
Survey of World Literature II

ENG 204

Belhaven University

Hall # 3

English Romantic Poets: Blake, Wordsworth, Shelley, Browning, and Tennyson

Introduction to Hall

- This Hall reviews major poets of the Romantic period. We will study the shorter lyric poems and also the dramatic monologue. These poems are very accessible and easy to understand.
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Topics to be Covered

- English 19th century Romanticism
 - Historical shift from Enlightenment
 - Impact of Darwin
 - Analysis and discussion of lyric poems and dramatic monologues
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Hall Objectives

- Contrast the Enlightenment with the Romantic period.
 - Analyze poetry from the Romantic period.
 - Apply a Christian worldview to Romanticism and its literature.
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Biblical Foundations

John 1:3

Through him all things were made;
without him nothing was made that has
been made.

19th Century Romanticism

- Importance of imagination
 - Fulfillment of individual
 - Emphasis on emotions
 - Nature's vastness and possibility
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Shift from Enlightenment to the Romanticism

- American and French Revolutions: both focused on rights of the individual
- Exciting inventions that glorified human imagination: steam engine, electric light bulb, pasteurization, cotton gin, etc...
- Industrial Revolution: crowded cities created both opportunity and misery

Darwin's Theory of Evolution

- *The Origin of Species* 1859
 - Naturalist whose five-year voyage convinced him that life forms were much older than thought and these had evolved from simpler to complex organisms based on “survival of the fittest”
 - Called into question traditional biblical principles about creation, man, original sin
 - Controversy just as heated today as it was during the Romantic period
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Focus on the Individual

- Self as authority
 - Self as good
 - Self as topics for writing
 - Inner self
 - Self and feelings
 - Imagination powerful part of self
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Role of Nature

- Nature's connection to emotion
 - Nature as unifying
 - Nature as multifaceted
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English Romantic Lyrics

- Address common issues of concern
 - Emotional and passionate
 - Range of emotions: awe, grief, joy, fear
 - Relatively “simple” poems to read, but filled with complexities and depth
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William Blake

- No formal education
 - Illustrator/writer who connects visual with language
 - *Songs of Innocence vs. Songs of Experience*
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“The Tyger”

- Beauty and horror of natural world
 - Biblical imagery and symbols
 - Questions about creator and creation
 - Blacksmith metaphor
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Questions

- Why is “tyger” spelled this way?
 - How is fire important in the poem?
 - Why does Blake use so many question marks?
 - How does the poem reflect Romanticism?
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Line Analysis

- “What immortal hand or eye / Could frame thy fearful symmetry?” (3-4)
 - “What the hammer? What the chain? / In what furnace was thy brain?” (13-14)
 - “Did he who made the Lamb make thee?” (20)
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William Wordsworth

- Embodied the newness of Romanticism
 - Collaborated with Samuel Coleridge
 - Used simple language and themes
 - Desired new view of present
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“The World Is Too Much With Us”

- Sonnet form (14 lines)
 - Fatalistic view of modern world
 - Vulnerability of nature
 - Allusions (references to mythology)
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Line Analysis

- “Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers” (2)
 - “We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!” (4)
 - “For this, for everything, we are out of tune” (8)
 - “Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea; / Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.” (13-14)
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Questions

- What might be upsetting Wordsworth about his world in this time period?
 - Why are certain words capitalized?
 - Why is the sea baring her bosom an important image?
 - Why does he refer to mythological characters?
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Percy Bysshe Shelley

- Defiant, dramatic life
 - Privileged upbringing
 - Poetry as connection with future
 - Union with nature in writing
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“Ode to the West Wind”

- Beauty can be created from evil and violence
 - Uses seasonal changes to move poem forward
 - At first, impersonal, but then switches to poet himself
 - Cycle of seasons like the cycle of life
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Questions

- Why are seasons chosen to make Shelley's points about life?
 - What are our connotations about each season?
 - How is death imagery used in the poem?
 - Why does the poem shift from third person to first person?
 - What is the poem's concluding thought?
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Line Analysis

- “The winged seeds, where they lie cold and low,
/ Each like a corpse within it grave” (7-8)
 - “Thou who didst waken from his summer dreams
/ The blue Mediterranean, where he lay” (29-30)
 - “Make me thy lyre” (57)
 - “The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind, / If Winter
comes, can Spring be far behind?” (69-70)
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Dramatic Monologue

- Character delivers a speech that reflects his history, personality, and motives
- Reader receives part of story but whole story be require reader to “fill in the blanks”

Robert Browning

- English poet of the Victorian era
 - Dramatic monologues, love poems
 - Supportive family; married to famous poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning
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“My Last Duchess”

- Duke unflatteringly reminisces about his dead wife while negotiating for a new one
 - Browning uses an actual duke of the Italian Renaissance as a model
 - Duke’s story reveals his narcissistic personality
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The Duke: Character Analysis

- Knows marriage is important socially
 - Prefers dead wife's portrait to the real thing
 - Ends her life because she was too cheerful
 - Sullies her character, even in death
 - Expresses she didn't respect his name
 - Shows off his art to impress the envoy
 - Duke thinks he's _____, but he's actually _____.
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Questions

- Why would a duke feel the need to speak poorly of his dead wife?
 - Did the duke kill his wife?
 - What is the importance of a name?
 - Why was the duke so threatened by his wife's good nature?
 - How is hypocrisy at work here?
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Line Analysis

- “Sir, ‘twas not / Her husband’s presence only,
called that spot / Of joy into the Duchess’
cheek:” (12-14)
- “She thanked men,--good! But thanked /
Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked /
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name / With
anybody’s gift.” (31-34)
- “This grew; I gave commands; / Then all smiles
stopped together.” (45-46)

Alfred, Lord Tennyson

- English poet during Victorian period
 - Very popular, but life was marked by sadness and loss
 - Poems of conflict between despair and hope
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“Ulysses”

- Dramatic monologue about an aging warrior who isn't ready to retire
 - Greek hero represents the human need to dream and aspire
 - Ulysses sees himself as special, so therefore is unwilling to give up his adventurous life
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Ulysses: Character Analysis

- Battles aging process and its inevitabilities
 - Longs for past glories
 - Suffocates under the burden of everyday life
 - Disconnects from wife and son
 - Rejects idea that his life's adventure is over
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Questions

- How is Ulysses' story played out in real life?
 - Why does Ulysses see himself as special?
 - Why does he fear aging?
 - How does he intend to combat death?
 - Are humans innately wired to be hopeful or not?
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Line Analysis

- “Matched with an aging wife,” (3)
 - “I cannot rest from travel” (5)
 - “I am a part of all that I have met;” (18)
 - “How dull it is to pause, to make an end,” (22)
 - “He works his work, I mine.” (43)
 - “’Tis not too late to seek a newer world.” (57)
 - “To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.” (70)
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What's next?

- Complete your detailed reading
- Answer the discussion questions
- Complete the writing assignments
- Take the Hall Quiz

References

- *The Norton Anthology of Western Literature*, Ninth Edition, Volume 2, Puchner Ed. et al

This concludes Hall 3