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The Lives and Works of the English Romantic Poets Part II

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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, who 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 sagaciousness 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 dear 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, framing 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 desire.

- IV. Byron's lyric poetry, for which he is most remembered by the general public, exhibits characteristic defects and excellencies.
- There is, first of all, his mastery of a variety of metrical and verse forms.
 - Many of the poems are actually entitled "stanzas for music" or could be set to melodies for singing.
 - 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 nonchalantness.
- "Written After Swimming from Sestos to Abydos" is a rollicking, mock-heroic send-up of classical myth.
 - "Maid of Athens" makes fun of Byron's own pretensions as a lover.
 - "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.
- In "Stanzas to Augusta," he addresses his half-sister, with whom he had an incestuous love affair before going into exile on the Continent.
 - "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:

- Why might Byron have been so popular in his day?
- How do you take the measure of Byron's tone of voice in many of his lyrics?
- Can we call Byron a "sincere" poet? What does "sincerity" mean with relation to poetry, especially Romantic poetry?

Lecture Fourteen

The Byronic Hero

Spoiler: 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 narrative 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-achiever with a secret crisis in his past. He is as haughty, tired, rebellious, and flamboyant as his creator.

Outline

- Byron's name is most frequently attached to the kind of hero we associate with him and his writing.
 - It is paradoxical that the Byronic hero should be both unique and a composite of many different characteristics.
 - The same was true of Byron's man.
 - This paradox is central to major Romantic ideas about identity, especially the poet's identity.
 - Kenn and Kimboud made momentous pronouncements to this effect.
 - The American photographer Cindy Sherman demonstrates the same tendency.
- The Byronic hero is often god-like.
 - Like Shelley, Byron idealized the Greek Titan Prometheus, for his indomitable will and his benefactions to humanity.
 - The figure of Prometheus also afflicted Mary Shelley, who subtitled her novel *Frankenstein*, "The New Prometheus."
 - Prometheus is rewarded with punishment for his kindness to humanity.
 - The quality of defiance (of authority) is paramount.
- In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (Canto 3), Byron achieved the most memorable version of himself as a Byronic hero.
 - Harold, like Byron, wanders across Europe.
 - He longs to escape from nature, is misanthropic, and is opposed to urban life.
 - He is "solitary and proud."
 - He enjoys contemplating the dust of empires.

IV. In his closet drama *Manfred*, Byron depicts a fallen 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 knees to anyone.
 2. He does not sell his soul for knowledge or power.
- C. Manfred has a cursed side. He has committed an unpardonable, unamendable 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?

Lecture Fifteen

Don Juan: A Comic Masterpiece

Singer: 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 free-wheeling 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 satirist.
 1. The *cantata 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 underlife.
 1. It is an exploration of heroic 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 affluence, especially in young lovers.
C. When *Don Juan* and *Dorcas 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 us to much attention to his own life and opinions as to the central 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 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 as to life?

Lecture Sixteen

Shelley and Romantic Lyricism

Speaker: 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 (where 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 ungraspable.”
- 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 operas.

1. He was an early proponent of free love.
2. His early death helped to immortalize his reputation as a “bright and intellectual 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 sentences 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, so we 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 optimism, 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 “meaning” 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 abstract and difficult.
 - H. 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 confuses 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 unattainable.
 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 *brave*, what exists at the top of the mountain.
 1. The "immortal" world is beyond our ken.
 2. All we know are its effects.
 3. Power dwells apart, tranquil and unworld.
 - 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 Greek-Roman) view of history with a linear (or Judeo-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, male king, in which peaceful protest is subdued by force. In *Pelham*, 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, *Jacobin* (1813), denounced monarchy, aristocracy, and conservation 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 Judeo-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 *Pelham* (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 over," Shelley gives us a vision of various historical and religious persons, who succeed and supplant one another.
 1. Christianity replaces the powers of Greek-Roman mythology.
 2. Progress and tragedy seem to be poetry 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 warlike or bloodshed.
 - B. It seems to be a purely "aesthetic" phenomenon.
 - C. Shelley acknowledges humankind's mortality and its perfectibility. The three sides of his disposition—moderation, 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 "Ozymis 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 do you notice in "Ode to the West Wind"?

Lecture Nineteen

Shelley and Love

Sages: 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 refers on the principle of Eros as the impeding 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.
- He runs through a conventional grab bag of images to find the right words for Emilia.
 - 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.
- 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.
 - On the other hand, he claims that Emilia is the "sun" of his life, rising over his "earth" with inspirational force.
- VI. His picture of an island paradise at the end of the poem deliberately uses erotic imagery to convey the physical, intellectual, and spiritual nature of his "love" for Emilia.
- The natural world seems like an appropriate spot for young lovers, because all the physical details are trembling with sexual force.
 - 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 love.
- The background of the poem doesn't really support Shelley's inflated claims about *Adonais* (Keats).
 - The two men had met once but were hardly friends.
 - When Shelley heard that Keats was ill, he invited him to Italy, but never saw him once he arrived at Naples and then Rome.
 - The real importance of Keats for Shelley is symbolic and vocational.
 - It is a convention to worry about the early deaths of poets.
 - It is equally conventional to lament those poets who were unappreciated during their lives or slighted by critics.
 - The pastoral elegy serves a social and a psychological purpose.
 - It consoles the survivors, the mourners.
 - 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.
- The erotic principle derives and overflows from a burning fountain into our dry world, and it impels all spiritual beings, especially poets, upward.

- Death involves the burning off of the chains of mortality.
- 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.
- The poem ends on a note of adventure, hopefulness, and suicidal adventure.

Questions to Consider:

- In the "Eupaisychidion" do you find Shelley's exclamations of love believable?
- What is the relationship between Shelley's moral views and his use of the myth of a woman to an island paradise?
- Why did he choose rhyming heroic couplets as his form for this poem?
- Why did he use the Spenserian stanza for *Adonais*?
- 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 two concerns 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, *Letters, Prose, 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 entwined themes.

- A. In a famous letter, he declared, "the Imagination may be compared to Adam's dream . . . He awakes 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.
- 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 time and poetic process in such poems as "In Dream-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 yearning 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 Dream-Nighted December" explores the paradox of "the first 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 Thresh 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, criticism, 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, criticism, and landscape in the "Ode to Psyche"?
3. What kinds of language does he use throughout his great ode?

Lecture Twenty-Two

Keats and Ecce

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 *Wesley*, 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 succession 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. Madeline is the crookshank 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 Bookman and Angela the nurse opposes the youth of the lovers.

3. The drunken revelry of Madeline's kissers 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. Madeline is like a child, "broodhatched 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 naive and voluptuous.
 - C. Keats's complex attitudes are revealed by an examination of his manuscript revisions of the poem, especially with regard to Madeline's undressing and Porphyro's sinning of her.
 1. In stanza 38, he must make Madeline's undressing seem both innocent and provocative at once.
 2. In stanza 39, he takes special care to give us a wonderful display of demented events.
- IV. The sexual and religious climax of the poem comes when Porphyro awakens Madeline; the characters at last make love.
 - A. Madeline 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.
- V. 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 raised 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 diva, 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.

- 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."
- 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:

- What is the relationship between "soul-making" and love-making in "The Eve of St. Agnes"?
- Why should Keats entertain skepticism concerning his hero and heroine?
- 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

- Keats's odes are generally considered his greatest achievement as a lyric poet.
 - 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.
 - The sense of mortality and the complexity of human feeling go along with Keats's idea of "negative capability," which we have already mentioned.
- 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.
 - It is a poem full of paradoxes.
 - He begins by saying that he wants to die, but then tells us that the reason for this death wish is too much happiness.
 - 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.
 - 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.
 - The poem is full of the wish to escape.
 - Subtle is one kind of escape.
 - Wine, or inebriation, is yet another.
 - Merging with the nightingale in the "Korax dim," charioted to her on the wings of "Paeony" itself, is an imaginative alternative to drugs.
 - At the poem's center, Keats exists in a mystical trance, seemingly apart from all time and its progress.
 - He seems to be symbolically dead, "in embalmed darkness."
 - The list of flowers he finds around him, however, suggests a movement in time from early spring to late summer.

- B. 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 “fairies” 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 to 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 overly “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 representations.
- II. William Butler Yeats in 1911 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 Lotus-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 Winzander."
 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 "Crucifix 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 Romantic?
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?

Use the resources below to help you explore the connections between the English Romantic poets and their American heirs.

1. www.english.utoronto.ca/~matt/romanticism/romanticism.html (University of Toronto)
2. www.english.utoronto.ca/~matt/romanticism/romanticism.html (University of Toronto)
3. www.english.utoronto.ca/~matt/romanticism/romanticism.html (University of Toronto)
4. www.english.utoronto.ca/~matt/romanticism/romanticism.html (University of Toronto)

Use the resources below to help you explore the connections between the English Romantic poets and their American heirs.

Use the resources below to help you explore the connections between the English Romantic poets and their American heirs.

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 were 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-feeding 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 unfix'd, 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, unmatch'd by the sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord!

Sonnet for Myself

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.
Thus 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 vain
The shore to which their shiver'd sail shall never stretch again.

Then the mortal coldness of the sand like death itself comes down;
It cannot feel for others' woes, it dries not down its own;
That heavy chill has frozen o'er the fountains 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 icy-leaves around the ruin'd turret wreaths,
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, or see many a wanderer's scene;
As springs in deserts found soon o'ert, all breakish though they be,
So might the wither'd waste of life, those tears would flow to me.

Written after Swimming from Sicily to Rhodes

I

It is the month of dark December,
Lentiler, who was rightly wroth
(What maid will not the tale
remember?)
To cross thy stream, broad
Hellespont!

II

It, when the wintry tempest roared,
The spell to fling, nothing loth,
And thus of old thy current posied,
Fair Ymas! how I pity both!

III

For me, degenerate modern wretch,
Though in the gentler 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 roe—and—Lord knows
what besides,
And sworn for Love, as I
the Glory;

V

'Twere hard to say who lived the
best:
Sad mortals! thus the Gods still
plague you!
He lost his labour, I my just:
For he was drowned, and I've the
agee.

Maid of Athens, See We Part

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

By those tresses unconfin'd,
Woo'd by each Illegion wind;
By those lids whose jetty fringes
Kiss thy soft cheeks' blossoming tinges;
By those wild eyes like the sea,
"My life, I love you."

By that lip I long to taste;
By that nose entwined maid;
By all the token-flowers that tell
What words can never speak so well,
By love's abstract joy and woe,

Maid of Athens, I am gone:
Think of me, sweet! when alone.
Though I fly to Isambod,
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 cuts where its sheath,
And the soul wears out the breast,
And the heart must pause to breathe,
And love itself have rest.

Though the night was made for
loving,
And the day returns too soon,
Yet we'll go no more a-roving
By the light of the moon.

Shamus 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 fruits 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
paid
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 breaks I believed in with
me,
If faith's 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
waves,

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 contain;
They may torture, but shall not
subdue me;

'Tis of thee that I think—run of
them.

Though human, thou didst not
deceive me,
Though woman, thou didst not
fascinate,

Though loved, thou forborest to
grieve me,
Though slander'd, thou never
couldst shake;

Though treated, thou didst not
disclaim me,
Though parted, it was not to fly,
Though watchful, 'twas not to delude
me.

On This Day I Complete My Thirty-Sixth Year

'Tis true this heart should be
removed,
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 fly that on my bosom preys

Nor, mate, that the world might
hate.

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 share;
And if dearly that error hath cost me,
And more than I once could
foresee,

I have found that, whatever it cost me,
It could not deprive me of thee.

From the wreck of the past, which
hath perish'd,
Thou teach I at least may recall,
It hath taught me that what I most
cherish'd

Deserv'd to be detest 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
thou.

In love as some volcanic lake,
No torch is kindled at its blaze
A funeral pile.

The hope, the fear, the jealous care,
The exalted position 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 brow,
Or binds his brow,

The sword, the banner, and the field,
Glory and Greece, around me reel!
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 in parent lake,
And thou strike home!

Tread those reviving passions down,
Unwarily march on!—unto thee
Indifferent should the smile or frown

From Lecture Fourteen (Byronic)

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage (excerpts from Canto 3)

12

But soon he knew himself the most woful
Of men to herd with men; 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 uncontrolled,
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 sought 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 readily meet their doom
With draughts incommensurate on the sinking deck,
Did yet inspire a cheer, which he forbore to check.

Off-beauty he.

If thou regret'st thy youth, why live?
The land of honorable death
Is here—go 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.

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 see see
 Nothing to loathe in nature, none 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.

And thus I am absorbed, and this is life:
 I look upon the peopled desert plain,
 As on a place of agony and strife,
 Where, for some sin, to sorrow I was cast,
 To rest and suffer, but no more at last
 With a fresh pinion which I feel to spring,
 Though young, yet waving vigorous as the blast
 Which it would cope with, on delighted wing,
 Spurning the clay-cold bonds which round me bring ailing.

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 ether, in the crowd
 They could not deem me one of such; I stand
 Amongst them, but not of them; in a shroud
 Of thoughts which were not their thoughts, and still could,
 Had I not filled my mind, which thus itself subdued.

I have not loved the world, nor the world me,
 But let us part fair (hey) 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 useful, nor worse
 Sources for the failing; I would also deem
 Of an others' griefs that some sincerely grieve;
 That two, or one, are almost what they seem,
 That goodness is no name, and happiness no dream.

... Thy Godlike crime was to be glad,
 To render with thy precepts less
 The sin of human wretchedness,
 And strengthen man with his own
 mind;
 But baffled as thou wert from high,
 Still is thy patient energy,
 In the endurance, and repulse
 Of thine impenetrable spirit,
 Which Earth and Heaven could not
 convoke,
 A mighty lesson we labor:
 Thou art a symbol and a sign
 To mortals of their fate and force;

From *Lectures Fifties* (Byron)

Don Juan (excerpt)

Canto First

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

6

Must epic poets plunge "in medias res"
 (Hence make this the heroic harpula road),
 And does your hero talk, when'er you please,
 What went before—by way of apitote,
 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 at the worst of sinning,
And therefore I shall open with a line
(Although it cost me half an hour in spinning)
Nursing 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 quarrelling.

21

'Tis pity learned virgins ever wed
With parsons 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 intellects,
Inferns as truly, have they not horn-pecked you all?

42

Widowed 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 sea;
And now I think on't, "mi vice in mente,"
Ladies even of the most amatory 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 indolent son,
Who cannot leave alone our helpless day,
But will keep bawling, bawling, bawling on,
That howsoever people list and pray,
The flesh is frail, and so the soul as loose;
What men call gallantry, and gods adultery,
Is much more common where the climate's sultry.

111

The hand which still held Jean's, by degrees
Gently, but palpably confirmed its grasp.
As if it said, "Determine 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 raise
A feeling dangerous to a prudent spouse.

112

I cannot know what Jean thought of this,
But what he did, is much what you would do;
His young lip thanked it with a grateful kiss,
And then, absorbed in 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 given so weak.

117

And Julia's voice was lost, except in sighs,
Until two lines 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 women did not oppose temptation;
A little still she strove, and much repeated,
And sighing "I will not" or consent"—consented.

200

My poem's epic, and its merit 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.

204

All these things will be specified in time,
With strict regard to Aristotle's rules,
The *Fable* *liberum* of the war sublime,
Which makes so many poets, and some fools;
These 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 porcupine the other day—
My heart is not much grayer; and, in short, I
Have squandered my whole summer while 'twas May,
And feel no more the spirit to return,
Have spent my life, both interest and principal,
And don't rat, what I damned, my soul inalienable.

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 of the bee,
Think 't 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 abstract
Quest 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
Inseparable, 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 judgment.

216

My days of love are over; no more
The charms of maid, wife, and still less of widow,
Can make the foot 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 charit is forbid too,
So fit a good diligent tenacity vice,
I think I must take up with aversion.

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
despise!"
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 unimpassioned 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 embodied 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 oar-floud.

What thou art we know not;
What is most like thee?
From rainbow clouds there flow not
Deep 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 horded not:

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

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

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

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

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

Chorus Hymened,
Or triumphal chant,
Matched with thine would be all
But an empty want.
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
Languor cannot be;
Shadow of annoyance
Never came near thee:
Thou lovest—but we're here have's and satety.

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 sudden thought.

Yet if we could score
Hate, and pride, and fear;
If we were things here
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 measures

Better than all treasures
That in books are found,
They skill to poet were, those scorers of the ground!

Track me half the gladders
That thy brain must know;
Such harmonious madmen
From my lips would flow
The world should listen them—as I am listening now.

From *Lecture Sermon* (Shelley)

Hymn to Intellectual Beauty

The awful shadow of some unseen Power
Floats though unseen among us,—visiting
This various world with an inconstant wing
As summer winds that creep from flower to flower;
Like incense-breath that behind some play mountain shrouds,
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 sight 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 thine upon
Oftentimes 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 naut for ever
Weaves rainbows o'er yon mountain river,
Why ought should fall and fade that once is shown,
Why fear and dream and death and birth
Cast on the day-light of this earth
Such gloom,—why man has such a scope
For love and hate, discrepancy and hope?

No voice from some abhissal world hath ever
To sage or poet these responses given,
Therefore the names of Demons, Ghost, and Heavens,
Remain the records of their vain endeavour,
Faint spells—whose uttered charms might not avail to sever,

From all we hear and all we see,
Doubt, chance, and instability,
Thy light alone—like mind 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 men and woe in lovers' eyes
Thou—that to human thought art ever present,
Like darkness to a dying flame,
Depart not as thy shadow came,
Depart not—lest the grave should be,
Like life and fate, a dark reality.

While yet a boy I sought for ghosts, and sped
Through empty a listening chamber, sun and rain,
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, as that event time when winds are moaning
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 bosoms
Of stainless soul or love's delight
Coveted with me the evilest night—
They know that never joy illumed my brow
Unlinked with hope that thou wouldst free
This world from its dark slavery,
That thou—O soul of LOVELINESS,
Wouldst give what these words cannot express.

The day becomes more solemn and serene
When noon is past—there is a harmony
In autumn, and a hush 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 rules—to me who worship thee,
And every form containing thee,
Whom, SPIRIT fair, thy spells did bind
To fear himself, and love all human kind.

How Many

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 is a feeble brook will oft measure
In the wild woods, among the mountains lone,
Where waterfalls around it leap for ever,
Where woods and winds contend, and a vast street
O'er its rocks tumultuously hurries and raves.

Thus thou, Ravine of Arve—dark, deep Ravine
Thou many-coloured, many-voiced vale,
O'er whose pines, and crags, and caverns sail
Fast cloud shadows and unnumbered awful forms,
Where Power in likeness of the Arve comes down
From the ice gulf that girds his secret throne,
Hurrying through those dark mountains like the flame
Of lightning through the tempest—thou dost lie,
The giant brood of pines around thee clinging,
Children of older time, in whose devotion
The chainless winds still come and ever come
To drink their odours, and their mighty swirling
To hear—an old and solemn harmony:
Thine earthy rainbows stretched across the sweep
Of the ethereal waterfall, whose veil
Hides some unsculptured image; the strange sleep
Which when the voices of the desert fall
Wraps all in its own deep eternity;
Thy caverns echoing to the Arve's commotion,
A faint, lone sound no other sound can tame;
Thou art pervaded with that ceaseless motion,
Thou art the path of that unending 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 passionately
Now raves and receives first inspirings,
Holding an unending 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 thou or thou art no unbidden guest,
In the still case of the witch Pezay,
Seeking among the shadows that pass by,
Ghosts of all things that are, some shade of them,
Some phantoms, some faint image, all the brood
From which they fled recall to them, thou art there!

Some say that glooms 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
His some unknown omnipotence unfiled

The veil of life and death? or do I lie
In dream, and does the mighty world of sleep
Spread far around and inaccessible
Its circles? Far the very spirit falls,
Driven like a homeless cloud from steep to steep
That vanishes among the viewless gales?
Far, far above, piercing the infinite sky,
Mount Blane appears—still, stony, and serene
Its subject mountains their assembly 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 steep;
A desert peopled by the storms alone,
Save when the eagle brings some hunter's home,
And the wolf tracks her there—how hideously
Its shapes are heaped around! rads, bare, and high,
Ghastly, and scarred, and rivers—in this the scene
Where the old Earthquake-demon taught her young Rain?
Were these their toys? or did a man
Of fire envelop once this silent snow?
None can reply—all seems eternal now,
The wilderness has a mysterious tongue
Which teaches awful truths, or fails so mild,
So solemn, so serene, that man may be,
But for such faith, with nature reconciled,
Thou hast a voice, great Mountain, to repeat
Large codes of law and war; 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,
Oceans, and all the living things that dwell
Within the dusky earth; lightning, and rain,
Earthquake, and fiery flood, and hurricane,
The torpor of the year when feebly dreams
Visit the hidden buds, or dreamless sleep
Bleeds every thistle leaf and flower—the hoard
With which from that detested treasure 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 primeval mountains
Touch 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 scorns of mortal power
Have piled alone, pyramid, and pinnacle,
A city of death, distinct with many a tower
And wall impregnable of burning ice.
Yet not a city, but a flood of rain
Is there, that from the boundaries of the sky
Rolls its perpetual stream; vast pines are strewn
Its desolved path, or in the mangled soil
Branchless and shagreened 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-places
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 these secret chasms in tumult swelling
Murmur in the vale, and rise majestic River,
The breath and blood of distant lands; for ever
Rolls its load waters to the ocean waves,
Breathes its evil vapours to the circling air.

V

Mount Blane 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 night,
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 heath
Rapid and strong, but silently! its horse
The soulless 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 (excerpt)

Worlds on Worlds Are Rolling Ever

Worlds as worlds are rolling over
From creation to decay,
Like the bubbles on a river
Sparkling, bursting, borne away,
But they are still immortal
Who, through birth's ardent portal
And death's dark chasm hurrying to and fro,
Clothe their ascending flight
In the brief dust and light.
Gathered around their chariots as they go,
New shapes they still may wear,
New gods, new lives receive,
Bright or dim as they as the toben they find
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 wild and tame,
Not prayed, until their Lord had taken flight;
The rooms of Mahomet
Arose, and it shall set
While flattered on Heaven's immortal noon
The cross leads generations on.

Swift as the radiant shapes of sleep
From one whose dreams are Pandæra
Fly, when the fond wretch wakes to weep,
And Day peers forth with her blank eyes,

So fleet, so faint, so fit,
The Powers of earth and air
Fled from the falling-star of Bosphorus:
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,
Waited 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 hopes
Glean
Like weeds of a bloodstained dream.
A brighter Hellas rears its mountains
From waves forever far;
A new Parnassus rolls his fountains
Against the morning star,
Where fainter Tempe flows, there
Sleep
Young Cyclops on a summer deep.
A loftier Argos classes the main,
Fraught with a later prize;
Another Orestes sings again,
And loves, and weeps, and dies.
A new Ulysses leaves his shore
Calypso for his native wood.
O, write no more the tale of Troy,
If earth Death's scroll must be!
New oaks with Lutan mope the joy
Which dawns upon the free.

Prometheus Unbound (excerpt) Act III

SPIRIT OF THE HOUR: ...As I have said, I floated to the earth:
It was, as it is still, the pain of life
To move, to breathe, to be; I wondering went

Although a sabbler Sphinx now
Riddles of death Thetis never knew,
Another Alecto shall arise,
And to remember time
Bequeaths, like cancer to the sides,
The splendour of its prime;
And leave, if sought so bright may
Ere,
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 unbelieved
Not gold, not blood, their altar
Down,
But native tears and symbol flowers,
O come! must hate and death return?
Cease! must man kill and die?
Cease! drain out to its dregs the urn
Of bitter prophecy.
The world is weary of the past,
O might it die or rest at last!

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 beheld, throes were kingless, and men walked
One with the other even as spirits do,
None feared, none tampered; hate, disdain, or fear,
Self-love or self-content, on human brow
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 object of his eye,
Which spurned him, like an outcast horse, to death,
None sought his lips in truth-entangling lies
Which sealed the lie his tongue disinclined to speak;
None, with firm seat, trod out in his own heat
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 life. . . .

Thrones, altars, judgement-seats, and prisons wherein,
And basils which, by wretched men were borne
Sceptres, thrones, swords, and chains, and noose
Of censured wrong, glazed on by ignorance,
Were like these monstrous and barbaric shapes,
The ghosts of a no-more-remembered fame,
Which, from their sworn obliques, look forth
In triumph o'er the palaces and tombs
Of those who were their conquerors, considering round,
These images, to the pride of kings and priests,
A dark yet mighty think, a power as wide
As is the world it waned, 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, ghostly, 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 cold and garlandless,
And slain amid men's unavailing tears,
Flattering the thing they feared, which fear was hate,
Frown, maddening 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
Scepterless, free, uncircumcised—but man:
Equal, unclassed, tribeless and nationless,
Except from awe, worship, degree, the King
Over himself; just, gentle, wise; but man
Passionless?—no; yet far from guilt or pain,
Which were, for his will made or suffered there,
Nor yet exempt, though ruling them like slaves,
From chance, and death, and mortality,
The dogs of that which else might wear
The holiest name of unassumed heaven,
Pursued him in the intense man.

Odin to the West Wind

I

O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves-dread
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,

Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
Pestilence-stricken multitudes: O thou,
Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed

The winged seeds, where they lie cold and low,
Each like a corpse within its grave, until
Thou shalt assure that of the Spring shall blow

Her clamor 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 art 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 these airy veils,
Like the bright hair upflown 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. Thus drape

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

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

Beside a punier isle in Baiae's bay,
And saw in sleep old palaces and towers
Quivering with the wass's interior day,

All overgrown with azure moss and flowers
So sweet, the sense faint picturing them!
Thus for whose path the Atlantic's level powers

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

Thy voice, and suddenly grow gray with fear,
And tremble and droop: all 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 uncontrolled! If even
I were as in my boyhood, and could be

The comrade of thy wanderings over Heaven,
As then, when to outstrip thy sky speed
Sourc'd seemed a vision, I would not '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 type, 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, ungodly 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 unstringed harp
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
Be through my lips to unwarmed earth

The trumpet of a prophecy! O, Wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

From *Lectures Newton* (Shelley):

Epilepsidion (excerpts)

...I never thought before my death to see
Youth's vision thus made perfect, Emily,
I have this; though the world by no thin name
Will hide that loss from its availed 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 far fiercer and there,
Blending two beams of one eternity!
Yet were one lawful and the other true,
These names, though dear, could point not, as it do,
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
Beyond the rocks on which high beams are wrecked.
I never was attached to that great sea,
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 jailer too,
The dreariest and the longest journey go.

Trac: Love in this differs from gold and clay,
That no divide is not to take away.
Love is like understanding, that grows bright,
Gazing on many truths; 'tis like thy light,
Imagination! which flows from earth and sky,
And from the depths of human destiny.
As from a thousand prisms and mirrors, falls
The Universe with glorious beams, and kills
Error, the worm, with many a sun-like arrow
Of its reverberated lightning. Narrow
The heart that loses, the brain that contemplates,
The life that weans, the spirit that craves
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 base from the noble; the impure
And foul, from what is clear and most endure.
If you divide suffering and dress, you may
Diminish till it is consumed away;
If you divide pleasure and loss and thought,
Each part exceeds the whole; and we know not
How much, while any yet remains unshar'd.
Of pleasure may be gained, of sorrow spared:
This truth is that deep well, whence eternal draw
The uncessant light of hope; the eternal law
By which those live, to whom this world of life
Is as a garden ravaged, and whose strife
Tells for the promise of a later birth
The wilderness of this Elysian earth.

...The blue Aegean girls this chosen home,
With ever-changing sound and light and foam,
Kissing the sifted sands, and covering hoar;
And all the winds wandering along the shore
Undulate with the undulating fair.
There are thick woods where oysters forms abide;
And many a fountain, rivulet, and pond,
As clear as elemental diamond,
On severe morning air, and far beyond,
The mossy tracks made by the goats and deer
(Which the rough shepherd trends but once a year)
Pierce into glades, caverns, and bowers, and halts
Built round with ivy, which the waterfalls
Flourishing, with sound that never fails
Accompany the moonly nightingales;
And all the place is peopled with sweet air;
The light clear element which the lake wears
Is heavy with the scent of lilies-flowers,
Which floats like mist laden with anemone showers,
And falls upon the eyelids like faint sleep;
And from the mass violet and jonquil peep,
And dart their arrowy odour through the brain.
Till you might faint with that delicious pain.
And every motion, colour, beam, and tone,
With that deep music, is in unison;
Which is a soul within the soul—they seem
Like robes of an eternal dream.

It is an Isle 'twixt Heaven, Air, Earth, and Sea,
Crafted, and hung in clear tranquility:

... And we will talk, until thought's melody
Becomes too sweet for utterance, and it dies
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 words
Which boil under our being's latent coils.
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! absolute two!
One passion in twin-hearts, which grows and grows,
'Till like two matrices of expanding flame,
These spheres interact with it become the same,
Touch, mingle, are transfused, ever still
Burning, yet ever insensate;
In one another's substance finding food,
Like flames too pure and light and unobscured
To scorchish their bright lives with bases grey,
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. Who is not?
The winged words on which my soul would pierce
Into the height of Love's rare Universe,
Are chains of lead around its flight of fire.
I part, I sink, I tremble, I expire!

Adonais (excerpt)

22

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 wouldst be with that which thou dost seek!

Fallen where all is flesh!—Rains's azure sky,
Flowers, rains, statues, music, words, are weak
The glory they transfuse with living truth to speak.

23

Why linger, why turn back, why shrink, my Heart?
The 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 will is dear
Attempts to crush, repels to make thee wither.
The salt sky smiles,—the low wind whispers near:
'The Adonais called! oh, hasten thither,
No more let Life divide what Death can join together.

From Lecture Twenty (Keats)

Sleep and Poetry (excerpt)

... I for ten years, that I may overwhelm
Myself in poetry; so I may do the deed
That my own soul has to itself deemed.
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,
Fixed 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
Like 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 to beat
May fan the cool air gently o'er my rest,
Another, bounding o'er her nimble tread,
Will set a green nook floating round her head,
And still will dance with ever varied ease,
Sailing 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 spread'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: truce, sports,
Darkness, and worms, and shrouds, and sepulchres
Delight it: for it froths upon the bars,
And thence of life, forgetting the great end
Of poetry, 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 isles have I been
Which bend 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 his 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 Cortes 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
Weights heavily on me like unsmiling 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-concurred 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 *Lectures Twenty-One (Keats):*

On Fame

How ever'd is the man who cannot look
Upon his mortal days with temperate blood,
Who vexes all the leaves of his life's book,
And sets his fair name of its maidenhood,
It is as if the rose should pluck herself,
Or the ripe plum pluck its juicy bloom,
As if a Maid, like a meddling elf,
Should darken her pure grot with muddy gloom;
But the rose leaves herself upon the brier,
For winds to kiss and gentle bees to feed,
And the ripe plum still swears its dim amber,
The unrobbed lake has crystal space;
Why then should man, leaving the world for grave,
Spoil his salvation for a throne misread?

In Dear Nighted December

I
In dear nighted December,
Too happy, happy tree,
Thy branches ne'er remember
Their green felicity
The north cannot waste them
With a sleety whistler through
them,
Nor frozen thawings glaze them
From budding at the prime.

In dear nighted December,
Too happy, happy brook,
Thy buildings ne'er remember

Apollo's summer look;
But with a sweet forgetting
They stay their crystal fretting,
Never, never parting
About the frozen time.

All would 'twere so with many
A gentle girl and boy!
But none there ever say
Wish'd out of passed joy?
The feel of not to feel it,
When there is none to feel it,
Nor numb'd names to steel it,
Was never said in rhyme.

To Homer

Standing aloof in giant ignorance,
Of thee I hear and of the Cyclopes,
As one who sits ashore and lings perchance
To visit dolphins—vent in deep seas,
So wast thou blind—but thou the veil was rent,

For Love uncertain'd heaven to let thee live,
And Neptune made for thee a spungy tent,
And Pan made sling for thee his forest-silver;
Aye on the shores of darkness there is light,
And precipices show uncrested green,
There is a building morning in midnight,
There is a triple sight in blindness born;
Such seeing hinders thee, as it once held
To Dian, Queen of Earth, and Heaven, and Hall.

Ode to Psyche

O Goddess! hear these senseless numbers, wring
By sweet enforcement and remembrance done,
And pardon that thy secrets should be sung,
Even into thine own soft-crested ear:
Surely I dream to-day, or did I see
The winged Psyche with unlocked'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 tumbled blossoms, where there sat
A brooklet, scarce expired:
'Mid hush'd, cool-crested flowers, fragrant-eyed,
Blue, silver-white, and beaded Tyrian,
They lay calm-bosoming on the bodied grass;
Their arms embraced, and their glances too,
Their lips touch'd not, but had not hush'd adieu,
As if disjoined by soft-lashed slumber,
And ready still put knees to countermand
At tender eye-dawn of morning 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 Phoebe's sapphire-vision'd star,
Or Vesper, anxious glow-worm of the sky;
Fairer than these, though temple thou hast none,
Nor altar heap'd with flowers;
Nor virgin-chair to make delicious room
Upon the midnight hours;
No voice, no line, no pipe, no incense sweet

From chain-swung censer streaming:
No shrine, no grove, no oracle, no heat
Of pale-mouth'd prophet dreaming.

O brightest! though too late for antique vates,
Too late for the fond believing lyre,
When holy were the haunted forest boughs,
Hills the air, the water, and the fire;
Yet even in these days so far retir'd
From happy plots, thy heaven lies,
Flourishing among the faint Olympians,
I see, and sing, by my own eyes inspired,
So let me be thy choir, and make a man
Upon the midnight hours;
Thy voice, thy lute, thy pipe, thy incense sweet,
From swinged censer sounding:
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 uncrested region of my mind,
Where branched thoughts, new grown with pleasant pain,
Instead of pines shall flourish in the wind;
Far, far around shall those dark-cluster'd trees
Flodge the wild-ridged mountains steep by steep,
And there by sphery, avens, and birds, and bees,
The moon-like Dryads shall be hail'd to sleep;
And in the midst of this wide quietness
A rocky 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 garden Fancy's e'er could frigate,
With 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 open at night,
To let the warm Love in!

From Lecture Twenty-Two (Keats):

The Day of St. Agnes (excerpt)

St. Agnes' Eve—Ah, bitter shall it seem!
The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold;
The hare limp'd trembling through the frozen grass,

And silent was the flask in waddy fold:
Numb were the Beadsmen's fingers, while he told
His rosary, and while his breast beneath,
Like pious incense from a censer odd,
Seem'd taking flight for heaven, without a death.
But the seven Virgin's passions, while his prayer he told.

9

So, purposing each moment to retire,
She linger'd still, meantime, across the stairs,
Had come young Porphyro, with heart on fire
For Madeline, beside the portal door,
Hatten'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 amaze;
Perchance speak, kneel, touch, kiss—in such such things have been.

10

Sudden a thought came like a full-blown rose,
Flushing his brow, and in his paleid hair:
Made purple rict: then doth he propose
A stratagem, that makes the boldness start:
"A cruel man and impious thou art:
Sweet lady, let her pray, and sleep, and dream
Alike with her good angels, for aye!
From wicked men like thee. Go, go!—I doom
That thou canst not surely be the same that thou didst seem."

24

A casement high and triple-arch'd there was,
All garlanded with cypress boughs
Of fruits, and flowers, and bunches of knot-grass,
And diamonded with panes of quaint device,
Inasensible of stains and splendid dyes,
As are the tiger-moth's deep-damask'd wings;
And in the middle, 'mong thousand heraldries,
And twilight saints, and dim embalamings,
A shielded scutcheon blaz'd with blood of queens and kings.

25

Fell on this casement shone the wintry moon,
And thro' the morn' gales 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

Awon his heart reviv'd: her vapors done,
Of all its wash'd pearls her hair the free;
Unlock'd her wamm'd jewels one by one;
Loosens her fragrant tresses; by degrees
The rich attire creeps rustling to her knees:
Half-hidden, like a mummy in sea-weed,
Passive awhile she dreams awake, and sees,
In fancy, fair St. Agnes in her bed,
But does not look behind, as all the charms is fled.

30

And still she slept an azure-lidded sleep,
In blanch'd linen, smooth, and lavender'd,
While he from forth the closet brought a heap
Of candied apple, quince, and plum, and gourd:
With jellies softer than the creamy curd,
And hazel syrup, thair with cinnamon;
Manna and dates, in agony transfer'd
From Fax; and spicedainties, every one,
From silted Samarcand to cedar'd Lebanon.

31

"Ah, Porphyro!" said she, "but even now
Thy voice was at my ear to mine ear,
Made audible with every resonant rook;
And these 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 complaining dear!
Oh leave me not in this eternal snow,
For if thou diest, my love, I know not where to go."

36

Beyond a mortal man impression'd far
At these voluptuous accents, he arose,
Enthral'd, throb'd, and like a throbbing star
Seem'd mid the sapphire heaven's deep repose;
Lure her dream he methid, as the rose
Blancheth in odour with the violet.

Solution must examine the frost-wind blows
Like Love's alarm patrolling the sharp sheet
Against the window-pane; St. Agnes' moon hath set.

41

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 wakened bloodflood rose, and shook his hide,
But his sagacious eye on Innate ome;
By one, and one, the bolts fall easy slide:
The chains lie silent on the floorward stair;
The key turns, and the door upon its hinges groans.

From *Lecture Twenty-Three (Kant)*:

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 yew-leaf 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 Florence 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:

3

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known,

The wanness, the fever, and the fit
Fits, whose keen air e'en here such other grows,
Where party shakes a few, and last gray hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and specter-thin, and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And hidden-eyed despair,
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.

4

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
Not chartered by Hermes and his goats,
But on the vixen 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's with the breeze blown
Through gossamer glimmers and winding mossy ways.

5

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalm'd darkness, guess sweet
'Wherewith the seasonable month endues
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine,
Fast fading violet-cover'd up in leaves,
And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dew-wrin,
The numerous haunt of flies on summer eves.

6

Darling I little; and, for many a time
I have been half in love with envious 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.

These must not heed for death, immortal Bird!
 No hungry generations tread their down;
 The voice I hear this passing night was heard
 In ancient days by emperors and cloister:
 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 perfidious seas, to the hazy shores.

Father! the very wind 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 ends
 Past the year's endles, 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

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-eaves 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 the budding corn,
 And fill the furrows, sower, with the seed;
 Until they think warm days will never cease,
 For summer has o'er-brim'd'd their clammy cells.

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
 Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
 Thee sitting careless on a grassy bank,
 Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
 Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,
 Drows'd with the fall of poppies, while thy hook

Spurns the next sward and all its twisted flowers;
 And sometimes like a glaucous thou dost keep
 Steady thy laden head across a brook;
 Or by a cygne-pass, with patient look,
 Thou watchest the last oarings hoar by hoar.

What 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 grey hair;
 Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
 Among the river sallows, borne aloft
 Or sinking in the light wind's lines at die,
 And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn,
 Hedge-crickets 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 stanzas 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 Byron 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 precocious 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 Pantislovenia ("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 Gillman 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 *amore amabile*, 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 athlete 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 Wilson, whom he was prevented from marrying because of the cardinal wartime ban between Britain and France. From 1793 to 1798, Wordsworth was largely at home 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.

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