

## LECTURE I

28.7.14

### INTRODUCTION

Romanticism - period of literature

**1789-1832** (*from French Revolution to Reform Act*)

Before: 18th century - enlightenment, Augustanism, Neo-classical age, Age of Reason

There was both continuity and change from the 18th to Romantics - Romanticism had origin in growth of sentimental movement through 1700s, but it's clear there was also a profound PARADIGM SHIFT (Thomas Kuhn's term) across Europe.

### IGNITED BY A SERIES OF REVOLUTIONS ACROSS THE WORLD

Whole world view shifted

Movement towards change but increasingly oppressive government

#### Significant Events:

Industrial revolution (1750s onwards, accelerating)

Urbanism replacing agrarian communities

GROWTH OF POLITICAL RADICALISM ACROSS EUROPE

1789 French revolution (and in other countries) resisted by repressive english government

1790s calls for 'Rights of Man' and 'Rights of Women' increasing campaign to abolish slavery

1819 Peterloo Massacre;

increasing calls for electoral reform

1832 Reform act, beginnings of democracy

#### What was Romanticism?

Social as well as literary movement based on change and revolution

Freedom and spontaneity valued over order

Primacy of CREATIVE IMAGINATION over REASON (the heart, not the head)

Primacy of FEELING over EXTERNAL REALITY (moods CREATE reality)

Attempts to fuse inner and outer worlds - create a link between the two

e.g. Blake's *The Growth of the Poet's mind*

Valuing of Nature

Originality, Inspiration, 'Genius' valued over IMITATION

Valuing of both SOLITUDE (individualism) and COMMUNITY (altruism)

New valuing of childhood

Revival of older forms - ballads/gothic (hyperreality)

Interest in supernatural, workings of the mind below conscious level

Dreams and irrational states - drugs (only anaesthetics available)

### ALL THESE ARE LINKED BY PRIMARY REFERENCE TO IMAGINATION

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## WILLIAM BLAKE

representative figure of the period (lived throughout as a Romantic - retained his beliefs)

manifests many of the elements BUT was barely known during this time (not literary influential)

his process of creation set him apart (worked primarily in both art and poetry)

images accompanied his poems (engraved)

not mass produced (one of the reasons he was not well known)

BECAME REVOLUTIONARY PARTLY BECAUSE OF HIS OBSCURITY

*able to pursue his radical ideas and remain true to them because of his isolation*

### **THE MARRIAGE OF HEAVEN AND HELL (1790-3)**

gives a quick access to his attitudes, visions and unique style

imagination over reason

assault on organised religion

reversing all the categories (what the church calls good, he calls bad)

Rejection of orthodox religion as repressive and conformist

inclusivity of positives and negatives essential to full existence - fusing opposites rather than carving them up into categories - primacy of emotional expression over repression

restrictions placed on human potential pervert people - repressing these urges creates the desire

corollary of the previous one - take away restrictions and all are virtuous - desire itself cannot be evil

### **VISIONS OF THE DAUGHTERS OF ALBION (1791-3)**

There is a basic story but it's not the real point of the poem - allegorical of larger issues. It follows *the Book of Thel* which is about an adolescent female on the brink of sexual awakening, simultaneously frightened and attracted by the state of adulthood

Similarities to *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*

Oothoon is a young woman ready to express her sexuality, she loves Theotormon but he is inexperienced, passive and judgemental

Ethan is raped and imprisoned by Bromion. The state is likened to a loveless Marriage which is likened to Slavery

Oothoon and the daughters of Albion challenge conventional sexual morality - insists on her inner purity laments about restrictions placed on love and sexuality by materialist philosophies guilt-ridden organised religion and legalistic codes

The issues of restraints on sexual love are seen as equally underpinning instates of colonialism and slavery, and impeding rights of women

very modern views

### **SONGS OF INNOCENCE AND OF EXPERIENCE**

accessibly - written for children, in some ways about children

reflect a new attitude towards innocence

pairings between 'innocence' and 'experience'

NURSES' SONG, CHIMNEY SWEEPER, THURSDAY

innocence isn't something only children have - state of being in which you cannot see evil, only the good

BUT once you're in that state you can be exploited - deceived, manipulated etc.

experience is inevitable - but the choice is either to become jealous, negative, manipulative

sadness at the loss

wise experience (almost a return to innocence) see the evil and attempt to change it by holding onto the innocence

PERSONA - on spectrum from pure innocence to regained innocence