festival,
A mourning or a funeral;
And this hath now his heart,
And unto this he frames his song:
Then will he fit his tongue
To dialogues of business, love, or strife;
But it will not be long
Ere this be thrown aside
And with new joy and pride
The little Actor cons another part;
Filling from time to time his "humorous stage"
With all the Persons, down to palsied Age,
That life brings with her in her equipage;
As if his whole vocation
Were endless imitation.

VIII
Thou, whose exterior semblance doth belie
Thy Soul's immensity;
Thou best Philosopher, who yet dost keep
Thy heritage, thou Eye among the blind,
That, deaf and silent, read'st the eternal deep,
Haunted for ever by the eternal mind,
Mighty Prophet! Seer blest!
On whom those truths do rest,
Which we are toiling all our lives to find,
In darkness lost, the darkness of the grave;
Thou, over whom thy Immortality
Broods like the Day, a Master o'er a Slave,
A Presence which is not to be put by;
Thou little Child, yet glorious in the might
Of heaven-born freedom on thy being's height,
Why with such earnest pains dost thou provoke
The years to bring the inevitable yoke,
Thus blindly with thy blessedness at strife?
Full soon thy Soul shall have her earthly freight,
And custom lie upon thee with a weight,
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!

IX
O joy! that in our embers
Is something that doth live,
That nature yet remembers
What was so fugitive!
The thought of our past years in me doth breed
Perpetual benediction: not indeed
For that which is most worthy to be blest;
Delight and liberty, the simple creed
Of Childhood, whether busy or at rest,
With new-fledged hope still fluttering in his breast:
Not for these I raise
The song of thanks and praise;
But for those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings;
Blank misgivings of a Creature
Moving about in worlds not realised,
High instincts before which our mortal Nature
Did tremble like a guilty Thing surprised:
But for those first affections,
Those shadowy recollections,
Which, be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain-light of all our day,
Are yet a master-light of all our seeing;
Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make
Our noisy years seem moments in the being
Of the eternal Silence: truths that wake,
To perish never:
Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour,
Nor Man nor Boy,
Nor all that is at enmity with joy,
Can utterly abolish or destroy.
Hence in a season of calm weather
Though inland far we be,
Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither,
Can in a moment travel thither,
And see the Children sport upon the shore,
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.

X
Then sing, ye Birds, sing, sing a joyous song!
And let the young Lambs bound
As to the tabor’s sound!
We in thought will join your throng,
Ye that pipe and ye that play,
Ye that through your hearts to-day
Feel the gladness of the May!
What though the radiance which was once so bright
Be now forever taken from my sight,
Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;
   We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind;
In the primal sympathy
Which having been must ever be;
In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering;
In the faith that looks through death,
In years that bring the philosophic mind.

XI
And O, ye Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and Groves,
Forebode not any severing of our loves!
Yet in my heart of hearts I feel your might;
I only have relinquished one delight
To live beneath your more habitual sway.
I love the Brooks which down their channels fret,
Even more than when I tripped lightly as they;
The innocent brightness of a new-born Day
   Is lovely yet;
The Clouds that gather round the setting sun
Do take a sober colouring from an eye
That hath kept watch o’er man’s mortality;
Another race hath been, and other palms are won.
Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

From Lecture Four (Wordsworth):

The Prelude Book Fifth (excerpt)

… There was a Boy: ye knew him well, ye cliffs
And islands of Winander!—many a time
At evening, when the earliest stars began
To move along the edges of the hills,
Rising or setting, would he stand alone
Beneath the trees or by the glimmering lake,

And there, with fingers interwoven, both hands
Pressed closely palm to palm, and to his mouth
Uplifted, he, as through an instrument,
Blew mimic hootings to the silent owls,
That they might answer him; and they would shout
Across the watery vale, and shout again,
Responsive to his call, with quivering peals,
And long halloos and screams, and echoes loud,
Redoubled and redoubled, concourse wild
Of jocund din; and, when a lengthened pause
Of silence came and baffled his best skill,
Then sometimes, in that silence while he hung

Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise

©2002 The Teaching Company Limited Partnership
Has carried far into his heart the voice
Of mountain torrents; or the visible scene
Would enter unawares into his mind,
With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
Its woods, and that uncertain heaven, received
Into the bosom of the steady lake.

This Boy was taken from his mates, and died
In childhood, ere he was full twelve years old.

*The Prelude*, Book Twelfth
(excerpt)

…There are in our existence spots of time,
That with distinct pre-eminence retain
A renovating virtue, whence, depressed
By false opinion and contentious thought,
Or aught of heavier or more deadly weight,
In trivial occupations, and the round
Of ordinary intercourse, our minds
Are nourished and invisibly repaired;
A virtue, by which pleasure is enhanced,
That penetrates, enables us to mount,
When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen.
This efficacious spirit chiefly lurks
Among those passages of life that give
Profoundest knowledge to what point, and how,
The mind is lord and master—outward sense
The obedient servant of her will. Such moments
Are scattered everywhere, taking their date
From our first childhood.
From Lecture Five (Wordsworth):

The Prelude (excerpts from Book First)

Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up
Fostered alike by beauty and by fear:
Much favoured in my birth-place, and no less
In that beloved Vale to which erelong
We were transplanted—there were we let loose
For sports of wider range. Ere I had told
Ten birth-days, when among the mountain slopes
Frost, and the breath of frosty wind, had snapped
The last autumnal crocus, ’twas my joy
With store of springes o’er my shoulder hung
To range the open heights where woodcocks run
Along the smooth green turf. Through half the night,
Scudding away from snare to snare, I plied
That anxious visitation;—moon and stars
Were shining o’er my head. I was alone,
And seemed to be a trouble to the peace
That dwelt among them. Sometimes it befell
In these night wanderings, that a strong desire
O’erpowers my better reason, and the bird
Which was the captive of another’s toil
Became my prey; and when the deed was done
I heard among the solitary hills
Low breathings coming after me, and sounds
Of undistinguishable motion, steps
Almost as silent as the turf they trod.

Nor less, when spring had warmed the cultured Vale,
Roved we as plunderers where the mother-bird
Had in high places built her lodge; though mean
Our object and inglorious, yet the end
Was not ignoble. Oh! when I have hung
Above the raven’s nest, by knots of grass
And half-inch fissures in the slippery rock
But ill sustained, and almost (so it seemed)
Suspended by the blast that blew amain,
Shouldering the naked crag, oh, at that time
While on the perilous ridge I hung alone,
With what strange utterance did the loud dry wind
Blow through my ear! the sky seemed not a sky
Of earth—and with what motion moved the clouds!….

One summer evening (led by her) I found
A little boat tied to a willow tree
Within a rocky cave, its usual home.
Straight I unloosed her chain, and stepping in
Pushed from the shore. It was an act of stealth
And troubled pleasure, nor without the voice
Of mountain-echoes did my boat move on;
Leaving behind her still, on either side,
Small circles glittering idly in the moon,
Until they melted all into one track

©2002 The Teaching Company Limited Partnership
Of sparkling light. But now, like one who rows,
Proud of his skill, to reach a chosen point
With an unswerving line, I fixed my view
Upon the summit of a craggy ridge,
The horizon’s utmost boundary; for above
Was nothing but the stars and the grey sky.
She was an elfin pinnace; lustily
I dipped my oars into the silent lake,
And, as I rose upon the stroke, my boat
Went heaving through the water like a swan;
When, from behind that craggy steep till then
The horizon’s bound, a huge peak, black and huge,
As if with voluntary power instinct
Upreared its head. I struck and struck again,
And growing still in stature the grim shape
Towered up between me and the stars, and still,
For so it seemed, with purpose of its own
And measured motion like a living thing,
Strode after me. With trembling oars I turned,
And through the silent water stole my way
Back to the covert of the willow tree;
There in her mooring-place I left my bark,
And through the meadows homeward went, in grave
And serious mood; but after I had seen
That spectacle, for many days, my brain
Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
Of unknown modes of being; o’er my thoughts
There hung a darkness, call it solitude
Or blank desertion. No familiar shapes
Remained, no pleasant images of trees,
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;
But huge and mighty forms, that do not live
Like living men, moved slowly through the mind
By day, and were a trouble to my dreams…..

And in the frosty season, when the sun
Was set, and visible for many a mile
The cottage windows blazed through twilight gloom,
I heeded not their summons: happy time
It was indeed for all of us—for me
It was a time of rapture! Clear and loud
The village clock tolled six,—I wheeled about,
Proud and exulting like an untired horse
That cares not for his home. All shod with steel,
We hissed along the polished ice in games
Confederate, imitative of the chase
And woodland pleasures—the resounding horn,
The pack loud chiming, and the hunted hare.
So through the darkness and the cold we flew,
And not a voice was idle; with the din
Smitten, the precipices rang aloud;
The leafless trees and every icy crag
Tinkled like iron; while far distant hills
Into the tumult sent an alien sound
Of melancholy not unnoticed, while the stars
Eastward were sparkling clear, and in the west
The orange sky of evening died away.
Not seldom from the uproar I retired
Into a silent bay, or sportively
Glanced sideway, leaving the tumultuous throng,
To cut across the reflex of a star
That fled, and, flying still before me, gleamed
Upon the glassy plain; and oftentimes,
When we had given our bodies to the wind,
And all the shadowy banks on either side
Came sweeping through the darkness, spinning still
The rapid line of motion, then at once
Have I, reclining back upon my heels,
Stopped short; yet still the solitary cliffs
Wheeled by me—even as if the earth had rolled
With visible motion her diurnal round!
Behind me did they stretch in solemn train,
Feebler and feebler, and I stood and watched
Till all was tranquil as a dreamless sleep.
The Prelude (excerpt from Book Fourteenth)

…We came, and roused the shepherd who attends
The adventurous stranger’s steps, a trusty guide;
Then, cheered by short refreshment, sallied forth.

It was a close, warm, breezeless summer night,
Wan, dull, and glaring, with a dripping fog
Low-hung and thick that covered all the sky;
But, undiscouraged, we began to climb
The mountain-side. The mist soon girt us round,
And, after ordinary travellers’ talk
With our conductor, pensively we sank
Each into commerce with his private thoughts:
Thus did we breast the ascent, and by myself
Was nothing either seen or heard that checked
Those musings or diverted, save that once
The shepherd’s lurcher, who, among the crags,
Had to his joy unearthed a hedgehog, teased
His coiled-up prey with barkings turbulent.
This small adventure, for even such it seemed
In that wild place and at the dead of night,
Being over and forgotten, on we wound
In silence as before. With forehead bent
Earthward, as if in opposition set
Against an enemy, I panted up
With eager pace, and no less eager thoughts.
Thus might we wear a midnight hour away,
Ascending at loose distance each from each,
And I, as chanced, the foremost of the band;
When at my feet the ground appeared to brighten,
And with a step or two seemed brighter still;
Nor was time given to ask or learn the cause,
For instantly a light upon the turf
Fell like a flash, and lo! as I looked up
The Moon hung naked in a firmament
Of azure without cloud, and at my feet
Rested a silent sea of hoary mist.
A hundred hills their dusky backs upheaved
Allover this still ocean; and beyond,
Far, far beyond, the solid vapours stretched,
In headlands, tongues, and promontory shapes,
Into the main Atlantic, that appeared
To dwindle, and give up his majesty,
Usurped upon far as the sight could reach.
Not so the ethereal vault; encroachment none
Was there, nor loss; only the inferior stars
Had disappeared, or shed a fainter light
In the clear presence of the full-orbed Moon,
Who, from her sovereign elevation, gazed
Upon the billowy ocean, as it lay
All meek and silent, save that through a rift
Not distant from the shore whereon we stood,
A fixed, abysmal, gloomy, breathing-place
Mounted the roar of waters, torrents, streams
Innumerable, roaring with one voice!
Heard over earth and sea, and, in that hour,
For so it seemed, felt by the starry heavens.

When into air had partially dissolved
That vision, given to spirits of the night
And three chance human wanderers, in calm thought
Reflected, it appeared to me the type
Of a majestic intellect, its acts
And its possessions, what it has and craves,
What in itself it is, and would become.
There I beheld the emblem of a mind
That feeds upon infinity, that broods
Over the dark abyss, intent to hear
Its voices issuing forth to silent light
In one continuous stream; a mind sustained
By recognitions of transcendent power,
In sense conducting to ideal form,
In soul of more than mortal privilege.
One function, above all, of such a mind
Had Nature shadowed there, by putting forth,
‘Mid circumstances awful and sublime,
That mutual domination which she loves
To exert upon the face of outward things,
So moulded, joined, abstracted, so endowed
With interchangeable supremacy,
That men, least sensitive, see, hear, perceive,
And cannot choose but feel. The power, which all
Acknowledge when thus moved, which Nature thus
To bodily sense exhibits, is the express
Resemblance of that glorious faculty
That higher minds bear with them as their own.

From Lecture Six (Coleridge):

The Eolian Harp

My pensive Sara! thy soft cheek reclined
Thus on mine arm, most soothing sweet it is
To sit beside our Cot, our Cot o’ergrown
With white-flower’d Jasmin, and the broad-leav’d Myrtle,
(Meet emblems they of Innocence and Love!)
And watch the clouds, that late were rich with light,
Slow saddening round, and mark the star of eve
Serenely brilliant (such should Wisdom be)
Shine opposite! How exquisite the scents
Snatch’d from yon bean-field! and the world so hush’d!
The stilly murmur of the distant Sea
Tells us of silence,
And that simplest Lute,
Placed length-ways in the clasping casement, hark!
How by the desultory breeze caress’d,
Like some coy maid half yielding to her lover,
It pours such sweet upbraiding, as must needs
Tempt to repeat the wrong! And now, its strings
Boldlier swept, the long sequacious notes
Over delicious surges sink and rise,
Such a soft floating witchery of sound
As twilight Elfins make, when they at eve
Voyage on gentle gales from Fairy-Land,
Where Melodies round honey-dropping flowers,
Footless and wild, like birds of Paradise,
Nor pause, nor perch, hovering on untam’d wing!
O! the one Life within us and abroad,
Which meets all motion and becomes its soul,
A light in sound, a sound-like power in light,
Rhythm in all thought, and joyance every where
Methinks, it should have been impossible
Not to love all things in a world so fill’d;
Where the breeze warbles, and the mute still air
Is Music slumbering on her instrument.

And thus, my Love! as on the midway slope
Of yonder hill I stretch my limbs at noon,
Whilst through my half-clos’d eye-lids I behold
The sunbeams dance, like diamonds, on the main,
And tranquil muse upon tranquillity;
Full many a thought uncall’d and undetain’d,
And many idle flitting phantasies,
As wild and various as the random gales
That swell and flutter on this subject Lute!
And what if all of animated nature
Be but organic Harps diversely fram’d,
That tremble into thought, as o’er them sweeps
Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze.
At once the Soul of each, and God of all?

But thy more serious eye a mild reproof
Darts, O beloved Woman! nor such thoughts
Dim and unhallow’d dost thou not reject,
And biddest me walk humbly with my God.
Meek Daughter in the family of Christ!
Well hast thou said and holily disprais’d
These shapings of the unregenerate mind;
Bubbles that glitter as they rise and break
On vain Philosophy’s aye-babbling spring.
For never guiltless may I speak of him,
The Incomprehensible! save when with awe
I praise him, and with Faith that inly feels:
Who with his saving mercies healed me,
A sinful and most miserable man,
Wilder’d and dark, and gave me to possess
Peace, and this Cot, and thee, heart-honour’d Maid!

This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison

Well, they are gone, and here must I remain,
This lime-tree bower my prison! I have lost
Beauty and feelings, such as would have been
Most sweet to my remembrance even when age
Had dimm’d mine eyes to blindness! They, meanwhile,
Friends, whom I never more may meet again,
On springy heath, along the hill-top edge,
Wander in gladness, and wind down, perchance,
To that still roaring dell, of which I told;
The roaring dell, o’erwooded, narrow, deep,
And only speckled by the mid-day sun;
Where its slim trunk the ash from rock to rock
Flings arching like a bridge—that branchless ash,
Unsunn’d and damp, whose few poor yellow leaves
Ne’er tremble in the gale, yet tremble still,
Fann’d by the water-fall! and there my friends
Behold the dark green file of long lank weeds,
That all at once (a most fantastic sight!)
Still nod and drip beneath the dripping edge
Of the blue clay-stone.

Now, my friends emerge
Beneath the wide wide Heaven—and view again
The many-steepled tract magnificent
Of hilly fields and meadows, and the sea,
With some fair bark, perhaps, whose sails light up
The slip of smooth clear blue betwixt two Isles
Of purple shadow! Yes! they wander on
In gladness all; but thou, methinks, most glad,
My gentle-hearted Charles! for thou hast pined
And hunger’d after Nature, many a year,
In the great City pent, winning thy way
With sad yet patient soul, through evil and pain
And strange calamity! Ah! slowly sink
Behind the western ridge, thou glorious Sun!
Shine in the slant beams of the sinking orb,
Ye purple heath-flowers! richlier burn, ye clouds!
Live in the yellow light, ye distant groves!
And kindle, thou blue Ocean! So my friend
Struck with deep joy may stand, as I have stood,
Silent with swimming sense; yea, gazing round
On the wide landscape, gaze till all doth seem
Less gross than bodily; and of such hues
As veil the Almighty Spirit, when yet he makes
Spirits perceive his presence.

A delight
Comes sudden on my heart, and I am glad
As I myself were there! Nor in this bower,
This little lime-tree bower, have I not mark’d
Much that has sooth’d me. Pale beneath the blaze
Hung the transparent foliage; and I watch’d
Some broad and sunny leaf, and lov’d to see
The shadow of the leaf and stem above
Dappling its sunshine! And that walnut-tree
Was richly ting’d, and a deep radiance lay
Full on the ancient ivy, which usurps
Those fronting elms, and now, with blackest mass
Makes their dark branches gleam a lighter hue
Through the late twilight: and though now the bat
Wheels silent by, and not a swallow twitters,
Yet still the solitary humble-bee
Sings in the bean-flower! Henceforth I shall know
That Nature ne’er deserts the wise and pure;
No plot so narrow, be but Nature there,
No waste so vacant, but may well employ
Each faculty of sense, and keep the heart
Awake to Love and Beauty! and sometimes
‘Tis well to be bereft of promis’d good,
That we may lift the soul, and contemplate
With lively joy the joys we cannot share.
My gentle-hearted Charles! when the last rook
Beat its straight path along the dusky air
Homewards, I blest it! deeming its black wing
(Now a dim speck, now vanishing in light)
Had cross’d the mighty Orb’s dilated glory,
While thou stood’st gazing; or, when all was still,
Flew creeking o’er thy head, and had a charm
For thee, my gentle-hearted Charles, to whom
No sound is dissonant which tells of Life.

From Lecture Seven (Coleridge):

From Christabel, Part I (lines 244–278)

Beneath the lamp the lady bowed,
And slowly rolled her eyes around;
Then drawing in her breath aloud,
Like one that shuddered, she unbound
The cincture from beneath her breast:
Her silken robe, and inner vest,
Dropt to her feet, and full in view,
Behold! her bosom and half her side
A sight to dream of, not to tell!
O shield her! shield sweet Christabel!

Yet Geraldine nor speaks nor stirs;
Ah! what a stricken look was hers!
Deep from within she seems half-way
To lift some weight with sick assay,
And eyes the maid and seeks delay;
Then suddenly, as one defied,
Collects herself in scorn and pride,
And lay down by the Maiden’s side!
And in her arms the maid she took,
Ah wel-a-day!
Rime of the Ancient Mariner (excerpts)

Part I
...He holds him with his glittering eye
The Wedding-Guest stood still,
And listens like a three years’ child:
The Mariner hath his will.

The Wedding-Guest sat on a stone:
He cannot choose but hear;
And thus spake on that ancient man,
The bright-eyed Mariner….

At length did cross an Albatross,
Thorough the fog it came;
As if it had been a Christian soul,
We hailed it in God’s name….

In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud,
It perched for vespers nine;
Whiles all the night, through fog-smoke white,
Glimmered the white Moon-shine.”

“God save thee, ancient Mariner!
From the fiends, that plague thee thus!
O Why look’st thou so?”
With my cross-bow
I shot the ALBATROSS….

Part IV
...Alone, alone, all, all alone,
Alone on a wide wide sea!
And never a saint took pity on
My soul in agony….

Within the shadow of the ship
I watched their rich attire:
Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,
They coiled and swam; and every track
Was a flash of golden fire.

O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love gushed from my heart,
And I blessed them unaware:
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
And I blessed them unaware.

The self-same moment I could pray;
And from my neck so free
The Albatross fell off, and sank
Like lead into the sea.

Part VII
...I moved my lips—the Pilot shrieked

And fell down in a fit;
The holy Hermit raised his eyes,
And prayed where he did sit.

I took the oars: the Pilot’s boy,
Who now doth crazy go,
Laughed loud and long, and all the while…

Forthwith this frame of mine was wrenched
With a woful agony,
Which forced me to begin my tale;
And then it left me free.

Since then, at an uncertain hour,
That agony returns:
And till my ghastly tale is told,
This heart within me burns.

I pass, like night, from land to land;
I have strange power of speech;
That moment that his face I see,
I know the man that must hear me:
To him my tale I teach.

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 Mariner, whose eye is bright,
Whose beard with age is hoar,
Is gone: and now the Wedding-Guest
Turned from the bridegroom’s door.

He went like one that hath been stunned,
And is of sense forlorn:
A sadder and a wiser man,

Kubla Khan

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.
So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round:
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
And here were forests ancient as the hills,
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!
A savage place! as holy and enchanted
As e’er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon-lover!
And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,
As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,
A mighty fountain momently was forced:
Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail:
And ’mid these dancing rocks at once and ever
It flung up momently the sacred river.
Five miles meandering with a mazy motion
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,
Then reached the caverns measureless to man,
And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean:
And ’mid this tumult Kubla heard from far
Ancestral voices prophesying war!
The shadow of the dome of pleasure
Floated midway on the waves;
Where was heard the mingled measure
From the fountain and the caves.
It was a miracle of rare device,
A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!

A damsel with a dulcimer
In a vision once I saw:
It was an Abyssinian maid,
And on her dulcimer she played,
Singing of Mount Abora.
Could I revive within me
Her symphony and song,
To such a deep delight ’twould win me,
That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! those caves of ice!
And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

From Lecture Eight (Coleridge):

To William Wordsworth (excerpts)

….O great Bard!
Ere yet that last strain dying awed the air,
With stedfast eye I viewed thee in the choir
Of ever-enduring men. The truly great
Have all one age, and from one visible space
Shed influence! They, both in power and act,
Are permanent, and Time is not with them,
Save as it worketh for them, they in it.
Nor less a sacred Roll, than those of old,
And to be placed, as they, with gradual fame
Among the archives of mankind, thy work
Makes audible a linked lay of Truth,
Of Truth profound a sweet continuous lay,
Not learnt, but native, her own natural notes!
Ah! as I listened with a heart forlorn,
The pulses of my being beat anew:
And even as Life returns upon the drowned,
Life’s joy rekindling roused a throng of pains
Keen pangs of Love, awakening as a babe
Turbulent, with an outcry in the heart;
And fears self-willed, that shunned the eye of Hope;
And Hope that scarce would know itself from Fear;
Sense of past Youth, and Manhood come in vain,
And Genius given, and Knowledge won in vain;
And all which I had culled in wood-walks wild,
And all which patient toil had reared, and all,
Commune with thee had opened out—but flowers
Strewed on my corse, and borne upon my bier
In the same coffin, for the self-same grave!….

And when—O Friend! my comforter and guide!
Strong in thyself, and powerful to give strength!
Thy long sustained Song finally closed,
And thy deep voice had ceased—yet thou thyself
Wert still before my eyes, and round us both
That happy vision of beloved faces
Scarce conscious, and yet conscious of its close
I sate, my being blended in one thought
(Thought was it? or aspiration? or resolve?)
Absorbed, yet hanging still upon the sound
And when I rose, I found myself in prayer.

Dejection: An Ode (excerpts)
Well! If the Bard was weather-wise, who made
The grand old ballad of Sir Patrick Spence,
This night, so tranquil now, will not go hence
Unroused by winds, that ply a busier trade
Than those which mould yon cloud in lazy flakes,
Or the dull sobbing draft, that moans and rakes
Upon the strings of this Eolian lute,
Which better far were mute.
For lo! the New-moon winter-bright!
And overspread with phantom light,
(With swimming phantom light o’erspread
But rimmed and circled by a silver thread)
I see the old Moon in her lap, foretelling
The coming-on of rain and squally blast.
And oh! that even now the gust were swelling,
And the slant night-shower driving loud and fast!
Those sounds which oft have raised me, whilst they awed,
And sent my soul abroad,
Might now perhaps their wonted impulse give,
Might startle this dull pain, and make it move and live!

I

A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear,
A stifled, drowsy, unimpassioned grief,
Which finds no natural outlet, no relief,
In word, or sigh, or tear—
O Lady! in this wan and heartless mood,
To other thoughts by yonder throstle woo’d,
All this long eve, so balmy and serene,
Have I been gazing on the western sky,
And its peculiar tint of yellow green:
And still I gaze—and with how blank an eye!
And those thin clouds above, in flakes and bars,
That give away their motion to the stars;
Those stars, that glide behind them or between,
Now sparkling, now bedimmed, but always seen:
Yon crescent Moon, as fixed as if it grew
In its own cloudless, starless lake of blue;
I see them all so excellently fair,
I see, not feel, how beautiful they are!

II

My genial spirits fail;
And what can these avail
To lift the smothering weight from off my breast?
It were a vain endeavour,
Though I should gaze for ever
On that green light that lingers in the west:
I may not hope from outward forms to win
The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.

III

There was a time when, though my path was rough,
This joy within me dallied with distress,
And all misfortunes were but as the stuff
   Whence Fancy made me dreams of happiness:
For hope grew round me, like the twining vine,
And fruits, and foliage, not my own, seemed mine.
But now afflictions bow me down to earth:
Nor care I that they rob me of my mirth;
   But oh! each visitation
Suspends what nature gave me at my birth,
   My shaping spirit of Imagination.
For not to think of what I needs must feel,
   But to be still and patient, all I can;
And haply by abstruse research to steal
   From my own nature all the natural man—
This was my sole resource, my only plan:
Till that which suits a part infects the whole,
And now is almost grown the habit of my soul.

*Work without Hope*

All Nature seems at work. Slugs leave their lair—
The bees are stirring—birds are on the wing—
And Winter slumbering in the open air,
Wears on his smiling face a dream of Spring!
And I the while, the sole unbusy thing,
Nor honey make, nor pair, nor build, nor sing.

   Yet well I ken the banks where amaranths blow,
Have traced the font whence streams of nectar flow.
Bloom, O ye amaranths! bloom for whom ye may,
For me ye bloom not! Glide, rich streams, away!
With lips unbrightened, wreathless brow, I stroll:
And would you learn the spells that drowse my soul?
Work without Hope draws nectar in a sieve,
And Hope without an object cannot live.

*From Lecture Nine (Blake):*

*Song*

*(How Sweet I roam’d from field to field)*

How sweet I roam’d from field to field,
   And tasted all the summer’s pride,
‘Till I the prince of love beheld,
   Who in the sunny beams did glide!

He shew’d me lillies for my hair,
   And blushing roses for my brow;
He led me through his gardens fair,
   Where all his golden pleasures grow.

With sweet May dews my wings were wet,
   And Phoebus fir’d my vocal rage;
He caught me in his silken net,
   And shut me in his golden cage.
He loves to sit and hear me sing,
    Then, laughing, sports and plays with me;
Then stretches out my golden wing,
    And mocks my loss of liberty.

Introduction
(Piping Down the Valleys Wild)

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,

The Shepherd

How sweet is the Shepherds sweet lot,
From the morn to the evening he strays:
He shall follow his sheep all the day
And his tongue shall be filled with praise.
For he hears the lambs innocent call,
And he hears the ewes tender reply,
He is watchful while they are in peace,
For they know when their Shepherd is nigh.

The Ecchoing Green

The Sun does arise,
And make happy the skies.
The merry bells ring
To welcome the Spring.
The sky-lark and thrush,
The birds of the bush,
Sing louder around,
To the bells chearful sound.
While our sports shall be seen
On the Ecchoing Green.

Old John with white hair
Does laugh away care,
Sitting under the oak,
Among the old folk,
They laugh at our play,

The Blossom

Merry Merry Sparrow
Under leaves so green

A happy Blossom
Sees you swift as arrow
Seek your cradle narrow
Near my Bosom.
Pretty Pretty Robin
Under leaves so green

A happy Blossom
Hears you sobbing sobbing
Pretty Pretty Robin
Near my Bosom.

**Holy Thursday**

Twas on a Holy Thursday their innocent faces clean
The children walking two & two in red & blue & green
Grey headed beadles walkd before with wands as white as snow
Till into the high dome of Pauls they like Thames waters flow

O what a multitude they seemd these flowers of London town
Seated in companies they sit with radiance all their own
The hum of multitudes was there but multitudes of lambs
Thousands of little boys & girls raising their innocent hands

Now like a mighty wind they raise to heaven the voice of song
Or like harmonious thunderings the seats of heaven among
Beneath them sit the aged men wise guardians of the poor
Then cherish pity, lest you drive an angel from your door

**The Chimney Sweeper**

When my mother died I was very young,
And my father sold me while yet my tongue,
Could scarcely cry weep weep weep weep.
So your chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep.

There’s little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head
That curl’d like a lambs back, was shav’ed, so I said.
Hush Tom never mind it, for when your head’s bare,
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair.

And so he was quiet, & that very night,
As Tom was a sleeping he had such a sight,
That thousands of sweepers Dick, Joe Ned & Jack
Were all of them lock’d up in coffins of black

And by came an Angel who had a bright key,
And he open’d the coffins & set them all free.
Then down a green plain leaping laughing they run
And wash in a river and shine in the Sun.

Then naked & white, all their bags left behind,
They rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind.
And the Angel told Tom if he’d be a good boy,
He’d have God for his father & never want joy.

And so Tom awoke and we rose in the dark
And got with our bags & our brushes to work.
Tho’ the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm,
So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm.

**From Lecture Ten (Blake):**

**The Tyger**
Tyger Tyger, burning bright,  
In the forests of the night;  
What immortal hand or eye,  
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies  
Burnt the fire of thine eyes!  
On what wings dare he aspire?  
What the hand, dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,  
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?  
And when thy heart began to beat,  
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain,  
In what furnace was thy brain?  
What the anvil? what dread grasp,  
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears  
And water’d heaven with their tears:  
Did he smile his work to see?  
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger, Tyger burning bright,  
In the forests of the night:  
What immortal hand or eye,  
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

---

**Ah Sun-Flower**

Ah Sun-flower! weary of time,  
Who countest the steps of the Sun:  
Seeking after that sweet golden clime  
Where the travellers journey is done.

Where the Youth pined away with desire,  
And the pale Virgin shrouded in snow:  
Arise from their graves, and aspire,  
Where my Sun-flower wishes to go.

---

**My Pretty Rose Tree**

A flower was offerd to me;  
Such a flower as May never bore.  
But I said I’ve a Pretty Rose-tree,  
And I passed the sweet flower o’er.

Then I went to my Pretty Rose-tree;  
To tend her by day and by night.  
But my Rose turnd away with jealousy:  
And her thorns were my only delight.

---

**The Garden of Love**

I went to the Garden of Love,  
And saw what I never had seen:  
A Chapel was built in the midst,  
Where I used to play on the green.

And the gates of this Chapel were shut,  
And Thou shalt not. writ over the door;  
So I turn’d to the Garden of Love,  
That so many sweet flowers bore,  
And I saw it was filled with graves,  
And tomb-stones where flowers should be:  
And Priests in black gowns, were walking their rounds,  
And binding with briars, my joys & desires.

---

**London**

I wander thro’ each charter’d street,  
Near where the charter’d Thames does flow.  
And mark in every face I meet  
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every Man,  
In every Infants cry of fear,  
In every voice: in every ban,  
The mind-forg’d manacles I hear

How the Chimney-sweepers cry  
Every blackning Church appalls,  
And the hapless Soldiers sigh,  
Runs in blood down Palace walls

But most thro’ midnight streets I hear  
How the youthful Harlots curse  
Blasts the new-born Infants tear  
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse

---

**The Crystal Cabinet**
The Maiden caught me in the Wild
Where I was dancing merrily
She put me into her Cabinet
And Lock’d me up with a golden Key

This Cabinet is formd of Gold
And Pearl & Crystal shining bright
And within it opens into a World
And a little lovely Moony Night

Another England there I saw
Another London with its Tower
Another Thames & other Hills
And another pleasant Surrey Bower

Another Maiden like herself
Translucent lovely shining clear
Threefold each in the other closd
O what a pleasant trembling fear

I travel’d thro’ a Land of Men
A Land of Men & Women too
And heard & saw such dreadful things
As cold Earth wanderers never knew

For there the Babe is born in joy
That was begotten in dire woe
Just as we Reap in joy the fruit
Which we in bitter tears did sow

And if the Babe is born a Boy
He’s given to a Woman Old
Who nails him down upon a rock
Catches his shrieks in cups of gold

She binds iron thorns around his head
She pierces both his hands & feet
She cuts his heart out at his side
To make it feel both cold & heat

Her fingers number every Nerve
Just as a Miser counts his gold
She lives upon his shrieks & cries
And she grows young as he grows old

Till he becomes a bleeding youth
And she becomes a Virgin bright
Then he rends up his Manacles
And binds her down for his delight

He plants himself in all her Nerves
Just as a Husbandman his mould
And she becomes his dwelling place
And Garden fruitful seventy fold

The Mental Traveller

An aged Shadow soon he fades
Wandring round an Earthly Cot
Full filled all with gems & gold
Which he by industry had got

And these are the gems of the Human Soul
The rubies & pearls of a lovesick eye
The countless gold of the akeing heart
The martyrs groan & the lovers sigh

They are his meat they are his drink
He feeds the Beggar & the Poor
And the wayfaring Traveller
For ever open is his door

His grief is their eternal joy
They make the roof & walls to ring
Till from the fire on the hearth
A little Female Babe does spring

And she is all of solid fire
And gems & gold, that none his hand
Dares stretch to touch her Baby form
Or wrap her in his swaddling-band

But she comes to the Man she loves
If young or old or rich or poor
They soon drive out the aged Host
A Beggar at anothers door

He wanders weeping far away
Until some other take him in
Oft blind & age-bent sore distrest
Untill he can a Maiden win
And to allay his freezing Age
The Poor Man takes her in his arms
The Cottage fades before his sight
The Garden & its lovely Charms

The Guests are scatterd thro' the land
For the Eye altering alters all
The Senses roll themselves in fear
And the flat Earth becomes a Ball
The stars sun Moon all shrink away
A desart vast without a bound
And nothing left to eat or drink
And a dark desart all around
The honey of her Infant lips
The bread & wine of her sweet smile
The wild game of her roving Eye
Does him to Infancy beguile

For as he eats & drinks he grows
Younger & younger every day
And on the des art wild they both
Wander in terror & dismay
Like the wild Stag she flees away
Her fear plants many a thicket wild
While he pursues her night & day
By various arts of Love beguild
By various arts of Love & Hate
Till the wide desart planted oer
With Labyrinths of wayward Love
Where roam the Lion Wolf & Boar
Till he becomes a wayward Babe
And she a weeping Woman Old
Then many a Lover wanders here
The Sun & Stars are nearer rolld
The trees bring forth sweet Extacy
To all who in the desart roam
Till many a City there is Built
And many a pleasant Shepherds home
But when they find the frowning Babe
Terror strikes thro the region wide
They cry The Babe the Babe is Born
And flee away on Every side
For who dare touch the frowning form
His arm is witherd to its root
Lions Boars Wolves all howling flee
And every Tree does shed its fruit
And none can touch that frowning form
Except it be a Woman Old
She nails him down upon the Rock
And all is done as I have told

Auguries of Innocence (excerpt)

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour
A Robin Red breast in a Cage
Puts all Heaven in a Rage
A dove house filld with doves & Pigeons
Shudders Hell thro all its regions
A dog starvd at his Masters Gate
Predicts the ruin of the State…

From Lecture Eleven (Blake):

Book of Urizen (excerpt)
Chap: I

1. Lo, a shadow of horror is risen
In Eternity! Unknown, unprolific!
Self-closd, all-repelling: what Demon
Hath form’d this abominable void
This soul-shudd’ring vacuum?—
Some said “It is Urizen”, But unknown, abstracted
Brooding secret, the dark power hid.

2. Times on times he divided, & measur’d
Space by space in his ninefold darkness
Unseen, unknown! changes appeard
In his desolate mountains rifted furious
By the black winds of perturbation

3. For he strove in battles dire
In unseen conflictions with shapes
Bred from his forsaken wilderness,
Of beast, bird, fish, serpent & element
Combustion, blast, vapour and cloud.

4. Dark revolving in silent activity:
Unseen in tormenting passions;
An activity unknown and horrible;
A self-contemplating shadow,
In enormous labours occupied….

Visions of the Daughters of Albion (excerpts)
Plate 2

...Why does my Theotormon sit weeping upon the threshold;
And Oothoon hovers by his side, perswading him in vam:
I cry arise O Theotormon for the village dog
Barks at the breaking day. the nightingale has done lamenting.
The lark does rustle in the ripe corn, and the Eagle returns
From nightly prey, and lifts his golden beak to the pure east;
Shaking the dust from his immortal pinions to awake
The sun that sleepes too long. Arise my Theotormon I am pure.
Because the night is gone that clos’d me in its deadly black.
They told me that the night & day were all that I could see;
They told me that I had five sense to inclose me up….

Silent I hover all the night, and all day could be silent.
If Theotormon once would turn his loved eyes upon me;
How can I be defild when I reflect thy image pure?
Sweetest the fruit that the worm feeds on. & the soul prey’d on by woe
The new wash’d lamb ting’d with the village smoke & the bright swan  
By the red earth of our immortal river: I bathe my wings.  
And I am white and pure to hover round Theotormons breast…

O Urizen! Creator of men! mistaken Demon of heaven:  
Thy joys are tears! thy labour vain, to form men to thine image.  
How can one joy absorb another? are not different joys  
Holy, eternal, infinite! and each joy is a Love…  

Book of Thel (excerpts)

Plate i

Thel's Motto

Does the Eagle know what is in the pit?  
Or wilt thou go ask the Mole:  
Can Wisdom be put in a silver rod?  
Or Love in a golden bowl?

Plate I

Thel

I

O life of this our spring! why fades the lotus of the water?  
Why fade these children of the spring? born but to smile & fall.  
Ah! Thel is like a watry bow, and like a parting cloud,  
Like a reflection in a glass. like shadows in the water.  
Like dreams of infants. like a smile upon an infants face,  
Like the doves voice, like transient day, like music in the air;  
Ah! gentle may I lay me down, and gentle rest my head.  
And gentle sleep the sleep of death. and gentle hear the voice  
Of him that walketh in the garden in the evening time…

Plate 3

II

O little Cloud the virgin said, I charge thee tell to me,  
Why thou complainest not when in one hour thou fade away:  
Then we shall seek thee but not find; ah Thel is like to Thee.  
I pass away, yet I complain, and no one hears my voice.  
The Cloud then shew’d his golden head & his bright form emerg’d,  
Hovering and glittering on the air before the face of Thel…..

Dost thou O little Cloud? I fear that I am not like thee;  
For I walk through the vales of Har. and smell the sweetest flowers;  
But I feed not the little flowers: I hear the warbling birds,  
But I feed not the warbling birds. they fly and seek their food;  
But Thel delights in these no more because I fade away,  
And all shall say, without a use this shining woman liv’d,  
Or did she only live. to be at death the food of worms…

From Lecture Twelve (Felicia Dorothea Hemans and Charlotte Smith):
Casabianca

The boy stood on the burning deck,  
Whence all but he had fled;  
The flame that lit the battle’s wreck  
Shone round him o’er the dead.

Yet beautiful and bright he stood,  
As born to rule the storm  
A creature of heroic blood,  
A proud, though childlike form.

The flames rolled on—he would not go  
Without his father’s word;  
That father, faint in death below,  
His voice no longer heard.
He called aloud—"Say, father! say
If yet my task is done!"
He knew not that the chieftain lay
Unconscious of his son.

“Speak, father!” once again he cried,
“If I may yet be gone!”
And but the booming shots replied,
And fast the flames rolled on.

Upon his brow he felt their breath,
And in his waving hair,
And looked from that lone post of death
In still yet brave despair;

And shouted but once more aloud,
“My father! must I stay?”
While o’er him fast, through sail and shroud,
The wreathing fires made way.

They wrapped the ship in splendor wild,
They caught the flag on high,
And streamed above the gallant child
Lake banners in the sky.

There came a burst of thunder sound--
The boy—O, where was he?
Ask of the winds that far around
With fragments strewed the sea!

With mast, and helm, and pennon fair,
That well had borne their part;
But the noblest thing which perished there
Was that young faithful heart!

The Homes of England

“Where’s the coward that would not dare
To fight for such a land?” Marmion.

The stately homes of England!
How beautiful they stand,
Amidst their tall ancestral trees,
O’er all the pleasant land!
The deer across their greensward bound,
Through shade and sunny gleam;
And the swan glides past them with the sound
Of some rejoicing stream.

The merry homes of England!
Around their hearths, by night,
What gladsome looks of household love
Meet in the ruddy light!
There woman’s voice flows forth in song,
Or childhood’s tale is told,
Or lips move tunefully along
Some glorious page of old.
The blessed homes of England!
How softly on their bowers
Is laid the holy quietness
That breathes from Sabbath hours!
Solemn, yet sweet, the church-bell’s chime
Floats through their woods at morn;
All other sounds, in that still time,
Of breeze and leaf are born.
The cottage homes of England!
By thousands, on her plains,
They are smiling o’er the silvery brooks,
And round the hamlet fanes.
Through glowing orchards forth they peep,
Each from its nook of leaves:
And fearless there the lowly sleep,
As the bird beneath their caves.

The free, fair homes of England!
Long, long, in hut and hall,
May hearts of native proof be reared
To guard each hallowed wall!
And green forever be the groves,
And bright the flowery sod,
Where first the child’s glad spirit loves
Its country and its God!

The Graves of a Household

They grew in beauty, side by side,
They fill’d one home with glee;
Their graves are sever’d, far and wide,
By mount, and stream, and sea.
The same fond mother bent at night
O’er each fair sleeping brow;
She had each folded flower in sight
Where are those dreamers now?
One, ‘midst the forest of the west,
By a dark stream is laid
The Indian knows his place of rest,
Far in the cedar shade.

The sea, the blue lone sea, hath one
He lies where pearls lie deep;
He was the loved of all, yet none
O’er his low bed may weep.
One sleeps where southern vines are drest,
Above the noble slain:
He wrapt his colours round his breast
On a blood-red field of Spain.
And one—o’er her the myrtle showers
Its leaves, by soft winds fann’d;
She faded ‘midst Italian flowers
The last of that bright band.
And parted thus they rest, who play'd
Beneath the same green tree;
Whose voices mingled as they pray'd
Around one parent knee!

They that with smiles lit up the hall,
And cheer'd with song the hearth
Alas! for love, if thou wert all,
And nought beyond, O earth!

*On Being Cautioned against Walking on an Headland Overlooking the Sea, Because It Was Frequented by a Lunatic.*

Is there a solitary wretch who hies
To the tall cliff, with starting pace or slow,
And, measuring, views with wild and hollow eyes
Its distance from the waves that chide below;
Who, as the sea-born gale with frequent sighs
Chills his cold bed upon the mountain turf,
With hoarse, half-utter'd lamentation, lies
Murmuring responses to the dashing surf?
In moody sadness, on the giddy brink,
I see him more with envy than with fear;
*He* has no *nice felicities* that shrink
From giant horrors; wildly wandering here,
He seems (uncursed with reason) not to know
The depth or the duration of his woe.
### Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Range</th>
<th>Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1749–1806</td>
<td>Charlotte Turner Smith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1757–1827</td>
<td>William Blake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1770–1850</td>
<td>William Wordsworth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1772–1834</td>
<td>Samuel Taylor Coleridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1788–1824</td>
<td>George Gordon, Lord Byron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1789</td>
<td>Storming the of the Bastille (July 14); start of the French Revolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1789</td>
<td>Blake, <em>Songs of Innocence</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1790–1793</td>
<td>Blake, <em>The Marriage of Heaven and Hell</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1792–1822</td>
<td>Percy Bysshe Shelley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1793</td>
<td>Reign of Terror in France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1793–1835</td>
<td>Felicia Hemans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1794</td>
<td>Blake, <em>Songs of Experience</em>; Coleridge leaves Cambridge without degree, meets Robert Southey, and plans Pantisocracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1795</td>
<td>Wordsworth and Coleridge meet; Schiller, <em>On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1798</td>
<td>First edition, <em>Lyrical Ballads</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1798–1799</td>
<td>Wordsworth in Germany with his sister; Coleridge in Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800</td>
<td>Second edition of <em>Lyrical Ballads</em> (with Wordsworth’s Preface)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1802</td>
<td>Wordsworth marries Mary Hutchinson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1802–1803</td>
<td>Peace of Amiens between England and France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1803–1815</td>
<td>War between France and England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1809</td>
<td>Blake, <em>Descriptive Catalogue</em> of his one public exhibition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1811</td>
<td>George III declared insane and replaced by his son, the Prince of Wales; Shelley marries Harriet Westbrook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1812</td>
<td>Byron, <em>Childe Harold</em>, Cantos 1 and 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1814</td>
<td>Shelley meets Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1815</td>
<td>Napoleon defeated at Waterloo; Byron marries Annabella Milbanke; Keats begins his medical studies in London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1816</td>
<td>Byron leaves England for the Continent; Shelley and Byron meet; Shelley composes “Mont Blanc” and “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1817</td>
<td>Coleridge, <em>Biographia Literaria</em>; Byron, <em>Manfred</em>; Keats, <em>Poems</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1818</td>
<td>Byron begins <em>Don Juan</em>; Shelley leaves England forever; Keats, <em>Endymion</em>; Tom Keats dies (December)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1819</td>
<td>Peterloo Massacre (August); Keats composes “To Autumn” (September)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1820</td>
<td>Keats, <em>Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes and Other Poems</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1821–1827</td>
<td>Greek War of Independence from Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1823</td>
<td>Byron sails for Greece</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1842 ................................................ Wordsworth named Poet Laureate after death of Robert Southey
1850 ................................................ Wordsworth, The Prelude (posthumous)
Glossary

**Aeolian harp**: A boxed-shaped musical instrument on which strings are stretched. These catch the wind, which produces various tones. Named for the Greek god of the winds, Aeolus. The harp became a symbol for the relationship between the human mind (or imagination) and external inspiration.

**Autobiography**: Any writing about the self. We associate this genre with the modern, that is, post-classical world, and especially with Christian habits of self-examination. Thus, the first real autobiography is the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine (354–430); modern examples would include the work of Ben Franklin, Henry David Thoreau, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (*Confessions*), and Wordsworth’s *Prelude*.

**Biographia Literaria**: Coleridge’s 1817 prose work that combines literary theory and criticism with autobiography, remarks on literary journalism, and considerable “borrowings” (including undocumented translations) from German Romantic writers.

**Blank verse**: Unrhymed iambic pentameter. Used for the first time in England by the Earl of Surrey in his 1540 translation of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, then popularized by Shakespeare in his plays and, above all, by Milton in *Paradise Lost*.

**Byronic hero**: The name we now conventionally assign to a dark, brooding, gloomy, and guilt-obsessed man, based to some extent on Lord Byron and some of his poetic creations.

**“Conversation” poem**: A term first invented by Coleridge for “The Nightingale” (1798) to refer to a long poem addressed to a real or imagined listener in which the poet thinks aloud.

**Dactylic hexameter**: The standard meter of Greek and Latin epics, containing six feet to a line, each consisting of one stressed (or long) syllable, followed by two unstressed (or short) ones.

**Eclogue**: Although the Greek word literally means “selection,” it was used by Virgil for his ten pastoral poems (37 B.C.E) and now refers conventionally to any pastoral poem employing the figures of shepherds.

**Empathy**: Rough English translation of the German *einfühlung* (“feeling into”), a hallmark of Romanticism. For example, we read in Keats: “if a sparrow comes before my window I take part in its existence and pick about the gravel.”

**Empiricism**: From the Greek word for “experience,” this term covers a wide range of thinkers and philosophies. Primarily it refers to the belief that experience has primacy in human knowledge and that experience begins with the knowledge of the senses. In England, it is associated with the work of John Locke (1632–1704) and his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689). See *tabula rasa*.

**Enjambment**: A run-on line, that is, one line of poetry that does not pause at its end but, instead, goes right into the following line.

**Enlightenment**: The philosophical views of (mostly) French, eighteenth-century thinkers, which emphasized the powers of reason and rejected traditional religious, social, and philosophical beliefs. It was both within and against Enlightenment thought that Romanticism may be said to have been conceived.

**Epigram**: Literally, from the Greek, something “written upon” something else (Latin equivalent is “inscription”); now equivalent to a short, pithy piece of prose or verse.

**Eros/Thanatos**: From the Greek for “love” and “death.” Sigmund Freud used these two terms for the primal human instincts toward life (or love, reproduction) and death.

**Iambic pentameter**: The standard meter for conventional verse from (roughly) the late fourteenth century until the near dominance, in the twentieth century, of “free” verse. Five feet and ten syllables per line; each foot having an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one.

**Imagination**: The mental faculty most praised by the Romantics. The word was used variously throughout the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, and the faculty was thought by some rationalist thinkers to be the enemy of reason. For Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge (who wrote of it extensively, borrowing from his German sources, in *Biographia Literaria*), and later Keats and Shelley, “imagination” is the creative power that transcends mere sense experience and memory, moving beyond the “association” of thoughts and feelings that empiricist philosophers...
claimed as the origins of thought. Coleridge invented the word “co-adunating” (from Latin, “to shape into one”) to explain how imagination works creatively.

**Irony:** From the Greek word related to “dissembling,” irony may be defined as saying one thing and meaning another. In Romantic irony, Friedrich Schlegel and other German writers used the term with regard to drama or narrative, in which an author builds up an illusion, then breaks it down by revealing that he has created and, therefore, can manipulate his characters as he wishes. Lawrence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* and, most important, Byron’s *Don Juan*, are excellent examples.

**“Lucy” poems:** The five poems written by Wordsworth in 1798–1799 about an imaginary girl named Lucy, whose life and (especially) death inspired a series of elegiac experiments.

**Lyrical Ballads:** The collection of poems by Coleridge and Wordsworth (1798) that can be said to have initiated the Romantic “movement” in English poetry. The second edition, expanded and with Wordsworth’s famous Preface, was published in 1800.

**Metaphor:** Any figure of similarity, whether explicit (he is *like* a fox) or unstated (“Three years she grew in sun and shower” implies that Lucy is like a flower).

**Noumena/phenomena:** Although the Greek terms have a history going back to Aristotle, they are associated largely with the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and refer to “things-in-themselves” (noumena), which are beyond ordinary human understanding and sense experience, and ordinary sense “phenomena” to which we have access via our senses.

**Ode:** Traditionally the most elevated form of lyric poetry, the ode can be highly structured (as it was by Pindar, fifth c. B.C.E.) or tending toward something conversational. In either case, it is serious and complex.

**Onomatopoeia:** The use of a linguistic sound to stand for, echo, or represent a nonverbal sound, for example, “the hissing snake.”

**Organicism:** The idea that works of art are analogous to living things. For example, we might say that a poem begins as a seed in the mind and grows in unpredictable ways as the writer develops it on the page. The “fusion of opposites” and “unity” are related concepts.

**Ottava rima:** An Italian stanzaic form, borrowed (and perfected) by both Byron and (later) William Butler Yeats: eight lines of iambic pentameter, with an “abababcc” rhyme scheme.

**Prolepsis:** The Greek term for “anticipation.” When used adjectivally (proleptic), it suggests any rhetorical or poetic gesture that looks forward.

**The Recluse:** Wordsworth’s name for his vast epic project, never completed, that would contain *The Excursion* (1814), plus other serious blank verse meditations.

**“Romantic nature lyric”:** A term invented by the critic M. H. Abrams, to include such diverse works as Wordsworth’s “Intimations” ode and Coleridge’s “Dejection: An Ode,” as well as “This Lime Tree Bower My Prison” and “Tintern Abbey.” In poems of this sort, the speaker begins usually in a specific setting, addresses himself (at some point) to a present or absent person, meditates on complex themes and feelings, and returns at the end to the place (actual or metaphorical) where he began.

**Sonnet:** The standard fourteen-line lyric, begun in Italy and transported (and translated) to England in the sixteenth century by Wyatt and Surrey. It comes, traditionally, in two forms (with many ingenious variations). The Italian (or Petracran) form has an octave (eight lines), followed after a turn (or *volta*) by a sestet (six lines), and adheres to a rhyme scheme of “abbaabba” and some version of “cdecde.” The English (or Shakespearean) sonnet has three quatrains and a couplet, rhyming “ababcddefg.” Wordsworth wrote more sonnets than any other major English poet.

**Sprezzatura:** The quality that defines the “Renaissance man” or any aristocratic dilettante, such as Lord Byron. The term is derived from the handbook *Il Cortegiano* (1528) by Count Baldassare Castiglione; Sir Thomas Hoby made an English translation in 1561. Although Hoby famously translates the expression as “recklessness,” a better synonym would be “cool,” that is, the ability to do many things effortlessly and without sweat.
**Synaesthesia:** The devise that uses a term for one sense in relation to another; for example, in Keats, “Ode to a Nightingale”: “I cannot see what flowers are at my feet, / Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs.”

**Tabula rasa:** The belief, associated in English philosophy with the epistemology of John Locke, that the mind at birth is a “blank slate” on which sense experience makes its inscriptions.

**Terza rima:** Stanzas of three lines, with interlocking rhymes: “aba, bcb, cdc, ded,” and so on. Used by Dante in his *Divine Comedy* and imitated by Shelley in “Ode to the West Wind.”

**Transcendentalism:** A term associated primarily with American thinkers and writers, such as Emerson and Thoreau, but with roots in German Romantic thinking and (in England) the work of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. It is essentially a belief in the primacy of reason (the a priori knowledge of truths gained through intuition) over understanding (which gives us access to the world of appearances.). See *noumena/phenomena*.

**Zoa(s):** From the Greek for animal/beast, used by Blake to refer to the four central parts of man.
The Lives and Works of the
English Romantic Poets
Part II
Professor Willard Spiegelman
Willard Spiegelman, Ph.D.
Hughes Professor of English, Southern Methodist University

Willard Spiegelman received his A.B. degree from Williams College (1966), magna cum laude and with highest honors in English. He did graduate work at Harvard, where he held Woodrow Wilson and Danforth fellowships and received an A.M. and a Ph.D. (1967, 1971). Since 1971, he has taught at Southern Methodist University in Dallas and has been a visiting professor at Williams (1987–1988). Dr. Spiegelman has won fellowships from the Guggenheim and Rockefeller Foundations and the National Endowment for the Humanities. In 1985–1986, he was the first Scholar-in-Residence at the Unterberg Poetry Center of the 92nd Street YMHA in Manhattan. At SMU, he has twice won an outstanding teacher award and was, in 1981, the first recipient of the Perrine Prize of Phi Beta Kappa for distinguished intellectual achievement.

Table of Contents
The Lives and Works of the English Romantic Poets
Part II

Professor Biography...........................................................................................................i
Lecture Thirteen  "Mad, Bad, and Dangerous to Know" .........................1
Lecture Fourteen The Byronic Hero .................................................................3
Lecture Fifteen  *Don Juan*: A Comic Masterpiece.............................5
Lecture Sixteen Shelley and Romantic Lyricism..................................7
Lecture Seventeen Shelley’s Figures of Thought ...............................9
Lecture Eighteen Shelley and History ....................................................11
Lecture Nineteen Shelley and Love .........................................................13
Lecture Twenty Keats and the Poetry of Aspiration .........................15
Lecture Twenty-One Keats and Ambition ..............................................17
Lecture Twenty-Two Keats and Eros .....................................................19
Lecture Twenty-Three Process, Ripeness, Fulfillment ......................21
Lecture Twenty-Four The Persistence of Romanticism .....................23
Poems......................................................................................................................24
Biographical Notes.................................................................................................58
Bibliography.............................................................................................................60

Note: Because of production limitations, we are unable to include some of the longer selections of the Romantic poets discussed in these lectures. We urge students to seek these out on their own.
Lecture Thirteen
“Mad, Bad, and Dangerous to Know”

Scope: This lecture begins a series of three on the most notorious of the English Romantics. Byron was part swashbuckling hero, part Regency gentleman, part radical. He was a poetry-writing aristocrat who was as famous for his escapades as for his work. We’ll pay attention to some of his shorter lyrics as examples of the metrical facility, the musical ear, and the linguistic vagueness that characterize many of his most popular poems.

Outline

I. The idea of celebrity or notoriety is intimately related to the nineteenth century.
   A. The media share much of the responsibility for making people temporarily famous.
   B. George Gordon, Lord Byron, is the first truly modern celebrity, as interesting for his life as for his work.

II. George Gordon (1788–1824) was a gloomy aristocrat who combined various opposing characteristics and wove himself and his life into his work.
   A. He was a Regency gentleman, with many accomplishments.
      1. He had little use for most of his “Romantic” contemporaries.
      2. He was both a political radical and a hater of democracy.
   B. He also had a gloomy, fatalistic side, inherited from his dour and Puritanical mother.
   C. His poetry reflects the two sides of his personality.
      1. His comic verse, especially his long Don Juan, expresses the exuberant and worldly Byron.
      2. His gloomier “Oriental” tales, featuring the so-called “Byronic hero,” present a more “Romantic,” occasionally doleful, haunted side of Byron’s temperament.

III. Byron makes us aware, paradoxically, that a person who is famous for being so distinct an individual should also be so divided and various.
   A. He describes himself as having “no character at all.”
   B. Although he was renowned as a great lover, he kept thinking of himself as the object of everyone else’s desires.

IV. Byron’s lyric poetry, for which he is most remembered by the general public, exhibits characteristic defects and excellences.
   A. There is, first of all, his mastery of a variety of metrical and verse forms.
   B. Many of the poems are actually entitled “stanzas for music” or could be set to melodies for singing.
   C. The feelings, like the people, in many of the love poems, are generic and indistinct.

V. At the same time, many of his lyrics exhibit his characteristic insouciance and nonchalance.
   A. “Written After Swimming from Sestos to Abydos” is a rollicking, mock-heroic send-up of classical myth.
   B. “Maid of Athens” makes fun of Byron’s own pretensions as a lover.
   C. “So We’ll Go No More A-Roving” is the classic hangover poem, full of regret and delicate suggestions of getting ready for more action after Lent.

VI. Byron’s seriousness found an outlet in several longer lyrics.
   A. In “Stanzas to Augusta,” he addresses his half-sister, with whom he had an incestuous love affair before going into exile on the Continent.
   B. “On This Day I Complete My 36th Year” depicts Byron before his death of a fever in Missolonghi (Greece). It is a portrait of an old, worn-out man.

Questions to Consider:
I. Why might Byron have been so popular in his day?
2. How do you take the measure of Byron’s tone of voice in many of his lyrics?

3. Can we call Byron a “sincere” poet? What does “sincerity” mean with relation to poetry, especially Romantic poetry?
Lecture Fourteen
The Byronic Hero

Scope: Byron perfected a kind of literary hero, to whom the label “Byronic” is always given. It is a hero who often closely resembles Byron himself. Childe Harold, Byron’s first important literary character, made him famous, and we’ll see how Harold and Byron are interwoven through the third canto of Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage, an early poem that takes its hero and its narrator across contemporary Europe. Next, we’ll examine the Faustian figure of Manfred, the title character in Byron’s verse drama, who is a Romantic over-reacher with a secret crime in his past. He is as haughty, tired, rebellious, and flamboyant as his creator.

Outline

I. Byron’s name is most frequently attached to the kind of hero we associate with him and his writing.
   A. It is paradoxical that the Byronic hero should be both unique and a composite of many different characteristics.
   B. The same was true of Byron the man.
   C. This paradox is central to major Romantic ideas about identity, especially the poet’s identity.
      1. Keats and Rimbaud made memorable pronouncements to this effect.
      2. The American photographer Cindy Sherman demonstrates the same tendency.

II. The Byronic hero is often god-like.
   A. Like Shelley, Byron idolized the Greek Titan Prometheus, for his indomitable will and his benefactions to humanity.
      1. The figure of Prometheus also affected Mary Shelley, who subtitled her novel Frankenstein, “The New Prometheus.”
      2. Prometheus is rewarded with punishment for his kindness to humanity.
   B. The quality of defiance (of authority) is paramount.

III. In Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage (Canto 3), Byron achieved the most memorable version of himself as a Byronic hero.
   A. Harold, like Byron, wanders across Europe.
   B. He longs to escape from nature, is misanthropic, and is opposed to urban life.
   C. He is “solitary and proud.”
   D. He enjoys contemplating the dust of empires.

IV. In his closet drama Manfred, Byron depicts a fuller version of the Byronic hero as a Faustian over-reacher, with important resemblances to Byron himself.
   A. Like his creator, Manfred may be compared to many other literary and historical figures.
   B. Unlike Faust, in the work of Christopher Marlowe or Johann von Goethe, Manfred does not make a pact with the devil.
      1. Instead, he fully and firmly resists otherworldly spirits, preferring not to bend his knee to anyone.
      2. He does not sell his soul for knowledge or power.
   C. Manfred has a cursed side. He has committed an unpardonable, unmentionable crime.
      1. His sister Astarte has died as a result of his love for her.
      2. The implications of incest would certainly have struck a contemporary audience as comparable to the plight of Byron in his own life.
   D. But Manfred, who all through the play wishes only to die, dies at last on his own terms, submitting to neither the representative of Christianity, in the person of the Abbot, nor to the devils whom he has invoked.
Questions to Consider:

1. What is the relationship between a “self” and a “persona”? Does each of us have a “true” self?

2. How does the Byronic hero compare to heroes of Shakespeare, or of Greek tragedy, or of other epic poems you have read?
Scope: Byron’s dark, Romantic side was complemented by his light, comic one. He is the author of several enduring comic masterpieces, notably Don Juan, a poem in sixteen cantos left unfinished at his death. It displays Byron’s cavalier spirit, his involvement with contemporary political and literary affairs, and his freewheeling imagination, as it follows the great lover Don Juan from his adolescence in Seville through various adventures that land him, at the end, in Regency England.

Outline

I. Byron was famous in his lifetime, but his reputation began to decline in the twentieth century.
   A. Reputations rise and fall, and when T. S. Eliot was the arbiter of taste for much of the English-speaking literary world, his anti-Romantic sentiments held sway.
   B. In addition, the kind of lyric variety that Byron’s poetry possessed was not much in fashion during the heyday of high modernism.
   C. And there has always been something of a bias against comic verse, especially light verse.

II. Byron’s Don Juan, left unfinished at his death, is a comic masterpiece and, in many ways, a modern poem.
   A. Hazlitt said that it was a poem “written about itself.”
      1. We find Byron constantly interrupting it, and himself, to tell us what he intends to do.
      2. Both the poem and the poet exhibit high degrees of self-consciousness.
   B. The apparent ease with which the poem is composed demonstrates Byron’s capacity as a versifier.
      1. The ottava rima stanza form, borrowed from Italian, enables him to interlace rhymes and to end each stanza with a couplet.
      2. Polysyllabic rhymes often sound comic; they are hard to pull off convincingly.
      3. As Robert Frost said, the fun is in how you do a thing.
   C. Byron’s poem has a serious underside.
      1. It is an exploration of heroism and popular definitions of the hero.
      2. He is writing in the epic tradition and constantly alludes to his epic forebears, going back to Homer and Virgil.
      3. He uses the poem as a vehicle for commentary on all kinds of contemporary political and social satire.

III. Don Juan is also a comic love poem whose tone is constantly changing.
   A. It is sometimes “romantic” and sentimental.
   B. At other times, it deflates the pretensions of romantic allusion, especially in young lovers.
   C. When Don Juan and Donna Julia finally cross the threshold to sexual fulfillment, Byron carefully modulates the tone of his description.

IV. The poem seems almost to be improvised, written in the present tense, because the author is always interrupting himself.
   A. Byron’s poetry, as well as his prose, bears the stamp of immediacy.
   B. He wants us to think of him as an aristocrat who is merely tossing off verses extemporaneously.
   C. But he also discusses his plans for the poem, reminding us of his debt to his epic forebears.

V. Above all, the hero of the poem is Byron himself, who calls as much attention to his own life and opinions as to the nominal story he is telling.
   A. When contemplating his own move into middle age (at the age of thirty!), Byron keeps us guessing as to his real feelings.
   B. He regrets the passage of time.
   C. But he segues gently into satire and self-mockery.
D. His real heirs in twentieth-century poetry are W. H. Auden and James Merrill, both of whom were able to maintain quicksilver tones and to dart from high to low.

Questions to Consider:
1. Is *Don Juan* a modern poem in its cynicism? What about in its style and organization?
2. How do Byron’s treatments of “love” differ from those of other Romantic poets you have read?
3. What is the relationship between comedy and sincerity? How can we know what Byron really feels or wants us to feel?
Lecture Sixteen
Shelley and Romantic Lyricism

Scope: Shelley seemed otherworldly, even effeminate, to many of his contemporaries, and he has always impressed readers as a poet who is both airy and difficult. This lecture examines Shelley’s decline and subsequent rise in critical esteem and looks at two characteristic, famous short poems, “Ozymandias” and “To a Skylark,” to introduce his themes and techniques. Wordsworth called Shelley a master of style, and a close look at these lyrics will show why.

Outline

I. Shelley’s reputation was distinguished throughout the nineteenth century, then fell, and recently has recovered.
   A. Keats and Wordsworth both admired him, though for different reasons.
   B. Browning and Yeats were enthralled by him.
   C. T. S. Eliot was not enthusiastic.

II. His three most important (poetic) characteristics give him a unique place.
   A. He managed to turn all kinds of poems into essentially a lyric mode.
   B. He was an extremist with regard to religion, politics, and sexual mores.
   C. In spite of his interest in Plato (whom he translated) and his idealism, Shelley was also something of a skeptic. Consequently, his poetry is often unclear and difficult.

III. He stands slightly outside the classical tradition in English poetry.
   A. For Shelley, what is abstract is often as important as what is concrete.
   B. His motto might be that of one of his characters, Demogorgon, who says, “The deep truth is imageless.”

IV. Shelley’s life gives us a handle to his poetry.
   A. He was an aristocrat and would have inherited a title if he had not died young.
   B. He felt out of place at both Eton and Oxford, from which he was expelled after a single semester.
      1. His political and religious radicalism did not endear him to university officials.
      2. After expulsion from Oxford, Shelley continued to explore various forms of radical philosophy and lifestyles.
   C. His marriages, first to Harriet Westbrook, then to Mary Godwin, as well as his various affairs, might strike us as the material of soap opera.
      1. He was an early proponent of free love.
      2. His early death helped to immortalize his reputation as a “bright and ineffectual angel” (Matthew Arnold’s phrase).

V. Shelley’s famous sonnet “Ozymandias” (1817) is a good introduction to his poetic techniques and to his interest in material events and history.
   A. It deals with the ephemerality of human achievement.
      1. This theme is thoroughly conventional.
      2. But Shelley managed to represent the theme in a startlingly novel way and with reference to many other writers, as well as to contemporary issues.
   B. The sonnet’s construction deserves attention.
      1. It is neither fully Italian nor fully English.
      2. The rhyme scheme is scattered.
      3. The syntax of the three sentences is also bizarre.
      4. The middle of the poem is convoluted.
   C. Interlocking seems to be a major principle.
      1. The rhymes are interlocked.
      2. The narrators are interlocked, one within the other.
D. We have a chain of readers and storytellers, going from the “I,” to the traveler, to the sculptor, and back to Ozymandias himself.
   1. Interestingly, only “passions” (the least tangible of things) seem to survive.
   2. Paradoxically, although he and his empire are gone, Ozymandias is the only person in the poem with a surviving name.

VI. “To a Skylark” represents the more spiritual side of Shelley’s temperament.
   A. The construction of the poem is very tight.
      1. Thirty lines are devoted to invoking the invisible bird.
      2. Thirty more lines ask, and attempt to answer, the important question: “What is most like thee?”
      3. The last section deals with Shelley’s effort to make himself into a version of the bird itself.
   B. Similes are Shelley’s preferred means of making comparisons. We can never know a thing itself; we can know it only by resemblances.
      1. The bird is, in sequence, like a poet, a high-born maiden, a glow-worm, and a rose.
      2. All these things are covered, invisible, delicate, and connected to sexuality, music, and creativity.
   C. The last three stanzas demonstrate Shelley’s extremism, energy, and skepticism.
      1. He realizes that we can never quite approach the skylark in all its glory.
      2. He paints a wishful picture of himself as a singer to whom the world will listen as he is now listening to the skylark.

Questions to Consider:
1. What do we mean by “lyric” poetry?
2. How do Shelley’s experiments with poetic form and diction affect the “meanings” of his poems?
3. What image of the artist is explicit or implicit in “Ozymandias” and “To a Skylark”?
Lecture Seventeen
Shelley’s Figures of Thought

Scope: In addition to making his lyrical flights of fancy, Shelley was a serious intellectual, involved with philosophical and scientific speculations and controversies. In many of his poems, we can see his mind not only working through various ideas but also attempting to find the best poetic means to demonstrate a mind thinking. This lecture, like the previous one, focuses on two complementary poems, each of which reflects a different side of Shelley’s philosophical temperament and poetic tendencies, “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty” and “Mont Blanc.”

Outline

I. Shelley was a serious intellectual, like Coleridge but unlike, for example, Byron and Keats.
   A. He included abstract philosophical ideas in his poems.
   B. He had to develop new poetic techniques for their inclusion.
      1. Shelley had little use for the “conversation” poem developed by Wordsworth and Coleridge.
      2. Instead, he stuck to a highly visionary mode, which makes many of his poems seem abstruse and difficult.

II. The two poems for this lecture were both composed in 1816 in Switzerland and may be thought of as complementary to each other.
    A. They both deal with the important philosophical question of how we can know objects outside ourselves.
    B. Epistemology, the study of knowledge, was perhaps more crucial for Shelley (at least in these works) than ethics, religion, or other branches of philosophy.
    C. Both poems also ask questions about ultimate causes and their effects on human lives.

III. “The Hymn to Intellectual Beauty” is the more conventional of the two poems. “Intellectual” means “spiritual” or “otherworldly.” Shelley wants to relate his own life to a higher power.
    A. The seven stanzas are sonnet-like, with interlocking rhymes.
    B. The ordering of his materials shows Shelley’s response to Wordsworth’s or Coleridge’s handling of similar questions.

IV. Shelley tries to decide what intellectual beauty is, what it is like, and how it works in our world.
    A. We can never know the thing itself but only its fleeting appearance in this phenomenal world.
    B. The spirit is inconstant and unknowable. Shelley renders the spirit through a series of partial similes.

V. The spirit comes from somewhere and confers beauty on our world.
    A. Human philosophy and religion have been unsuccessful efforts to name and locate this power.
    B. Love, hope, and self-esteem (rather than faith) come and go along with this power.
    C. The power grants nourishment to human thought.

VI. “Mont Blanc” removes Shelley from the action.
    A. He looks at a sublime landscape and asks questions prompted by his observations.
    B. His main questions are “What is the relation of mind to matter? What is the principle of causation in the world? What is the source of such causation?”
    C. He begins by calling the world “a universe of things.”
       1. He confines the operations of that universe to the human mind.
       2. Next, he looks at the actual scene around him, realizing that the River Arve comes from somewhere, just as any single human thought does, but the origin of thought, like the origin of the river, is unreachable.
3. We notice that Wordsworth would have begun with the actual scene before meditating on it; Shelley turns Wordsworth’s methods on their head, starting with an abstraction, then moving to a sensory description of the scene.

D. We can only guess, or intuit, what exists at the top of the mountain.
   1. The “noumenal” world is beyond our ken.
   2. All we know are its effects.
   3. Power dwells apart, tranquil and amoral.

E. Shelley’s interest in causation or power ends with a question.
   1. This demonstrates his skepticism.
   2. It also has a relation to his ideas concerning politics and history, the subject of Lecture Eighteen.

Questions to Consider:
1. What is the importance of abstract ideas, or abstract diction, in Shelley’s poems?
2. Do you find Shelley more interesting in comparison to, or in contrast with, Wordsworth?
Lecture Eighteen
Shelley and History

Scope: One of Shelley’s distinctive achievements was to have successfully combined a circular (or Greco-Roman) view of history with a linear (or Judaeo-Christian) one. Because of his intense involvement in radical political movements and radical thought, he wrote many poems concerned with historical progress. In “England in 1819,” he paints a bleak picture of a country ruled by an old, mad king, in which peaceful protest is subdued by force. In Hellas, a verse play about the Greek war for independence, Shelley includes a pair of interesting lyrics that combine his two views of history as repetitive and linear. In his Prometheus Unbound and “Ode to the West Wind,” we can see Shelley at the top of his game, writing impassioned poems about historical, seasonal, and personal change.

Outline

I. Part of Shelley’s appeal to his contemporaries and to Victorian readers was his political radicalism
   A. His first major poem, Queen Mab (1813), denounced monarchy, aristocracy, and conservatism of all sorts.
   B. After the Peterloo Massacre in August 1819, Shelley wrote The Mask of Anarchy in deliberately simple language for popular consumption.
   C. His sonnet “England in 1819” gives, in miniature, his view of a country ruled by the mad and dying George III.

II. Shelley’s greatest political poetry combines two views of history.
   A. The Judaeo-Christian notion of history is linear, or teleological.
      1. Time begins when God creates the world.
      2. Time will end after the Second Coming of Christ.
   B. To the ancient Greeks and Romans, however, history moved in cycles.
      1. In Hesiod (the contemporary of Homer) and Ovid (in Augustan Rome), we have the myth of the four ages of humanity.
      2. The creation of the world is of less interest to the Greeks and Romans than what happens to the world after humanity has taken root.
      3. History moves in a downward spiral of four ages: from gold to silver to bronze to iron.
      4. But a new golden age will return, and human nature will improve.

III. In some famous lyrics from Hellas (a lyrical “drama” concerning the Greek war of independence from the Turks), Shelley combines these two historical models.
   A. In “World on worlds are rolling ever,” Shelley gives us a vision of various historical and religious persons, who succeed and supplant one another.
      1. Christianity replaces the powers of Greco-Roman mythology.
      2. Progress and tragedy seem to be pretty much the same thing.
   B. In the play’s final lyric, “The world’s great age begins anew,” Shelley offers a picture of the return of the ancient Golden Age.
      1. His words are translated from Virgil’s fourth eclogue.
      2. This formula appears on the American dollar bill.
      3. Everything seems to happen again but in a slightly different way.
      4. Shelley acknowledges both circles and endings.

IV. Shelley’s greatest work is his verse drama Prometheus Unbound, concerning the Greek Titan whom Jupiter finally forgives and whose release from his rock in the Caucasus Mountains inaugurates a new golden age for humankind.
   A. In Shelley’s version, this revolution takes place without warfare or bloodshed.
   B. It seems to be a purely “aesthetic” phenomenon.
C. Shelley acknowledges humankind’s mortality and its perfectability. The three sides of his disposition—radicalism, lyricism, and skepticism—are brilliantly brought out by the play.

V. Shelley’s most popular poem, “Ode to the West Wind,” is not overtly political, but it, too, combines the two views of history we have just seen.
   A. Its form—interlocking sonnets written in Dante’s verse called terza rima—allows for linear movement, as well as interlocking, repetitive motifs.
   B. Its initial figure is that of the fallen leaves, which is an old trope going all the way back to Homer.
   C. Each of the first three stanzas deals with a single motif—leaf, air, water—and the last two stanzas pick up the motifs but handle them differently.
   D. As in “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty,” Shelley introduces himself into the poem after its midpoint.
      1. He wishes to become an agent of the wind.
      2. He places himself at the service of political, social, and seasonal revolution and upheaval.
      3. His own “leaves” (that is, his verses) will help to initiate political change, just as the leaves of the trees are buried and reborn in the spring, through seasonal change.
      4. For Shelley, politics, poetry, prophecy, and personal renewal are all intertwined.

Questions to Consider:
1. Is Shelley’s radicalism persuasive?
2. How many kinds of organization to do you notice in “Ode to the West Wind?”
Lecture Nineteen
Shelley and Love

Scope: Almost as famous (or notorious) as Byron for his love affairs, Shelley was, even more significantly, a major love poet. He was a student and translator of Plato, whose ideas he absorbs and appropriates in “Epipsychidion,” a thinly veiled autobiography of his erotic life and a plea for free love as a way of liberating the individual and society in general. In his elegy on the death of Keats, *Adonais*, Shelley relies on the principle of Eros as the impelling spirit that rolls through all things and all human consciousness.

Outline

I. For both the experiences of his life and his poetry, Shelley has always been thought of as a love poet.
   A. His multiple affairs were scandalous during his own day.
   B. He was an avid reader of Plato and translated his *Symposium*, the Socratic dialogue concerned with defining love.

II. Among Shelley’s poems, “Epipsychidion” is the most important defense, after Blake’s “Visions of the Daughters of Albion,” of free love in English. (And it was certainly better known.)
   A. It is both a thinly veiled autobiography and a philosophical treatise.
      1. We may ask where exactly is the intersection between a poet’s life and his work.
      2. The idealized figure of Emilia in the poem is based on Teresa Viviani, a young girl Shelley met in Pisa, who had been placed in a convent there by her father.
   B. The title of the poem has various meanings.
      1. “Epi” might mean “within” or “out of.”
      2. It also means “upon” in the sense that an “epithalamion” is a traditional poem to be sung in front of the wedding chamber.
      3. The entire poem is also indebted to Shelley’s reading of Dante, especially the *Vita Nuova*, Dante’s treatise on courtly and spiritual love.

III. The poem has a wonderful style and organization.
   A. It is written in easy rhymed couplets.
   B. It is divided into long sections.
      1. Part 1 is an ecstatic invocation of Emilia.
      2. Part 2 is Shelley’s philosophy of love.
      3. Part 3 is his allegorical autobiography.
      4. Part 4 is an invitation to Emilia to escape with him to an island paradise.

IV. In its use of similes, the poem reminds us of Shelley’s efforts to define “intellectual beauty” or his skylark.
   A. He runs through a conventional grab bag of images to find the right words for Emilia.
   B. But he is, as usual, defeated by the sad incompetence of human speech.

V. Shelley’s defense of free love has two, perhaps contradictory, sections.
   A. On the one hand, he does not wish to be bound by the chains of an outdated social and religious convention, marriage, which would compel a person to spend the rest of his life with a single mate.
   B. On the other hand, he claims that Emilia is the “sun” of his life, ruling over his “earth” with inspirational force.

VI. His picture of an island paradise at the end of the poem delicately uses erotic imagery to convey the physical, intellectual, and spiritual nature of his “love” for Emilia.
   A. The natural world seems like an appropriate spot for young lovers, because all the physical details are trembling with sexual force.
   B. But at the end, Shelley is still defeated by the inadequacy of language to convey the force or the nature of his passion.
VII. Shelley’s great elegy on the death of Keats, Adonais, can also be seen in terms of Shelley’s Platonic ideas about Eros as an inspiring force.

A. The background of the poem doesn’t really support Shelley’s inflated claims about Adonais (Keats).
   1. The two men had met once but were hardly friends.
   2. When Shelley heard that Keats was ill, he invited him to Italy, but never saw him once he arrived at Naples and then Rome.

B. The real importance of Keats for Shelley is symbolic and vocational.
   1. It is a convention to worry about the early deaths of poets.
   2. It is equally conventional to lament those poets who were unappreciated during their lives or slighted by critics.

C. The pastoral elegy serves a social and a psychological purpose.
   1. It consoles the survivors, the mourners.
   2. It allows Shelley to overcome fears about his own vocational destiny.

VIII. Shelley borrowed from the neo-Platonist philosopher Plotinus his ideas about Eros and its relation to the world beneath.

A. The erotic principle derives and overflows from a burning fountain into our dry world, and it impels all spiritual beings, especially poets, upward.

B. Death involves the burning off of the chains of mortality.

C. And a return to the “One” means that we should not be mourning Adonais but, instead, deriving comfort from his new status as a star to guide us onward.

D. The poem ends on a note of adventure, hopefulness, and suicidal adventure.

Questions to Consider:
1. In the “Epipsychidion” do you find Shelley’s exclamations of love believable?
2. What is the relationship between Shelley’s moral views and his use of the myth of a retreat to an island paradise?
3. Why did he choose rhyming heroic couplets as his form for this poem?
4. Why did he use the Spenserian stanza for Adonais?
5. Why should Shelley be so concerned by Keats’s death?
Lecture Twenty

Keats and the Poetry of Aspiration

Scope: This group of four lectures on Keats focuses on his short life and on the aspirations he brought to his poetry. Unlike Wordsworth, who looked back to childhood for subject matter and for psychological and philosophical support, Keats was always looking ahead, plotting his every move. We see him in “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer” and “Sleep and Poetry” commenting on his literary status as a reader and on his plans for future projects. Although his writing career lasted less than four years, we can see Keats advancing, in both his poems and letters, in thought, sophistication, confidence, and general wisdom. Always thinking of what is to come, he is the consummate poet of process, in both the natural and the human worlds.

Outline

I. John Keats (1795–1821) has always been the most popular of the English Romantic poets. His career was the briefest.
   A. He was also the youngest poet to have achieved such high renown.
   B. He came from the lower middle class; his father ran an inn.
   C. He was also the shortest major poet in English. I mention this detail only by way of pointing out that everyone commented on his eager, feisty, combative disposition.
   D. Keats was in training to become an apothecary, part of the medical establishment, but he gave up his studies before he was twenty to focus all his attention on writing verse.
   E. His career lasted essentially for little more than three years. In the last seventeen months of his life (October 1819 to February 1821), he was too ill to complete any major poems.

II. Keats’s accomplishment, in his marvelous letters as well as in his poetry, allows us to understand him in several different ways.
   A. He exemplifies the great Romantic tradition of empathy, of feeling into someone or something else.
   B. Although the external circumstances of his life were necessary for his work, he is not in any standard way a “confessional” poet. His highest ambition, in fact, was to write plays.
   C. He thought that any great poet’s work was the commentary on his life.

III. His three volumes of published verse show a remarkable and sudden progress toward maturity.
   A. The early Poems (1817) is largely adolescent and weak but contains several notable sonnets, especially his first masterpiece, “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer,” written just short of his twenty-first birthday.
   B. Endymion (1818) is Keats’s longest poem, a book-length romance concerning a young man’s aspiration for a goddess he has seen in a dream.
   C. The last volume, Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes and Other Poems (1820) contains his finest narrative poems, as well as some of his great odes from 1819.

IV. For Keats, love and imagination are twinned themes.
   A. In a famous letter, he declared, “the Imagination may be compared to Adam’s dream . . . He awoke and found it truth.”
      1. Adam’s dream was Eve, just as Endymion dreams of finding the goddess who visited him in his dream. (She turns out to be Cynthia, goddess of the moon.)
      2. The early, discursive poem “Sleep and Poetry” describes Keats’s plans for the composition of future verse.
   B. In all his great poems, we can see the plans Keats is making for future poems. He is interested in where he is going and what he is doing next.
      1. Keats entertains different ideas of what poetry should be, even while trying new styles.
      2. Escapism, Greek heroism, and humanitarianism are the three stages he envisions for his poetry.

©2002 The Teaching Company Limited Partnership
V. We can measure Keats’s development by following the literary models he was reading and imitating during his writing life.
   A. Leigh Hunt, Edmund Spenser, and Coleridge were early models.
   B. The great poem of Keats’s youth is the sonnet on Chapman’s Homer, which is specifically a poem concerning a literary experience.
      1. Keats treats the event as though it were a physical rather than an imaginative one.
      2. He works through various metaphors to arrive at the best form for presenting his literary discoveries.

Questions to Consider:
1. Can you find various expressions of aspiration throughout these poems?
2. Reading through “Sleep and Poetry,” try to contemplate the various kinds of poetry Keats envisions and the various ways in which he defines the poet’s role.
Lecture Twenty-One  
Keats and Ambition

Scope: This lecture begins with some of the hostile reviews that Keats’s first two books gathered. It continues with an investigation of his ideas of poetic fame and poetic process in such poems as “In Drear-Nighted December,” “To Homer,” and “To Fame.” We end with a longer investigation of the “Ode to Psyche,” one of the great odes written in the spring of 1819. In this poem, Keats outlines his plans for a new kind of poetry that will be inward-looking and that will enable him to speak on behalf of Psyche, a kind of underdog among the gods. In representing her, he is also representing himself.

Outline

I. Keats’s brief writing life was marked by hostility from some of the reviewers.
   A. Much of the hostility was provoked by considerations of class and politics.
   B. Some of the complaints about the weakness of his early verse were well taken, however.

II. Like any great artist, Keats was interested in achieving lasting fame, and he wavered between periods of great confidence and moments of doubt.
   A. His sonnet “On Fame” (1819) uses many of his characteristic images and metaphors to explore the nature of fame and human questing after something that may be unnatural.
   B. Keats tries to weigh the aggressiveness of human ambition against his feeling for natural process and ripening.
   C. For Keats, “if poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree it had better not come at all.”

III. As a corollary, Keats was always interested in the relationship of human consciousness to the healthy unconsciousness of all other living beings, such as trees and animals.
   A. His poem “In Drear-Nighted December” explores the paradox of “the feel of not to feel it.”
   B. The tree regains its greenness, the brook regains its summer sparkle, without remembering the cold of winter, but human beings are burdened by memory and their awareness of mortality.
   C. In “To Homer,” Keats explores the paradox of blindness and insight as exemplified by the Greek poet who, though blind, could see imaginatively into reality’s depths.
   D. In “What the Thrush Said,” the bird enjoins human beings not to “fret” after knowledge and prefers the natural state of animal ignorance.
   E. Keats’s exclamation (from a letter) “O for a life of sensations rather than of thought” suggests his occasional preference for feelings to thinking, for the life of the body to the life of the mind.

IV. His “Ode to Psyche” (the first of the great odes in May 1819) is an exploration of the issues involved in writing a new kind of poetry.
   A. Psyche was a human girl in love with Cupid (Eros) who visited her by night. She was not permitted to look at him. When her curiosity got the better of her, she looked at him, but he awoke and left her. Subsequently, she was “promoted” to a place among the immortals.
      1. Consequently, she is a newcomer to divinity.
      2. In Keats’s program, she represents both the human soul in love and the new inward-turning direction of his poetry.
   B. The poem is about seeing and discovering. It is also Keats’s way of representing the goddess by becoming her priest.
   C. He builds for her a temple in his mind (Where else? She is the goddess of the human soul, after all.)
   D. Imagination, eroticism, sympathy, and adventure work together in Keats’s poem.
Questions to Consider:
1. How does Keats treat “fame” and human ambition as compared to the natural world?
2. What relationships does Keats develop among religion, eroticism, and landscape in the “Ode to Psyche?”
3. What kinds of language does he use throughout his great ode?
Scope: Because he was a sexually alert young man, Keats was very interested in matters of love. He became engaged to a young woman named Fanny Brawne, and much of his poetry concerns itself with erotic issues. This lecture is devoted largely to “The Eve of St. Agnes,” the greatest Romantic poem of sexual fulfillment. It then turns briefly to two bleaker, more negative versions of sexual activity, “La Belle Dame Sans Merci,” and “Lamia,” Keats’s last narrative poem, which shows him moving into new stylistic and thematic paths.

Outline

I. Keats’s fascination with doorways, windows, and other passageways combines with his interest in human sexuality in “The Eve of St. Agnes,” his great poem of erotic and imaginative fulfillment.
   A. In one of his letters, he refers to life as “a mansion of many apartments.”
      1. From the infant or “thoughtless” chamber, we move into the “chamber of maiden thought.”
      2. Keats’s own genius is explorative of the “dark passages” that move away from the two first chambers; these are also comparable to the chambers through which the characters move in “The Eve of St. Agnes.”
   B. The interest in movement through passages corresponds to Keats’s interest in the development of human psychology (or soul-making) and to the grand march of intellect he sees in human history.
   C. “The Eve of St. Agnes” also has an autobiographical cause; Keats had just fallen in love with Fanny Brawne, to whom he was to become engaged.

II. The main characters in the poem—hardly fully realized, three-dimensional figures—correspond to the male and female ideals, respectively.
   A. Porphyro is the burning lover, who comes across the moors to catch a glimpse of his beloved.
   B. Madeleine is the credulous maiden who goes to bed at night in the hope of gaining a vision of the man she is to marry.
   C. Comparable contrasts operate throughout the poem.
      1. The iciness of nature on a cold winter’s night is opposed to the warmth of young love.
      2. The old age of the Beadsman and Angela the nurse opposes the youth of the lovers.
      3. The drunken revelry of Madeleine’s kinsmen is opposed to the spiritual transcendence won by the young lovers.

III. Keats wants us to sympathize with, but also to see through, the main characters.
   A. Porphyro is both idealistic and passionate.
      1. He is unaware of the strength of his physical desires.
      2. He keeps them in check with his religious affirmations.
   B. Madeleine is like a bird, “hoodwinked with fairy fancy.”
      1. She believes the old wives’ tale about Saint Agnes Eve and the rites that a young virgin must perform.
      2. Keats consistently characterizes her as naïve and voluptuous.
   C. Keats’s complex attitudes are revealed by an examination of his manuscript revisions of the poem, especially with regard to Madeleine’s undressing and Porphyro’s winning of her.
      1. In stanza 26, he must make Madeleine’s undressing seem both innocent and provocative at once.
      2. In stanza 30, he takes special care to give us a wonderful display of dessert sweets.

IV. The sexual and religious climax of the poem comes when Porphyro awakens Madeleine; the characters at last make love.
   A. Madeleine must be awakened twice from her dreaming to reality.
   B. Porphyro assures her that he is a real man and that he will not leave her to pine in her nest.
   C. The lovers escape easily from the castle and disappear into the stormy night.
Keats never again wrote such a confident and optimistic wish-fulfillment about the nature of young love.

A. “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” is a pseudo-medieval ballad depicting the seduction and destruction of a Knight-at-Arms by a mysterious witch-like lady.
   1. The knight is both saved from immediate death and ruined by his experience, to be left on a cold hillside.
   2. Keats leaves unclear the cause of his tragedy, or the relationship between the knight’s sexual initiation and his imaginative dream, which warns him of his plight.

B. Keats’s last great narrative poem, “Lamia,” also concerns an evil snake-woman who falls in love (or seems to) with a young man; he dies at the end of the poem when his old teacher warns him that he has been bewitched by an evil sorceress.
   1. Like many of Keats’s poems, this one exemplifies the quality he so admired in Shakespeare, which he refers to in one of his letters as “negative capability.”
   2. Keats defined the term as a condition when one is capable of remaining in “uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.”

Questions to Consider:
1. What is the relationship between “soul-making” and love-making in “The Eve of St. Agnes”?
2. Why should Keats entertain skepticism concerning his hero and heroine?
3. Can you find in other of Keats’s poems variations on the theme of dreaming?
Lecture Twenty-Three  
Process, Ripeness, Fulfillment

Scope: Keats’s greatest achievement was the composition of the five spring odes in April–May 1819 and “To Autumn” the following September. This lecture will examine in close detail two of them, “The Ode to a Nightingale” and “To Autumn,” as examples of Keats’s experiments in poetic form and his interest in natural process as the best metaphor for human development.

Outline

I. Keats’s odes are generally considered his greatest achievement as a lyric poet.
   A. The “Ode on Melancholy” presents a state of mixed emotions, because Melancholy, as Keats depicts her as a goddess, dwells with her opposites: Joy, Beauty, Delight, and Pleasure.
   B. The sense of mutability and the complexity of human feeling go along with Keats’s idea of “negative capability,” which we have already mentioned.

II. The “Ode to a Nightingale” is one of two odes for this lecture; it exemplifies Keats’s interest in both negative capability and natural process.
   A. It is a poem full of paradoxes.
      1. He begins by saying that he wants to die, but then tells us that the reason for this death wish is too much happiness.
      2. He says he does not envy the nightingale her song, but it is clear that the bird is a model of a certain kind of natural, easy singer and, consequently, has certain capacities the speaker envies.
      3. We learn from stanza 3 that one reason to wish to die now is to avoid painful death or merely the weaknesses of old age.
   B. The poem is full of the wish to escape.
      1. Suicide is one kind of escape.
      2. Wine, or inebriation, is yet another.
      3. Merging with the nightingale in the “forest dim,” charioted to her on the wings of “Poesy” itself, is an imaginative alternative to drugs.
   C. At the poem’s center, Keats exists in a mystical trance, seemingly apart from all time and its progress.
      1. He seems to be symbolically dead, “in embalmed darkness.”
      2. The list of flowers he finds around him, however, suggests a movement in time from early spring to late summer.
   D. By the end of the sixth stanza, Keats realizes that were he dead, he would be unable to hear the nightingale.
      1. He imagines various audiences for the song (stanza 7).
      2. The “forlorn” fairylands remind him of his own loneliness.
   E. At poem’s end, Keats has awakened from his “dream” of the nightingale.
      1. It is morning.
      2. The bird has flown away.
      3. The speaker cannot be sure whether he had a vision or a “waking dream.”

III. As a poem of process, “Ode to a Nightingale” prepares us for the ode “To Autumn,” written in September 1819, a poem that is all about natural process and, by implication, death.
   A. The poem seems to be “pure” description.
      1. But we can understand from its form what Keats is actually doing.
      2. The stanzas are now eleven, not ten, lines long.
      3. The ordering of the stanzas—and what they represent—is significant.
   B. Keats depicts autumn, the season, and the goddess of the season, in a variety of ways.
   C. The poem contains mellow, gentle premonitions of death.
   D. The poem also solves various stylistic problems Keats was having in his spring odes.
      1. We can see what kinds of language Keats uses here and what he refuses.
2. We can see what figures of speech or grammar he no longer uses.

E. As an act of recovery and compensation, the ode is a perfect ending to Keats’s own creative life. Although it was not his last poem, it is a valediction.

Questions to Consider:
1. What is the connection between time and music in the “Ode to a Nightingale?”
2. If you know the “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” can you formulate some similarities and differences between it and the nightingale poem?
3. How many connections can you pursue between “To Autumn” and the earlier odes?
4. Why is Keats’s last ode his most personal in its overtly “impersonal” program?
Lecture Twenty-Four  
The Persistence of Romanticism

Scope: This last lecture takes a long look from the Romantics to the present day in an effort to trace the shadow they cast over subsequent literature and culture in general. Among the Victorian poets, Matthew Arnold, Robert Browning, and Alfred Tennyson all owed a considerable debt to their predecessors. Even more, if we jump across the Atlantic and into the twentieth century, we can see how poets as diverse as Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, Allen Ginsberg, and Elizabeth Bishop all bear witness to the persistence of Romanticism as a means of imagining human life and arranging poetry.

Outline

I. The legacy of the Romantic poets extends through high and low culture of the past two centuries.
   A. One can find its traces in the lyrics of popular songs, from sentimental ballads through rock-and-roll.
   B. The persistence of the Byronic hero extends from Byron and from a figure like Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein down through his movie representatives.

II. William Butler Yeats in 1931 called himself and his colleagues “the last Romantics.”
   A. He was thinking of folk ballads and nationalism.
   B. But we might take his debt to the Romantics even deeper. A poem such as “Among School Children” is really a re-working of Wordsworth’s “Intimations” ode.

III. The major Victorian poets all profited from, and adapted, the Romantics and their works.
   A. Robert Browning venerated Shelley; Matthew Arnold was clearly a Wordsworthian poet.
   B. Alfred, Lord Tennyson was clearly revising the Byronic hero in his depiction of Ulysses.
      1. Ulysses is a complex character, at once an adventurer and an escapist.
      2. Tennyson depicts other versions of Romantic escapism in “The Lotos-Eaters.”

IV. Another way to measure the influence of the Romantics is to make a trans-Atlantic crossing.
   A. Walt Whitman inherited many of Wordsworth’s themes.
   B. In the twentieth century, Robert Frost and Wallace Stevens are updated versions of Wordsworth and Keats, respectively.
      1. Frost’s “The Most of It” is a response to Wordsworth’s “Boy of Winander.”
      2. Stevens read Keats (and Shelley) throughout his life, and we can hear echoes of these poets in poems as different as “The Snow Man,” “Sunday Morning,” and “Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction.”
      3. The interest in epistemology, or problems of knowledge, unites the English poets and their American heirs.
   C. In the later part of the twentieth century, many American poets were influenced by the Romantics.
      1. Allen Ginsberg was devoted to William Blake from his undergraduate days at Columbia; “Ah, Sunflower” was a major influence on Ginsberg’s “Sunflower Sutra.”
      2. A much different poet, Elizabeth Bishop, was a deep and appreciative reader of Wordsworth, as is evident in “At the Fishhouses,” “The Bight,” and “Cape Breton” (her versions of “Tintern Abbey”). Her late “Crusoe in England” alludes to “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud.”

Questions to Consider:
1. Thinking of other British and American poets of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, can you identify other overt echoes of, or implicit connections to, the English Romantics?
2. Can you see connections between “high” literary culture and contemporary popular American culture that permit us to say that we are still living in a Romantic age?
3. What recent American poets (such as Bishop and Ginsberg) have avowed connections to the Romantics? Which ones, in your reading experience, seem to turn their backs on the Romantics and their examples?

©2002 The Teaching Company Limited Partnership
Poems

From Lecture Thirteen (Byron):

*The Destruction of Sennacherib*

The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.

Like the leaves of the forest when summer is green,
That host with their banners at sunset were seen:
Like the leaves of the forest when autumn hath blown,
That host on the morrow lay wither’d and strown.

For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he pass’d;
And the eyes of the sleepers wax’d deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and forever grew still!

And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide,
But through it there roll’d not the breath of his pride;
And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,
And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.

And there lay the rider distorted and pale,
With the dew on his brow, and the rust on his mail:
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,
The lances unlifted, the trumpet unblown.

And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail,
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal;
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord!

*Stanzas for Music*

There’s not a joy the world can give like that it takes away,
When the glow of early thought declines in feeling’s dull decay;
‘Tis not on youth’s smooth cheek the blush alone, which fades so fast,
But the tender bloom of heart is gone, ere youth itself be past.

Then the few whose spirits float above the wreck of happiness
Are driven o’er the shoals of guilt or ocean of excess:
The magnet of their course is gone, or only points in vam
The shore to which their shiver’d sail shall never stretch again.

Then the mortal coldness of the soul like death itself comes down;
It cannot feel for others’ woes, it dare not dream its own;
That heavy chill has frozen o’er the fountain of our tears,
And though the eye may sparkle still, ‘tis where the ice appears.

Though wit may flash from fluent lips, and mirth distract the breast,
Through midnight hours that yield no more their former hope of rest;
‘Tis but as ivy-leaves around the ruin’d turret wreath,
All green and wildly fresh without but worn and gray beneath.

Oh could I feel as I have felt,—or be what I have been,
Or weep as I could once have wept, o’er many a vanish’d scene;
As springs in deserts found seem sweet, all brackish though they be,
So midst the wither’d waste of life, those tears would flow to me.

Written after Swimming from Sestos to Abydos

I
If, in the month of dark December,
Leander, who was nightly wont
(What maid will not the tale remember?)
To cross thy stream, broad Hellespont!

II
If, when the wintry tempest roared,
He sped to Hero, nothing loth,
And thus of old thy current poured,
Fair Venus! how I pity both!

III
For me, degenerate modern wretch,
Though in the genial month of May
My dripping limbs I faintly stretch,
And think I’ve done a feat to-day.

IV
But since he crossed the rapid tide,
According to the doubtful story,
To woo—and—Lord knows what beside,
And swam for Love, as I for Glory;

V
‘Twere hard to say who fared the best:
Sad mortals! thus the Gods still plague you!
He lost his labour, I my jest:
For he was drowned, and I’ve the ague.
Maid of Athens, Ere We Part

Maid of Athens, ere we part,
Give, oh give me back my heart!
Or, since that has left my breast,
Keep it now, and take the rest!
Hear my vow before I go,
“My life, I love you.”

By those tresses unconfined,
Woo’d by each Jovean wind;
By those lids whose jetty fringe
Kiss thy soft cheeks’ blooming tinge;
By those wild eyes like the roe,
“My life, I love you.”

By that lip I long to taste;
By that zone-encircled waist;
By all the token-flowers that tell
What words can never speak so well;
By love’s alternate joy and woe,
Maid of Athens, I am gone:
Think of me, sweet! when alone.
Though I fly to Istanbul,
Athens holds my heart and soul:
Can I cease to love thee? No!
“My life, I love you.”

So We’ll Go No More A-Roving

So, we’ll go no more a-roving
So late into the night,
Though the heart be still as loving,
And the moon be still as bright.

For the sword outwears its sheath,
And the soul wears out the breast,
And the heart must pause to breathe,
And love itself have rest.

Stanzas to Augusta

Though the day of my destiny’s over,
And the star of my fate hath declined,
Thy soft heart refused to discover
The faults which so many could find;
Though thy soul with my grief was acquainted,
It shrunk not to share it with me,
And the love which my spirit hath painted
It never hath found but in thee.

Then when nature around me is smiling,
The last smile which answers to mine,
I do not believe it beguiling,
Because it reminds me of thine;
And when winds are at war with the ocean,
As the breasts I believed in with me,
If their billows excite an emotion,
It is that they bear me from thee.
Though the rock of my last hope is shiver’d,
And its fragments are sunk in the wave,
Though I feel that my soul is deliver’d
To pain—it shall not be its slave.
There is many a pang to pursue me:
They may crush, but they shall not contemn;
They may torture, but shall not subdue me;
’Tis of thee that I think—not of them.

Though human, thou didst not deceive me,
Though woman, thou didst not forsake,
Though loved, thou forborest to grieve me,
Though slander’d, thou never couldst shake;
Though trusted, thou didst not disclaim me,
Though parted, it was not to fly,
Though watchful, ’twas not to defame me,
Nor, mute, that the world might belie.

Yet I blame not the world, nor despise it,
Nor the war of the many with one;
If my soul was not fitted to prize it,
’Twas folly not sooner to shun:
And if dearly that error hath cost me,
And more than I once could foresee,
I have found that, whatever it lost me,
It could not deprive me of thee.

From the wreck of the past, which hath perish’d,
Thus much I at least may recall,
It hath taught me that what I most cherish’d
Deserved to be dearest of all:
In the desert a fountain is springing,
In the wide waste there still is a tree,
And a bird in the solitude singing,
Which speaks to my spirit of thee.

On This Day I Complete My Thirty-Sixth Year

’Tis time this heart should be unmoved,
Since others it hath ceased to move:
Yet, though I cannot be beloved,
Still let me love!

My days are in the yellow leaf;
The flowers and fruits of love are gone;
The worm, the canker, and the grief
Are mine alone!

The fire that on my bosom preys
Is lone as some volcanic isle;
No torch is kindled at its blaze
A funeral pile.

The hope, the fear, the jealous care,
The exalted portion of the pain
And power of love, I cannot share,
But wear the chain.

But ’tis not thus—and ’tis not here
Such thoughts should shake my soul, nor now,
Where glory decks the hero’s bier,
Or binds his brow.

The sword, the banner, and the field,
Glory and Greece, around me see!
The Spartan, borne upon his shield,
Was not more free.

Awake! (not Greece—she is awake!)
Awake, my spirit! Think through whom
Thy life-blood tracks its parent lake,
And then strike home!

Tread those reviving passions down,
Unworthy manhood!—unto thee
Indifferent should the smile or frown
Of beauty be.

If thou regret’st thy youth, why live?
The land of honorable death
Is here—up to the field, and give
Away thy breath!

Seek out—less often sought than found
A soldier’s grave, for thee the best;
Then look around, and choose thy ground,
And take thy rest.

From Lecture Fourteen (Byron):

Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage (excerpts from Canto 3)

12

But soon he knew himself the most unfit
Of men to herd with man; with whom he held
Little in common; untaught to submit
His thoughts to others, though his soul was quelled
In youth by his own thoughts; still uncompelled,
He would not yield dominion of his mind
To spirits against whom his own rebelled;
Proud though in desolation; which could find
A life within itself, to breathe without mankind.

16
Self-exiled Harold wanders forth again,
With nought of hope left, but with less of gloom;
The very knowledge that he lived in vain,
That all was over on this side the tomb,
Had made Despair a smilingness assume,
Which, though ‘twere wild—as on the plundered wreck
When mariners would madly meet their doom
With draughts intemperate on the sinking deck,
Did yet inspire a cheer, which he forbore to check.

72
I live not in myself, but I become
Portion of that around me; and to me
High mountains are a feeling, but the hum
Of human cities torture: I can see
Nothing to loathe in nature, save to be
A link reluctant in a fleshly chain,
Classed among creatures, when the soul can flee,
And with the sky, the peak, the heaving plain
Of ocean, or the stars, mingle, and not in vain.

73
And thus I am absorbed, and this is life:
I look upon the peopled desert past,
As on a place of agony and strife,
Where, for some sin, to sorrow I was cast,
To act and suffer, but remount at last
With a fresh pinion; which I feel to spring,
Though young, yet waxing vigorous as the blast
Which it would cope with, on delighted wing,
Spurning the clay-cold bonds which round our being cling.

113
I have not loved the world, nor the world me;
I have not flattered its rank breath, nor bowed
To its idolatries a patient knee,
Nor coined my cheek to smiles, nor cried aloud
In worship of an echo; in the crowd
They could not deem me one of such; I stood
Amongst them, but not of them; in a shroud
Of thoughts which were not their thoughts, and still could,
Had I not filed my mind, which thus itself subdued.

114
I have not loved the world, nor the world me,
But let us part fair foes; I do believe,
Though I have found them not, that there may be
Words which are things, hopes which will not deceive,  
And virtues which are merciful, nor weave  
Snares for the failing; I would also deem  
O’er others’ griefs that some sincerely grieve;  
That two, or one, are almost what they seem,  
That goodness is no name, and happiness no dream.

Prometheus (excerpt)

…Thy Godlike crime was to be kind,  
To render with thy precepts less  
The sum of human wretchedness,  
And strengthen man with his own mind;  
But baffled as thou wert from high,  
In the endurance, and repulse  
Of thine impenetrable spirit,  
Which Earth and Heaven could not convulse,  
A mighty lesson we inherit:  
Thou art a symbol and a sign  
To mortals of their fate and force;  
Like thee, man is in part divine,  

A troubled stream from a pure source;  
And man in portions can foresee  
His own funereal destiny;  
His wretchedness, and his resistance,  
And his sad unallied existence:  
To which his spirit may oppose  
Itself—and equal to all woes,  
And a firm will, and a deep sense,  
Which even in torture can descry  
Its own concent’r’d recompense,  
Triumphant where it dares defy,  
And making death a victory.

From Lecture Fifteen (Byron):

Don Juan (excerpts)  
Canto the First

1  
I want a hero: an uncommon want,  
When every year and month sends forth a new one,  
Till, after cloying the gazettes with cant,  
The age discovers he is not the true one:  
Of such as these I should not care to vaunt,  
I’ll therefore take our ancient friend Don Juan  
We all have seen him, in the pantomime,  
Sent to the devil somewhat ere his time.

6  
Most epic poets plunge “in medias res”  
(Horace makes this the heroic turnpike road),  
And then your hero tells, whene’er you please,  
What went before—by way of episode,  
While seated after dinner at his ease,  
Beside his mistress in some soft abode,  
Palace, or garden, paradise, or cavern,  
Which serves the happy couple for a tavern.

7  
That is the usual method, but not mine  
My way is to begin with the beginning;  
The regularity of my design  
Forbids all wandering as the worst of sinning,  
And therefore I shall open with a line  
(Although it cost me half an hour in spinning)
Narrating somewhat of Don Juan’s father,
And also of his mother, if you’d rather.

12
Her favorite science was the mathematical,
   Her noblest virtue was her magnanimity;
Her wit (she sometimes tried at wit) was Attic all,
   Her serious sayings darkened to sublimity;
In short, in all things she was fairly what I call
   A prodigy—her morning dress was dimity,
Her evening silk, or, in the summer, muslin,
   And other stuffs, with which I won’t stay puzzling.

22
’Tis pity learned virgins ever wed
   With persons of no sort of education,
Or gentlemen, who, though well born and bred,
   Grow tired of scientific conversation;
I don’t choose to say much upon this head,
   I’m a plain man, and in a single station,
But—Oh! ye lords of ladies intellectual,
   Inform us truly, have they not hen-pecked you all?

62
Wedded she was some years, and to a man
   Of fifty, and such husbands are in plenty;
And yet, I think, instead of such a ONE
   ’Twere better to have TWO of five-and-twenty,
Especially in countries near the sun:
   And now I think on’t, “mi vien in mente,”
Ladies even of the most uneasy virtue
   Prefer a spouse whose age is short of thirty.

63
’Tis a sad thing, I cannot choose but say,
   And all the fault of that indecent sun,
Who cannot leave alone our helpless clay,
   But will keep baking, broiling, burning on,
That howsoever people fast and pray,
   The flesh is frail, and so the soul undone:
What men call gallantry, and gods adultery,
   Is much more common where the climate’s sultry.

111
The hand which still held Juan’s, by degrees
   Gently, but palpably confirmed its grasp,
As if it said, “Detain me, if you please”;
   Yet there’s no doubt she only meant to clasp
His fingers with a pure Platonic squeeze;
   She would have shrunk as from a toad or asp,
Had she imagined such a thing could rouse
   A feeling dangerous to a prudent spouse.

112
I cannot know what Juan thought of this,
   But what he did, is much what you would do;
His young lip thanked it with a grateful kiss,  
And then, abashed at its own joy, withdrew  
In deep despair, lest he had done amiss,  
Love is so very timid when 't is new:  
She blushed, and frowned not, but she strove to speak,  
And held her tongue, her voice was grown so weak.

117
And Julia’s voice was lost, except in sighs,  
Until too late for useful conversation;  
The tears were gushing from her gentle eyes,  
I wish, indeed, they had not had occasion;  
But who, alas! can love, and then be wise?  
Not that remorse did not oppose temptation;  
A little still she strove, and much repented,  
And whispering “I will ne’er consent”—consented.

200
My poem’s epic, and is meant to be  
Divided in twelve books; each book containing,  
With love, and war, a heavy gale at sea,  
A list of ships, and captains, and kings reigning,  
New characters; the episodes are three:  
A panoramic view of hell’s in training,  
After the style of Virgil and of Homer,  
So that my name of Epic’s no misnomer.

201
All these things will be specified in time,  
With strict regard to Aristotle’s rules,  
The Vade Mecum of the true sublime,  
Which makes so many poets, and some fools:  
Prose poets like blank-verse, I’m fond of rhyme,  
Good workmen never quarrel with their tools;  
I’ve got new mythological machinery,  
And very handsome supernatural scenery.

213
But now at thirty years my hair is gray  
(I wonder what it will be like at forty?  
I thought of a peruke the other day—)  
My heart is not much greener; and, in short, I  
Have squandered my whole summer while ‘twas May,  
And feel no more the spirit to retort; I  
Have spent my life, both interest and principal,  
And deem not, what I deemed, my soul invincible.

214
No more—no more—Oh! never more on me  
The freshness of the heart can fall like dew,  
Which out of all the lovely things we see  
Extracts emotions beautiful and new,  
Hived in our bosoms like the bag 0’ the bee.  
Think’st thou the honey with those objects grew?  
Alas! ‘twas not in them, but in thy power  
To double even the sweetness of a flower.

215
No more—no more—Oh! never more, my heart,
Canst thou be my sole world, my universe!
Once all in all, but now a thing apart,
Thou canst not be my blessing or my curse:
The illusion’s gone for ever, and thou art
Insensible, I trust, but none the worse,
And in thy stead I’ve got a deal of judgment,
Though heaven knows how it ever found a lodgment.

216
My days of love are over; me no more
The charms of maid, wife, and still less of widow,
Can make the fool of which they made before,
In short, I must not lead the life I did do;
The credulous hope of mutual minds is o’er,
The copious use of claret is forbid too,
So for a good old-gentlemanly vice,
I think I must take up with avarice.

From Lecture Sixteen (Shelley):

Ozymandias

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert…Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;
And on the pedestal these words appear:
“My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!”
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

To a Skylark

Hail to thee, blithe Spirit!
Bird thou never wert,
That from Heaven, or near it,
Pourest thy full heart
In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.

Higher still and higher
From the earth thou springest
Like a cloud of fire;
The blue deep thou wingest,
And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest.

In the golden lightning
Of the sunken sun,
O’er which clouds are bright’ning,
Thou dost float and run;
Like an unbodied joy whose race is just begun.

The pale purple even
Melts around thy flight;
Like a star of Heaven,
In the broad daylight
Thou art unseen, but yet I hear thy shrill delight,

Keen as are the arrows
Of that silver sphere,
Whose intense lamp narrows
In the white dawn clear
Until we hardly see—we feel that it is there.

All the earth and air
With thy voice is loud,
As, when night is bare,
From one lonely cloud
The moon rains out her beams, and Heaven is over-flowed.

What thou art we know not;
What is most like thee?
From rainbow clouds there flow not
Drops so bright to see
As from thy presence showers a rain of melody.

Like a Poet hidden
In the light of thought,
Singing hymns unbidden,
Till the world is wrought
To sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not:

Like a high-born maiden
In a palace-tower,
Soothing her love-laden
Soul in secret hour
With music sweet as love, which overflows her bower:

Like a glow-worm golden
In a dell of dew,
Scattering unbeholden
Its aereal hue
Among the flowers and grass, which screen it from the view:

Like a rose embowered
In its own green leaves,
By warm winds deflowered,
Till the scent it gives
Makes faint with too much sweet those heavy-winged thieves:

Sound of vernal showers
On the twinkling grass,
Rain-awakened flowers,
All that ever was
Joyous, and clear, and fresh, thy music doth surpass.

Teach us, Sprite or Bird,
What sweet thoughts are thine:
I have never heard
Praise of love or wine
That panted forth a flood of rapture so divine.

Chorus Hymeneal,
Or triumphal chant,
Matched with thine would be all
But an empty vaunt,
A thing wherein we feel there is some hidden want.

What objects are the fountains
Of thy happy strain?
What fields, or waves, or mountains?
What shapes of sky or plain?
What love of thine own kind? what ignorance of pain?

With thy clear keen joyance
Langour cannot be:
Shadow of annoyance
Never came near thee:
Thou loveth—but ne’er knew love’s sad satiety.

Waking or asleep,
Thou of death must deem
Things more true and deep
Than we mortals dream,
Or how could thy notes flow in such a crystal stream?

We look before and after,
And pine for what is not:
Our sincerest laughter
With some pain is fraught;
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.

Yet if we could scorn
Hate, and pride, and fear;
If we were things born
Not to shed a tear,
I know not how thy joy we ever should come near.

Better than all measures
Of delightful sound,
Better than all treasures
That in books are found,
Thy skill to poet were, thou scornor of the ground!

Teach me half the gladness
That thy brain must know,
Such harmonious madness
From my lips would flow
The world should listen then—as I am listening now.

From Lecture Seventeen (Shelley):

Hymn to Intellectual Beauty

The awful shadow of some unseen Power
Floats though unseen among us,—visiting
This various world with as inconstant wing
As summer winds that creep from flower to flower;
Like moonbeams that behind some piny mountain shower,
   It visits with inconstant glance
   Each human heart and countenance;
Like hues and harmonies of evening,
   Like clouds in starlight widely spread,
   Like memory of music fled,
   Like aught that for its grace may be
Dear, and yet dearer for its mystery.

Spirit of BEAUTY, that dost consecrate
   With thine own hues all thou dost shine upon
   Of human thought or form,—where art thou gone?
Why dost thou pass away and leave our state,
This dim vast vale of tears, vacant and desolate?
   Ask why the sunlight not for ever
   Weaves rainbows o’er yon mountain river,
Why aught should fail and fade that once is shown,
   Why fear and dream and death and birth
   Cast on the daylight of this earth
   Such gloom,—why man has such a scope
For love and hate, despondency and hope?

No voice from some sublimer world hath ever
   To sage or poet these responses given
Therefore the names of Demon, Ghost, and Heaven,
Remain the records of their vain endeavour,
Frail spells—whose uttered charm might not avail to sever,
   From all we hear and all we see,
   Doubt, chance, and mutability.
Thy light alone—like mist o’er mountains driven,
   Or music by the night wind sent
   Through strings of some still instrument,
   Or moonlight on a midnight stream,
Gives grace and truth to life’s unquiet dream.

Love, Hope, and Self-esteem, like clouds depart
   And come, for some uncertain moments lent.
Man were immortal, and omnipotent,
Didst thou, unknown and awful as thou art,
Keep with thy glorious train firm state within his heart.
   Thou messenger of sympathies,
   That wax and wane in lovers’ eyes
Thou—that to human thought art nourishment,
   Like darkness to a dying flame!
   Depart not as thy shadow came,
   Depart not—lest the grave should be,
Like life and fear, a dark reality.

While yet a boy I sought for ghosts, and sped
   Through many a listening chamber, cave and ruin,
   And starlight wood, with fearful steps pursuing
Hopes of high talk with the departed dead.
I called on poisonous names with which our youth is fed;
    I was not heard—I saw them not
When musing deeply on the lot
Of life, at that sweet time when winds are wooing
    All vital things that wake to bring
    News of birds and blossoming,
    Sudden, thy shadow fell on me;
I shrieked, and clasped my hands in ecstasy!
I vowed that I would dedicate my powers
To thee and thine—have I not kept the vow?
With beating heart and streaming eyes, even now
I call the phantoms of a thousand hours
Each from his voiceless grave: they have in visioned bowers
Of studious zeal or love’s delight
Outwatched with me the envious night—
They know that never joy illum’d my brow
Unlinked with hope that thou wouldst free
This world from its dark slavery,
That thou—O awful LOVELINESS,
Wouldst give whate’er these words cannot express.

The day becomes more solemn and serene
When noon is past—there is a harmony
In autumn, and a lustre in its sky,
Which through the summer is not heard or seen,
As if it could not be, as if it had not been!
Thus let thy power, which like the truth
Of nature on my passive youth
Descended, to my onward life supply
Its calm—to one who worships thee,
And every form containing thee,
Whom, SPIRIT fair, thy spells did bind
To fear himself, and love all human kind.

Mont Blanc

I
The everlasting universe of things
Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves,
Now dark—now glittering—now reflecting gloom
Now lending splendour, where from secret springs
The source of human thought its tribute brings
Of waters—with a sound but half its own,
Such as a feeble brook will oft assume
In the wild woods, among the mountains lone,
Where waterfalls around it leap for ever,
Where woods and winds contend, and a vast river
Over its rocks ceaselessly bursts and raves.
II
Thus thou, Ravine of Arve—dark, deep Ravine
Thou many-coloured, many-voiced vale,
Over whose pines, and crags, and caverns sail
Fast cloud shadows and sunbeams: awful scene,
Where Power in likeness of the Arve comes down
From the ice gulfs that gird his secret throne,
Bursting through these dark mountains like the flame
Of lightning through the tempest—thou dost lie,
Thy giant brood of pines around thee clinging,
Children of elder time, in whose devotion
To drink their odours, and their mighty swinging
To hear—an old and solemn harmony;
Thine earthly rainbows stretched across the sweep
Of the ethereal waterfall, whose veil
Robes some unsculptured image; the strange sleep
Which when the voices of the desert fail
Wraps all in its own deep eternity;
Thy caverns echoing to the Arve’s commotion,
A loud, lone sound no other sound can tame;
Thou art pervaded with that ceaseless motion,
Thou art the path of that unresting sound
Dizzy Ravine! and when I gaze on thee
I seem as in a trance sublime and strange
To muse on my own separate fantasy,
My own, my human mind, which passively
Now renders and receives fast influencings,
Holding an unremitting interchange
With the clear universe of things around;
One legion of wild thoughts, whose wandering wings
Now float above thy darkness, and now rest
Where that or thou art no unbidden guest,
In the still cave of the witch Poesy,
Seeking among the shadows that pass by,
Ghosts of all things that are, some shade of thee,
Some phantom, some faint image; till the breast
From which they fled recalls them, thou art there!

III
Some say that gleams of a remoter world
Visit the soul in sleep—that death is slumber,
And that its shapes the busy thoughts outnumber
Of those who wake and live—I look on high;
Has some unknown omnipotence unfurled
The veil of life and death? or do I lie
In dream, and does the mightier world of sleep
Spread far around and inaccessibly
Its circles? For the very spirit fails,
Driven like a homeless cloud from steep to steep
That vanishes among the viewless gales!
Far, far above, piercing the infinite sky,
Mont Blanc appears—still, snowy, and serene
Its subject mountains their unearthly forms
Pile around it, ice and rock; broad vales between
Of frozen floods, unfathomable deeps,
Blue as the overhanging heaven, that spread
And wind among the accumulated steeps;
A desert peopled by the storms alone,
Save when the eagle brings some hunter’s bone,
And the wolf tracks her there—how hideously
Its shapes are heaped around! rude, bare, and high,
Ghastly, and scarred, and riven—Is this the scene
Where the old Earthquake-daemon taught her young Ruin?
Were these their toys? or did a sea
Of fire envelop once this silent snow?
None can reply—all seems eternal now.
The wilderness has a mysterious tongue
Which teaches awful doubt, or faith so mild,
So solemn, so serene, that man may be,
But for such faith, with nature reconciled;
Thou hast a voice, great Mountain, to repeal
Large codes of fraud and woe; not understood
By all, but which the wise, and great, and good
Interpret, or make felt, or deeply feel.

IV
The fields, the lakes, the forests, and the streams,
Ocean, and all the living things that dwell
Within the daedal earth; lightning, and rain,
Earthquake, and fiery flood, and hurricane,
The torpor of the year when feeble dreams
Visit the hidden buds, or dreamless sleep
Holds every future leaf and flower—the bound
With which from that detested trance they leap;
The works and ways of man, their death and birth,
And that of him and all that his may be;
All things that move and breathe with toil and sound
Are born and die; revolve, subside, and swell.
Power dwells apart in its tranquillity,
Remote, serene, and inaccessible:
And this, the naked countenance of earth,
On which I gaze, even these primaeval mountains
Teach the adverting mind. The glaciers creep
Like snakes that watch their prey, from their far fountains,
Slow rolling on; there, many a precipice,
Frost and the Sun in scorn of mortal power
Have piled: dome, pyramid, and pinnacle,
A city of death, distinct with many a tower
And wall impregnable of beaming ice.
Yet not a city, but a flood of ruin
Is there, that from the boundaries of the sky
Rolls its perpetual stream; vast pines are strewing
Its destined path, or in the mangled soil
Branchless and shattered stand; the rocks, drawn down
From yon remotest waste, have overthrown
The limits of the dead and living world,
Never to be reclaimed. The dwelling-place
Of insects, beasts, and birds, becomes its spoil;
Their food and their retreat for ever gone,
So much of life and joy is lost. The race
Of man flies far in dread; his work and dwelling
Vanish, like smoke before the tempest’s stream,
And their place is not known. Below, vast caves
Shine in the rushing torrents’ restless gleam,
Which from those secret chasms in tumult welling
Meet in the vale, and one majestic River,
The breath and blood of distant lands, for ever
Rolls its loud waters to the ocean waves,
Breathes its swift vapours to the circling air.

V
Mont Blanc yet gleams on high—the power is there,
The still and solemn power of many sights,
And many sounds, and much of life and death.
In the calm darkness of the moonless nights,
In the lone glare of day, the snows descend
Upon that Mountain; none beholds them there,
Nor when the flakes burn in the sinking sun,
Or the star-beams dart through them—Winds contend
Silently there, and heap the snow with breath
Rapid and strong, but silently! Its home
The voiceless lightning in these solitudes
Keeps innocently, and like vapour broods
Over the snow. The secret Strength of things
Which governs thought, and to the infinite dome
Of heaven is as a law, inhabits thee!
And what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea,
If to the human mind’s imaginings
Silence and solitude were vacancy?

From Lecture Eighteen (Shelley):

Hellas (excerpts)

Worlds on Worlds Are Rolling Ever

Worlds on worlds are rolling ever
From creation to decay,
Like the bubbles on a river
   Sparkling, bursting, borne away.
   But they are still immortal
Who, through birth’s orient portal
And death’s dark chasm hurrying to and fro,
   Clothe their unceasing flight
In the brief dust and light
Gathered around their chariots as they go;
   New shapes they still may weave,
   New gods, new laws receive,
Bright or dim are they as the robes they last
On Death’s bare ribs had cast.

A power from the unknown God,
   A Promethean conqueror, came;
Like a triumphal path he trod
   The thorns of death and shame.
A mortal shape to him
Was like the vapour dim
Which the orient planet animates with light;
Hell, Sin, and Slavery came,
Like bloodhounds mild and tame,
Nor preyed, until their Lord had taken flight;
The moon of Mahomet
Arose, and it shall set:
While blazoned as on Heaven’s immortal noon
The cross leads generations on.

Swift as the radiant shapes of sleep
From one whose dreams are Paradise
Fly, when the fond wretch wakes to weep,
And Day peers forth with her blank eyes;
So fleet, so faint, so fair,
The Powers of earth and air
Fled from the folding-star of Bethlehem:
Apollo, Pan, and Love,
And even Olympian Jove
Grew weak, for killing Truth had glared on them;
Our hills and seas and streams,
Dispeopled of their dreams,
Their waters turned to blood, their dew to tears,
Wailed for the golden years.

The World’s Great Age Begins Anew

The world’s great age begins anew,
The golden years return,
The earth doth like a snake renew
Her winter weeds outworn:
Heaven smiles, and faiths and empires gleam
Like wrecks of a dissolving dream.
A brighter Hellas rears its mountains
From waves serener far;
A new Peneus rolls his fountains
Against the morning star.
Where fairer Tempes bloom, there sleep
Young Cyclads on a sunnier deep.
A loftier Argo cleaves the main,
Fraught with a later prize;
Another Orpheus sings again,
And loves, and weeps, and dies.
A new Ulysses leaves once more
Calypso for his native shore.
O, write no more the tale of Troy,
If earth Death’s scroll must be!
Nor mix with Laian rage the joy
Which dawns upon the free:

Although a subtler Sphinx renew
Riddles of death Thebes never knew.
Another Athens shall arise,
And to remoter time
Bequeath, like sunset to the skies,
The splendour of its prime;
And leave, if nought so bright may live,
All earth can take or Heaven can give.

Saturn and Love their long repose
Shall burst, more bright and good
Than all who fell, than One who rose,
Than many unsubdued:
Not gold, not blood, their altar dowers,
But votive tears and symbol flowers.
O cease! must hate and death return?
Cease! must men kill and die?
Cease! drain not to its dregs the urn
Of bitter prophecy.
The world is weary of the past,
O might it die or rest at last!
SPIRIT OF THE HOUR: …As I have said, I floated to the earth:
It was, as it is still, the pain of bliss
To move, to breathe, to be; I wandering went
Among the haunts and dwellings of mankind,
And first was disappointed not to see
Such mighty change as I had felt within
Expressed in outward things; but soon I looked,
And behold, thrones were kingless, and men walked
One with the other even as spirits do,
None fawned, none trampled; hate, disdain, or fear,
Self-love or self-contempt, on human brows
No more inscribed, as o’er the gate of hell,
“All hope abandon ye who enter here;”
None frowned, none trembled, none with eager fear
Gazed on another’s eye of cold command,
Until the subject of a tyrant’s will
Became, worse fate, the abject of his own,
Which spurred him, like an outspent horse, to death.
None wrought his lips in truth-entangling lines
Which smiled the lie his tongue disdained to speak;
None, with firm sneer, trod out in his own heart
The sparks of love and hope till there remained
Those bitter ashes, a soul self-consumed,
And the wretch crept a vampire among men,
Infesting all with his own hideous ill;….

Thrones, altars, judgement-seats, and prisons wherein,
And beside which, by wretched men were borne
Sceptres, tiaras, swords, and chains, and tomes
Of reasoned wrong, glozed on by ignorance,
Were like those monstrous and barbaric shapes,
The ghosts of a no-more-remembered fame,
Which, from their unworn obelisks, look forth
In triumph o’er the palaces and tombs
Of those who were their conquerors, mouldering round.
These imaged, to the pride of kings and priests,
A dark yet mighty faith, a power as wide
As is the world it wasted, and are now
But an astonishment; even so the tools
And emblems of its last captivity,
Amid the dwellings of the peopled earth,
Stand, not o’erthrown, but unregarded now.
And those foul shapes, abhorred by god and man,
Which, under many a name and many a form
Strange, savage, ghastly, dark and execrable,
Were Jupiter, the tyrant of the world;
And which the nations, panic-stricken, served
With blood, and hearts broken by long hope, and love
Dragged to his altars soiled and garlandless,
And slain amid men’s unclaiming tears,
Flattering the thing they feared, which fear was hate,
Frown, moulndering fast, o’er their abandoned shrines:
The painted veil, by those who were, called life,
Which mimicked, as with colours idly spread,
All men believed or hoped, is torn aside;
The loathsome mask has fallen, the Man remains
Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed—but man:
Equal, unclassed, tribeless and nationless,
Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the King
Over himself; just, gentle, wise: but man
Passionless?—no: yet free from guilt or pain,
Which were, for his will made or suffered them,
Nor yet exempt, though ruling them like slaves,
From chance, and death, and mutability,
The clogs of that which else might oversoar
The loftiest star of unascended heaven,
Pinnacled dim in the intense inane.

Ode to the West Wind

I
O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn’s being,
Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,
Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
Pestilence-stricken multitudes: O thou,
Who chariostest to their dark wintry bed
The winged seeds, where they lie cold and low,
Each like a corpse within its grave, until
Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow
Her clarion o’er the dreaming earth, and fill
(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)
With living hues and odours plain and hill:
Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;
Destroyer and preserver; hear, O, hear!

II
Thou on whose stream, ‘mid the steep sky’s commotion,
Loose clouds like earth’s decaying leaves are shed,
Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean,
Angels of rain and lightning: there are spread
On the blue surface of thine airy surge,
Like the bright hair uplifted from the head
Of some fierce Maenad, even from the dim verge
Of the horizon to the zenith’s height,
The locks of the approaching storm. Thou dirge
Of the dying year, to which this closing night
Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre,
Vaulted with all thy congregated might
Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere
Black rain, and fire, and hail will burst: O, hear!

III
Thou who didst waken from his summer dreams
The blue Mediterranean, where he lay,
Lulled by the coil of his crystalline streams,

Beside a pumice isle in Baiae’s bay,
And saw in sleep old palaces and towers
Quivering within the wave’s intenser day,

All overgrown with azure moss and flowers
So sweet, the sense faints picturing them!
Thou For whose path the Atlantic’s level powers

Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below
The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear
The sapless foliage of the ocean, know

Thy voice, and suddenly grow gray with fear,
And tremble and despoil themselves: O, hear!
IV
If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear;
If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;
A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share

The impulse of thy strength, only less free
Than thou, O uncontrollable! If even
I were as in my boyhood, and could be

The comrade of thy wanderings over Heaven,
As then, when to outstrip thy skiey speed
Scarce seemed a vision; I would ne’er have striven

As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.
O! lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!

A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed
One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud.

V
Make my thy lyre, even as the forest is:
What if my leaves are falling like its own!
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies

Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!
And, by the incantation of this verse,

Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
Be through my lips to unawakened earth

The trumpet of a prophecy! O, Wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?
From Lecture Nineteen (Shelley):

Epipsychidion (excerpts)

…I never thought before my death to see
Youth’s vision thus made perfect. Emily,
I love thee; though the world by no thin name
Will hide that love from its unvalued shame.
Would we two had been twins of the same mother!
Or, that the name my heart lent to another
Could be a sister’s bond for her and thee,
Blending two beams of one eternity!
Yet were one lawful and the other true,
These names, though dear, could paint not, as is due,
How beyond refuge I am thine. Ah me!
I am not thine: I am a part of thee.

…Thy wisdom speaks in me, and bids me dare
Beacon the rocks on which high hearts are wrecked.
I never was attached to that great sect,
Whose doctrine is, that each one should select
Out of the crowd a mistress or a friend,
And all the rest, though fair and wise, commend
To cold oblivion, though it is in the code
Of modern morals, and the beaten road
Which those poor slaves with weary footsteps tread,
Who travel to their home among the dead
By the broad highway of the world, and so
With one chained friend, perhaps a jealous foe,
The dreariest and the longest journey go.

True Love in this differs from gold and clay,
That to divide is not to take away.
Love is like understanding, that grows bright,
Gazing on many truths; ‘tis like thy light,
Imagination! which from earth and sky,
And from the depths of human fantasy,
As from a thousand prisms and mirrors, fills
The Universe with glorious beams, and kills
Error, the worm, with many a sun-like arrow
Of its reverberated lightning. Narrow
The heart that loves, the brain that contemplates,
The life that wears, the spirit that creates
One object, and one form, and builds thereby
A sepulchre for its eternity.

Mind from its object differs most in this:
Evil from good; misery from happiness;
The baser from the nobler; the impure
And frail, from what is clear and must endure.
If you divide suffering and dross, you may
Diminish till it is consumed away;
If you divide pleasure and love and thought,
Each part exceeds the whole; and we know not
How much, while any yet remains unshared,
Of pleasure may be gained, of sorrow spared:
This truth is that deep well, whence sages draw
The unenvied light of hope; the eternal law
By which those live, to whom this world of life
Is as a garden ravaged, and whose strife
Tills for the promise of a later birth
The wilderness of this Elysian earth.

….The blue Aegean girds this chosen home,
With ever-changing sound and light and foam,
Kissing the sifted sands, and caverns hoar;
And all the winds wandering along the shore
Undulate with the undulating tide:
There are thick woods where sylvan forms abide;
And many a fountain, rivulet, and pond,
As clear as elemental diamond,
Or serene morning air; and far beyond,
The mossy tracks made by the goats and deer
(Which the rough shepherd treads but once a year)
Pierce into glades, caverns, and bowers, and halls
Built round with ivy, which the waterfalls
Illumining, with sound that never fails
Accompany the noonday nightingales;
And all the place is peopled with sweet airs;
The light clear element which the isle wears
Is heavy with the scent of lemon-flowers,
Which floats like mist laden with unseen showers,
And falls upon the eyelids like faint sleep;
And from the moss violets and jonquils peep,
And dart their arrowy odour through the brain
Till you might faint with that delicious pain.
And every motion, odour, beam, and tone,
With that deep music is in unison:
Which is a soul within the soul
 they seem
Like echoes of an antenatal dream.
It is an isle ‘twixt Heaven, Air, Earth, and Sea,
Cradled, and hung in clear tranquillity;

….And we will talk, until thought’s melody
Become too sweet for utterance, and it die
In words, to live again in looks, which dart
With thrilling tone into the voiceless heart,
Harmonizing silence without a sound.
Our breath shall intermix, our bosoms bound,
And our veins beat together; and our lips
With other eloquence than words, eclipse
The soul that burns between them, and the wells
Which boil under our being’s inmost cells,
The fountains of our deepest life, shall be
Confused in Passion’s golden purity,
As mountain-springs under the morning sun.
We shall become the same, we shall be one
Spirit within two frames, oh! wherefore two?
One passion in twin-hearts, which grows and grew,
‘Till like two meteors of expanding flame,
Those spheres instinct with it become the same,
Touch, mingle, are transfigured; ever still
Burning, yet ever inconsumable:
In one another’s substance finding food,
Like flames too pure and light and unimbued
To nourish their bright lives with baser prey,
Which point to Heaven and cannot pass away:
One hope within two wills, one will beneath
Two overshadowing minds, one life, one death,
One Heaven, one Hell, one immortality,
And one annihilation. Woe is me!
The winged words on which my soul would pierce
Into the height of Love’s rare Universe,
I pant, I sink, I tremble, I expire!

Adonais (excerpts)

52
The One remains, the many change and pass;
Heaven’s light forever shines, Earth’s shadows fly;
Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
Until Death tramples it to fragments—Die,
If thou wouldest be with that which thou dost seek!
Follow where all is fled!—Rome’s azure sky,
Flowers, ruins, statues, music, words, are weak
The glory they transfuse with fitting truth to speak.

53
Why linger, why turn back, why shrink, my Heart?
Thy hopes are gone before: from all things here
They have departed; thou shouldst now depart!
A light is passed from the revolving year,
And man, and woman; and what still is dear
Attracts to crush, repels to make thee wither.
The soft sky smiles,—the low wind whispers near:
‘Tis Adonais calls! oh, hasten thither,
No more let Life divide what Death can join together.

From Lecture Twenty (Keats):

Sleep and Poetry (excerpts)

…O for ten years, that I may overwhelm
Myself in poesy; so I may do the deed
That my own soul has to itself decreed.
Then will I pass the countries that I see
In long perspective, and continually
Taste their pure fountains. First the realm I’ll pass
Of Flora, and old Pan: sleep in the grass,
Feed upon apples red, and strawberries,
And choose each pleasure that my fancy sees;
Catch the white-handed nymphs in shady places,
To woo sweet kisses from averted faces,
Play with their fingers, touch their shoulders white
Into a pretty shrinking with a bite
As hard as lips can make it: till agreed,
A lovely tale of human life we’ll read.
And one will teach a tame dove how it best
May fan the cool air gently o’er my rest;
Another, bending o’er her nimble tread,
Will set a green robe floating round her head,
And still will dance with ever varied ease,
Smiling upon the flowers and the trees:
Another will entice me on, and on
Through almond blossoms and rich cinnamon;
Till in the bosom of a leafy world
We rest in silence, like two gems upcurl’d
In the recesses of a pearly shell…

‘Tis might half slumb’ring on its own right arm.
The very archings of her eye-lids charm
A thousand willing agents to obey,
And still she governs with the mildest sway:
But strength alone though of the Muses born
Is like a fallen angel: trees uptorn,
Darkness, and worms, and shrouds, and sepulchres
Delight it; for it feeds upon the burrs,
And thorns of life; forgetting the great end
Of poesy, that it should be a friend
To sooth the cares, and lift the thoughts of man.

On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer

Much have I travell’d in the realms of gold,
   And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
Round many western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
   That deep-brow’d Homer ruled as his demesne;
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
   When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
   He star’d at the Pacific—and all his men
Look’d at each other with a wild surmise
   Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

On Seeing the Elgin Marbles

My spirit is too weak—mortality
   Weighs heavily on me like unwilling sleep,
And each imagined pinnacle and steep
Of godlike hardship tells me I must die
Like a sick eagle looking at the sky.
   Yet ‘tis a gentle luxury to weep
That I have not the cloudy winds to keep
Fresh for the opening of the morning’s eye.
Such dim-conceived glories of the brain
    Bring round the heart an undescribable feud;
So do these wonders a most dizzy pain,
    That mingles Grecian grandeur with the rude
Wasting of old time—with a billowy main
    A sun—a shadow of a magnitude.

From Lecture Twenty-One (Keats):

On Fame

How feverd’s is the man who cannot look
    Upon his mortal days with temperate blood,
Who vexes all the leaves of his life’s book,
    And robs his fair name of its maidenhood;
It is as if the rose should pluck herself,
Or the ripe plum finger its misty bloom,
As if a Naiad, like a meddling elf,
    Should darken her pure grot with muddy gloom;
But the rose leaves herself upon the briar,
    For winds to kiss and grateful bees to feed,
And the ripe plum still wears its dim attire,
    The undisturbed lake has crystal space;
Why then should man, teasing the world for grace,
    Spoil his salvation for a fierce miscreed?

In Drear Nighted December

I
In drear nighted December,
    Too happy, happy tree,
Thy branches ne’er remember
    Their green felicity
The north cannot undo them
    With a sleetly whistle through them,
Nor frozen thawings glue them
    From budding at the prime.

In drear nighted December,
    Too happy, happy brook,
Thy babblings ne’er remember
    Apollo’s summer look;

But with a sweet forgetting
    They stay their crystal fretting,
Never, never petting
    About the frozen time.
Ah! would ’twere so with many
    A gentle girl and boy!
But were there ever any
    Wrth’d not of passed joy?
The feel of not to feel it,
    When there is none to heal it,
Nor numbed sense to steel it,
    Was never said in rhyme.

To Homer

Standing aloof in giant ignorance,
    Of thee I hear and of the Cyclades,
As one who sits ashore and longs perchance
    To visit dolphin-coral in deep seas.
So wast thou blind—but then the veil was rent,
    For Jove uncertain’d heaven to let thee live,
And Neptune made for thee a spumy tent,
    And Pan made sing for thee his forest-hive;
Aye on the shores of darkness there is light,
    And precipices show untrodden green,
There is a budding morrow in midnight,
   There is a triple sight in blindness keen;
Such seeing hadst thou, as it once befel
To Dian, Queen of Earth, and Heaven, and Hell.

Ode to Psyche

O Goddess! hear these tuneless numbers, wrung
   By sweet enforcement and remembrance dear,
And pardon that thy secrets should be sung
   Even into thine own soft-conched ear:
Surely I dreamt to-day, or did I see
   The winged Psyche with awaken’d eyes?
I wander’d in a forest thoughtlessly,
   And, on the sudden, fainting with surprise,
Saw two fair creatures, couched side by side
   In deepest grass, beneath the whisp’ring roof
Of leaves and trembled blossoms, where there ran
   A brooklet, scarce espied:
‘Mid hush’d, cool-rooted flowers, fragrant-eyed,
Blue, silver-white, and budded Tyrian,
They lay calm-breathing on the bedded grass;
   Their arms embraced, and their pinions too;
   Their lips touch’d not, but had not bade adieu,
As if disjoined by soft-handed slumber,
   And ready still past kisses to outnumber
At tender eye-dawn of aurorean love:
   The winged boy I knew;
   But who wast thou, O happy, happy dove?
   His Psyche true!

O latest born and loveliest vision far
   Of all Olympus’ faded hierarchy!
Fairer than Phrebe’s sapphire-region’d star,
   Or Vesper, amorous glow-worm of the sky;
Fairer than these, though temple thou hast none,
   Nor altar heap’d with flowers;
Nor virgin-choir to make delicious moan
   Upon the midnight hours;
No voice, no lute, no pipe, no incense sweet
   From chain-swung censer teeming;
No shrine, no grove, no oracle, no heat
   Of pale-mouth’d prophet dreaming.

O brightest! though too late for antique vows,
   Too, too late for the fond believing lyre,
When holy were the haunted forest boughs,
   Holy the air, the water, and the fire;
   Yet even in these days so far retir’d
From happy pieties, thy lucent fans,
Fluttering among the faint Olympians,
I see, and sing, by my own eyes inspired.
So let me be thy choir, and make a moan
   Upon the midnight hours;
Thy voice, thy lute, thy pipe, thy incense sweet
From swinged censer teeming;
Thy shrine, thy grove, thy oracle, thy heat
Of pale-mouth’d prophet dreaming.
Yes, I will by thy priest, and build a fane
In some untrodden region of my mind,
Where branched thoughts, new grown with pleasant pam,
Instead of pines shall murmur in the wind:
Far, far around shall those dark-cluster’d trees
Fledge the wild-ridged mountains steep by steep;
And there by zephyrs, streams, and birds, and bees,
The moss-lain Dryads shall be lull’d to sleep;
And in the midst of this wide quietness
A rosy sanctuary will I dress
With the wreath’d trellis of a working brain,
With buds, and bells, and stars without a name,
With all the gardener Fancy e’er could feign,
Who breeding flowers, will never breed the same:
And there shall be for thee all soft delight
That shadowy thought can win,
A bright torch, and a casement ope at night,
To let the warm Love in!

From Lecture Twenty-Two (Keats):

*The Eve of St. Agnes* (excerpts)

1
St. Agnes’ Eve—Ah, bitter chill it was!
The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold;
The hare limp’d trembling through the frozen grass,
And silent was the flock in woolly fold:
Numb were the Beadsman’s fingers, while he told
His rosary, and while his frosted breath,
Like pious incense from a censer old,
Seem’d taking flight for heaven, without a death,
Past the sweet Virgin’s picture, while his prayer he saith.

9
So, purposing each moment to retire,
She linger’d still. Meantime, across the moors,
Had come young Porphyro, with heart on fire
For Madeline. Beside the portal doors,
Buttress’d from moonlight, stands he, and implores
All saints to give him sight of Madeline,
But for one moment in the tedious hours,
That he might gaze and worship all unseen;
Perchance speak, kneel, touch, kiss—in sooth such things have been.

16
Sudden a thought came like a full-blown rose,
Flushing his brow, and in his pained heart
Made purple riot: then doth he propose
A stratagem, that makes the beldame start:
“A cruel man and impious thou art:
Sweet lady, let her pray, and sleep, and dream
Alone with her good angels, far apart
From wicked men like thee. Go, go!—I deem
Thou canst not surely be the same that thou didst seem.”

24
A casement high and triple-arch’d there was,
All garlanded with carven imag’ries
Of fruits, and flowers, and bunches of knot-grass,
And diamonded with panes of quaint device,
Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes,
As are the tiger-moth’s deep-damask’d wings;
And in the midst, ’mong thousand heraldries,
And twilight saints, and dim emblazonings,
A shielded scutcheon blush’d with blood of queens and kings.

25
Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,
And threw warm gules on Madeline’s fair breast,
As down she knelt for heaven’s grace and boon;
Rose-bloom fell on her hands, together prest,
And on her silver cross soft amethyst,
And on her hair a glory, like a saint:
She seem’d a splendid angel, newly drest,
Save wings, for heaven—Porphyro grew faint:
She knelt, so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint.

26
Anon his heart revives: her vespers done,
Of all its wreathed pearls her hair she frees;
Unclasps her warmed jewels one by one;
Loosens her fragrant boddice; by degrees
Her rich attire creeps rustling to her knees:
Half-hidden, like a mermaid in sea-weed,
Pensive awhile she dreams awake, and sees,
In fancy, fair St. Agnes in her bed,
But dares not look behind, or all the charm is fled.

30
And still she slept an azure-lidded sleep,
In blanched linen, smooth, and lavender’d,
While he from forth the closet brought a heap
Of candied apple, quince, and plum, and gourd;
With jellies soother than the creamy curd,
And lucent syrops, tinct with cinnamon;
Manna and dates, in argosy transferr’d
From Fez; and spiced dainties, everyone,
From silken Samarcand to cedar’d Lebanon.

35
“Ah, Porphyro!” said she, “but even now
Thy voice was at sweet tremble in mine ear,
Made tuneable with every sweetest vow;
And those sad eyes were spiritual and clear:
How chang’d thou art! how pallid, chill, and drear!
Give me that voice again, my Porphyro,
Those looks immortal, those complainings dear!
Oh leave me not in this eternal woe,
For if thou diest, my love, I know not where to go.”

Beyond a mortal man impassion’d far
At these voluptuous accents, he arose,
Ethereal, flush’d, and like a throbbing star
Seen mid the sapphire heaven’s deep repose;
Into her dream he melted, as the rose
Blendeth its odour with the violet,
Solution sweet: meantime the frost-wind blows
Like Love’s alarum pattering the sharp sleet
Against the window-panes; St. Agnes’ moon hath set.

They glide, like phantoms, into the wide hall;
Like phantoms, to the iron porch, they glide;
Where lay the Porter, in uneasy sprawl,
With a huge empty flaggon by his side:
The wakeful bloodhound rose, and shook his hide,
But his sagacious eye an inmate owns:
By one, and one, the bolts full easy slide:
The chains lie silent on the footworn stones;
The key turns, and the door upon its hinges groans.

From Lecture Twenty-Three (Keats):

Ode to a Nightingale

1
My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
   My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
   One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:
‘Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
   But being too happy in thine happiness,
That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,
   In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
   Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

2
O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been
   Cool’d a long age in the deep-delved earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
   Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!
O for a beaker full of the warm South,
   Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
   And purple-stained mouth;
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
   And with thee fade away into the forest dim:
Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs,
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:
Already with thee! tender is the night,
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
Cluster’d around by all her starry Fays;
But here there is no light,
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Now what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
White hawthorn, and the pastoral egantine;
Fast fading violets cover’d up in leaves;
And mid-May’s eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eyes.

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call’d him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath;
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy!
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain
To thy high requiem become a sod.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that oft-times hath
Charm’d magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

8
Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is fam’d to do, deceiving elf.
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and now ‘tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades:
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?

To Autumn

I
Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run;
To bend with apples the moss’d cottage-trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
Until they think warm days will never cease,
For summer has o’er-brimm’d their clammy cells.

II
Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
Or on a half-reap’d furrow sound asleep,
Drows’d with the fume of poppies, while thy hook
Sparest the next swath and all its twined flowers:
And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
Steady thy laden head across a brook;
Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,
Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.

III
Where are the songs of spring? Ay, where are they?
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,
While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,
And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
Among the river sallows, borne aloft
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
Hedge-cricketts sing; and now with treble soft
The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.
Biographical Notes

William Blake (1757–1827). Blake was a Londoner, the son of a successful glover. He was trained as an engraver and worked initially in the book and magazine trade. He married Catherine Boucher in 1782. The Blakes had an extremely happy, though childless, marriage, and Catherine assisted William in his engraving shop. After 1788, Blake developed a new technique of illuminated printing, which he applied to the production of his own illuminated manuscripts, designing text and illustrations, then printing and hand-coloring the plates. Blake’s poems were never conventionally printed; consequently, he was less well known during his life than afterward. His longer visionary poems attest to his own mythological inventiveness and to his involvement in radical politics and religious movements throughout his life.

George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788–1824). The son of Captain John (“Mad Jack”) Byron and his second wife, Catherine Gordon, Byron was the most famous of the English Romantic poets during his event-filled and notorious lifetime. Educated at Harrow and, for a while, at Trinity College, Cambridge, Byron embarked on a lengthy tour of the European continent in 1809–1811, when he returned home to assume his seat in the House of Lords. In the same year, he published the first two cantos of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, which made him famous. In 1815, he married Annabella Milbanke, by whom he sired a daughter, Augusta Ada. The following year, Lady Bryon left him, and all Britain was abuzz with the rumors of his possible incestuous relationship with his half-sister, Augusta Leigh. He left England permanently in 1816, settling for a while in Switzerland with the Shelleys, before traveling to Italy, and finally to Greece, where he died in 1824, preparing to fight in the war for Greek independence.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834). The youngest of many children in a clergyman’s family, Coleridge was always a precious student. After his father’s death, he attended Christ’s Hospital in London, a grammar school for gifted but poor boys, where one of his classmates (and a lifelong friend) was Charles Lamb. His university career was not distinguished. Coleridge left Cambridge without a degree, but while there, he met Robert Southey. Together, the two young men concocted the idea of a utopian community in Pennsylvania (“Pantisocracy”) to which they intended to move with their wives, who were sisters. Coleridge’s marriage was an unhappy one. In 1795, he met Wordsworth, and for the next several years, they inspired and encouraged each other, working together on the volume that became *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). Because of chronic health problems and general unhappiness, Coleridge lived apart from his wife and children and was eventually alienated from the Wordsworths. To earn a living, he took to freelance journalism and lecturing. During the last eighteen years of his life, Coleridge stayed with the family of Dr. James Gilman in Highgate (London), who helped him to regulate his addictions to drugs and alcohol.

John Keats (1795–1821). The eldest of four children of a London innkeeper and his wife, Keats trained to be an apothecary and was apprenticed to a surgeon. He finished his medical training at Guy’s Hospital in London in 1815, but abandoned any thoughts of a career in medicine as he turned his attention gradually and permanently to composing poetry. He became friendly with a circle surrounding the radical writer Leigh Hunt. In 1817, Keats’s first volume of poems appeared, followed a year later by his long verse romance, *Endymion*, which was negatively reviewed by most of the conservative Tory journals. From 1818 through the fall of 1819, Keats had an *annus mirabilis*, composing not only his great odes, but also the narrative poems (“The Eve of Saint Agnes,” “Lamia,” and two versions of an uncompleted epic entitled “Hyperion”) on which his fame rests. Gradually weakened by a cold caught on a trip to Scotland in the summer of 1818, Keats developed tuberculosis (from which his youngest brother, Tom, died in December 1818). He became infatuated with a woman named Fanny Brawne, to whom he became engaged. At the invitation of Shelley, Keats sailed to Italy in 1820 in search of a more salubrious climate. He died in Rome, in a room near the Spanish Steps, in February 1821.

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822). Shelley was born into a newly aristocratic family, the eldest son of a member of Parliament. At Eton and University College, Oxford, he became famous as an atheist and free-thinker; he left Oxford after a half year. He eloped with Harriet Westbrook in 1811, but in 1814, he abandoned his pregnant wife to elope with Mary Wollstonecraft, whom he married two years later after Harriet’s suicide. The Shelleys lived in Geneva during the summer of 1816 with Byron, after which they returned to England briefly, before returning permanently to the Continent in 1818. They spent the next four years in Italy. Shelley’s idealistic and radical thought inspired equivalent strains of radicalism in his poetry. He drowned, with his friend Edward Williams, in a storm in the Bay of Spezia off the west coast of Italy and was buried in the Protestant Cemetery in Rome.
William Wordsworth (1770–1850). The second of five children, William Wordsworth was born and raised in the Lake District. He was seven when his mother died and was separated from his siblings. Educated at Cambridge, he traveled in France in 1790 and 1791, seeing at firsthand the early days of the Revolution. While there, he sired a child by Annette Vallon, whom he was prevented from marrying because of the continual warfare between Britain and France. From 1793 to 1798, Wordsworth was largely at loose ends—professionally and emotionally—although after he met and collaborated with Coleridge, his sense of his own literary vocation strengthened. He married Mary Hutchinson in 1802 and lived a quiet and increasingly celebrated life in Grasmere until his death. In 1842, at the death of Robert Southey, he was named Poet Laureate.
Bibliography

Essential Reading
Most of the primary readings for this series of lectures may be found in David Perkins, ed., *English Romantic Writers (2nd ed.)*, New York: Harcourt Brace, 1995. The following editions also contain much of the material.


Other Anthologies


Supplementary Critical Reading

-------- *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature.* New York: W.W. Norton, 1971. An excellent investigation of Romantic figures of thought, especially with regard to the imagination, and with reference to Continental, as well as British, Romanticism.


Richards, I. A. *Coleridge on Imagination*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1950. A critical investigation by the theorist responsible in part for what is called “new criticism,” this book shows the influential line of Coleridge through the twentieth century.


