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**HUM 3306: History of Ideas--The Age of Enlightenment to the Age of Anxiety
Summer 2010**

Romantic Era Poems

<p>William Blake: "And Did Those Feet"</p> <p>And did those feet in ancient time Walk upon England's mountains green? And was the holy Lamb of God On England's pleasant pastures seen?</p> <p>And did the Countenance Divine Shine forth upon our clouded hills? And was Jerusalem builded here Among these dark satanic mills?</p> <p>Bring me my bow of burning gold! Bring me my arrows of desire! Bring me my spear! O clouds, unfold! Bring me my chariot of fire!</p> <p>I will not cease from mental fight, Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand, Till we have built Jerusalem In England's green and pleasant land</p>	<p>Blake in this poem draws upon a legend that Jesus visited Britain (do a Google search if you are curious).</p> <p>But the poem quickly opens up and departs from that notion, wondering in amazement if England ever had a sublime presence (this ultimately isn't a Christian poem), given its transformation from a "green" world to one of early Industrial age belching out of foulness (the "dark satanic mills").</p> <p>The "Lamb" then, transformed into the prophetic figure of Blake speaking as "me," proclaims he will fight for a new, apocalyptic resurrection of "Jerusalem."</p> <p>Blake is condemning a real blighting of England, but sees the solution in the power of the imagination, "mental fight."</p> <p>Read the poem aloud to get the strong pounding rhythms achieved through repetition and a simple ballad form.</p>
<p>William Wordsworth: "The World Is Too Much with Us" (1807)</p> <p>The world is too much with us; late and soon, Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers; Little we see in Nature that is ours; We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon! This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon, The winds that will be howling at all hours, And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers,</p>	<p>This poem is (roughly) in a traditional sonnet form, and the imagery and allusions may seem "poetic" in a fashion that made you hate poetry in high school.</p> <p>So, you have to read aloud, slowly, letting the sad poignancy of Wordsworth's voice speak to you. In the first 2 lines: think of how tired you are at the end of your work or school day, plotting out your future to get out</p>

Our meddling intellect
Misshapes the beauteous forms of things-- 15
We murder to dissect.

Enough of Science and of Art,
Close up those barren leaves;
Come forth, and bring with you a heart
That watches and receives. 20

**William Wordsworth:
"Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" on
Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour, July 13, 1798**

Five years have past; five summers, with the length
Of five long winters! and again I hear
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
With a soft inland murmur. Once again
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
That on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
The landscape with the quiet of the sky.
The day is come when I again repose
Here, under this dark sycamore, and view
These plots of cottage ground, these orchard tufts,
Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,
Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves
'Mid groves and copses. Once again I see
These hedgerows, hardly hedgerows, little lines
Of sportive wood run wild; these pastoral farms,
Green to the very door; and wreaths of smoke
Sent up, in silence, from among the trees!
With some uncertain notice, as might seem
Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,
Or of some Hermit's cave, where by his fire
The Hermit sits alone.

These beauteous forms,
Through a long absence, have not been to me
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye;
But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
And passing even into my purer mind,
With tranquil restoration: -feelings too
Of unremembered pleasure; such, perhaps,
As have no slight or trivial influence

On that best portion of a good man's life,

This is challenging poem. It takes me at least a whole class period to cover just the basics. It is considered one of the best poems of the Romantic period.

So, start with a clear image of where Wordsworth is at. He's standing on a hillside looking downward/across the distance to a river, some farm fields, and an old church. He's been here before, and starts the poem by comparing what he feels now to what he feels then.

The first section describes a pleasant bucolic scene. It's "pretty" but not sublime; it isn't overpowering... just pleasant.

Curiously, decorating this scene is some "vagrant" folk. Notice how Wordsworth doesn't wonder whether these are, say, workers out of a job because during the early Industrial Revolution killed whole categories of work. It's as if you were to go to the beach, and see some "bum" roasting a hotdog in a fire, and say "how quaint."

My point is that this is a poem that is so concentrated on the psychological process of memory and nostalgia that Wordsworth doesn't really see poverty at all (Marx, who we will be reading soon, would cut through Wordsworth's bourgeois sentimentality).

The image about the blind man is a bit hard to follow. Imagine yourself where you are, right now, in the

His little, nameless, unremembered, acts
Of kindness and of love. Nor less, I trust,
To them I may have owed another gift,
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened: -that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on -
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul;
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.

If this

Be but a vain belief, yet, oh! how oft -
In darkness and amid the many shapes
Of joyless daylight; when the fretful stir
Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,
Have hung upon the beatings of my heart -
How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee,
O sylvan Wye! thou wanderer through the woods,
How often has my spirit turned to thee!

And now, with gleams of half-extinguished though
With many recognitions dim and faint,
And somewhat of a sad perplexity,
The picture of the mind revives again:
While here I stand, not only with the sense
Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts
That in this moment there is life and food
For future years. And so I dare to hope,
Though changed, no doubt, from what I was when first
I came among these hills; when like a roe
I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides
Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,
Wherever nature led -more like a man
Flying from something that he dreads than one
Who sought the thing he loved. For nature then
(The coarser pleasures of my boyish days,
And their glad animal movements all gone by)
To me was all in all. -I cannot paint
What then I was. The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion; the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite; a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,

solitude of your house, reading this professorial stuff. Wouldn't you like to be elsewhere? Wouldn't you like to get back to the beach and its "beauteous forms" that you can remember in your mind's eye?

Your marvelous interior imagination/your human capacity to respond to beauty gives you mental resources even amidst the dreariness that life often is: it gives you "sensations sweet" as you recollect nature's glories; such feelings might even be linked to religious sentiments, in which some sense of sublimity ("aspect more sublime; that blessed mood") helps you make sense of existential blankness/deadness.

Musing on such psycho-theological possibilities, Wordsworth almost goes into a narcotic trance, in which he almost becomes "one" with all exteriority, as he "sees into the life of things."

(Notice how much Romantic poetry keeps playing out a tension between sublime feelings/deadness.)

The next section goes into his mental replay of when he used to romp in the woods in childhood freedom. I'm not especially charmed by that part of the poem; for me, it picks up again when he goes transcendental, and feels a "presence" of "something far more deeply interfused...". Here, the world of individuality/subjecthood and the world of objects fuse together and Wordsworth has what we would call in a different context a "peak" experience.

By thought supplied, nor any interest
 Unborrowed from the eye. -That time is past,
 And all its aching joys are now no more,
 And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this
 Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur; other gifts
 Have followed; for such loss, I would believe,
 Abundant recompense. For I have learned
 To look on nature, not as in the hour
 Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
 The still, sad music of humanity,
 Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
 To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
 A presence that disturbs me with the joy
 Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
 Of something far more deeply interfused,
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
 And the round ocean and the living air,
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
 A motion and a spirit, that impels
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
 And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
 A lover of the meadows and the woods,
 And mountains; and of all that we behold
 From this green earth; of all the mighty world
 Of eye, and ear -both what they half create,
 And what perceive; well pleased to recognise
 In nature and the language of the sense
 The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
 The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
 Of all my moral being.

**John Keats. 1795–1821:
 “Ode to a Nightingale”**

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-wingèd Dryad of the trees,
 In some melodious plot
 Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
 Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

O for a draught of vintage! that hath been
 Cool'd a long age in the deep-delvèd earth,

5

10

I hope those lecture notes above helped you appreciate the poems. I would provide the same for the Keats' poem below, but I want you to read it on your own.

Some background, though: Keats really went out to his backyard one afternoon and wrote the poem in a few hours. He really was slowly dying at the time of tuberculosis. The love of his life (they did not get married; who wants to marry a dying poet...?!) lived next store, tantalizingly so.

So, with nothing but a bleak future, haunted by death and unconsummated passion, Keats goes

Tasting of Flora and the country-green,
 Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!
 O for a beaker full of the warm South! 15
 Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
 With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
 And purple-stainèd mouth;
 That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
 And with thee fade away into the forest dim: 20

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 grey hairs, 25
 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. 30

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, 35
 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. 40

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
 Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
 But, in embalmèd darkness, guess each sweet
 Wherewith the seasonable month endows
 The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild; 45
 White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
 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 eves. 50

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 musèd rhyme,
 To take into the air my quiet breath;
 Now more than ever seems it rich to die, 55
 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—

into his garden and gets “high,” all-too-briefly, in just being able to experience the bird and its song. The poignancy of the poem is the intimate clash of sensations of beauty and the certitude of death.

Read the poem slowly, softly; with some Chopin in the background (see the enhancement site at the top of the main Romanticism lecture). If the poem does not melt your heart, you are made of wood!

To thy high requiem become a sod.	60
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	65
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home, She stood in tears amid the alien corn; The same that ofttimes hath Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.	70
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 famed to do, deceiving elf. Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades	75
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?	80