

ENGLISH ROMANTIC POETRY

(course of lectures)

Contents

Lecture 1. English Romanticism. The Spirit of the Age

Lecture 2. Romanticism and Consciousness.

Lecture 3. Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image.

Lecture 4. Mythical Phase. Symbol as Archetype.

Lecture 5. Dreams. The dream-like modes of Romantic poetry.

Bibliography

Lecture 1. English Romanticism. The Spirit of the Age

The ways in which the political, intellectual, and emotional circumstances of a period of revolutionary upheaval affected the scope, subject-matter, themes, values, and even language of a number of Romantic poems. The Spirit of the 1790s. Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge. Romantic Oracles. The Apocalypse of Imagination

The early 1790s to 1825 coincide with what literary historians now call the Romantic period. Eminently it was an age obsessed with the fact of violent and inclusive change, and Romantic poetry cannot be understood, historically, without awareness of the degree to which this preoccupation affected its substance and form. When critics and historians turn to the general task of defining the distinctive qualities of “Romanticism”, or of the English Romantic movement, they usually ignore its relations to the revolutionary climate of the time, giving not more but passing mention to the French Revolution. Hence we shall try to indicate briefly some of the ways in which the political, intellectual, and emotional circumstances of a period of revolutionary upheaval affected the scope, subject-matter, themes, values, and even language of a number of Romantic poems.

I. The Spirit of the 1790s. Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge.

“*Man regenerate in a world made new*”; this was the theme of a multitude of writers notable, forgotten or anonymous. There were two points of view on regeneration of old England: French Radicalism which is represented by downright atheists (Godwin – the representative of French philosophers of perfectibility in England) and English Radicalism which came from the religious Nonconformists who looked upon contemporary politics through the perspective of biblical prophecy. Also there were Unitarians. The group included most of scientists, literary men, and powerful pulpit orators; projected on the

empirical science (based on experience) of human progress the pattern and details of biblical prophecies, Messianic¹, millennial, and apocalyptic.

The classic text of apocalyptic violence is the Book of Revelation. The formative age of Romantic poetry was clearly one of apocalyptic expectations, or at least apocalyptic imaginings, which endowed the promise of France with the form and impetus of one of the deepest rooted and most compelling myths in the culture of Christian Europe. Blake like Priestley and other religious radicals of the day, envisioned the Revolution as the portent of apocalypse. The ultimate source of Wordsworth's discovery was the Bible, and especially the New Testament, which is grounded on the radical paradox that "the last shall be first".

II. Romantic Oracles

Whatever the form, the Romantic Bard is one "who present, past and future sees"; so that in dealing with current affairs his procedure is often panoramic, his stage cosmic, his agents quasi-mythological, and his logic of events apocalyptic. Typically this mode of Romantic vision fuses history, politics, philosophy, and religion into one grand design, by asserting Providence – or some form of natural teleology – to operate in the seeming chaos of human history so as to effect from present evil a greater good.

III. The Apocalypse of Imagination

The great Romantic poems were writing not in the mood of revolutionary exaltation but in the later mood of revolutionary disillusionment or despair. It becomes apparent even from these brief summaries that certain terms, images and quasi-mythical agents tend to recur and to assume a specialized reference to revolutionary events and expectations: the earthquake and the volcano, the purging fire, the emerging sun, the dawn of glad day...

¹ 1. Messianic means relating to the belief that a divine being has been born, or will be born, who will change the world. *The cult leader saw himself as a Messianic figure.* 2. Messianic means relating to the belief that there will be a complete change in the social order in a country or in the world. *The defeated radicals of the French Revolution were the first to have this messianic vision in 1794.*

Lecture 2. Romanticism and Consciousness

1820 as the high-water mark for verse in the Romantic period. *Submerged reasons for the phenomenon in question*: retreat into a mental sanctuary; impact of poetry in a political, a social realm; conventional ties between poetry and an educated leisure class; restrictions in terms of gender, hence in terms of genre; “to be “among the English Poets” was a just ambition for the marginalized”.

Ages are marked by literary fashion as much as by their political settlements or upheavals.

We may in the way regard the great poems of the period as embodying a bridge between the old and the new, leading with undeviating aim in the direction of ourselves and our modern preoccupations with inner growth, the psychology of creativity, the aspiration for a simple, organic engagement with the natural, or less optimistically, with our fundamental uncertainties, divided allegiances (loyalties), and desires beyond fulfillment.

However, we should keep in mind that there was no some special historical configuration of a time with very different values, political and cultural stresses, economic exigencies, discoveries about the self and the world. In England, to list a few examples, except for the first few years after the fall of the Bastille, the word “democrat” was a term of shame...disgrace... opprobrium; the constant if sometimes muffled thunders of war, and for the first time on a world scale, reflected for the 22 years separating the beheading of Louis XVI and the Armageddon of Waterloo; simultaneously, an Asian and African empire was silently attached to notions of British destiny, all in the name of averting French anarchy; and, with factory riots, a periodic threat of famine, the dislocation into the army and navy of an enormous number of young males, and widespread political agitation posing increasing challenges to an outdated, inept political establishment,

England emerged from the Napoleonic Wars paradoxically the richest nation on earth and to prove it rebuilt the west of London in the grand, public manner that still survives as a wonder of monumental architecture and urban planning. If one mulls (thinks) over such a disjointed, perhaps contradictory record, none of its constituents (except warfare) really sounds modern at all. Least of all should be the connection of such a turbulent, even chaotic, time with the artistic craft and dependence on traditional refinements associated with poetry.

In 1820, which was the high-water mark for verse in the Romantic period, at least 323 volumes or collections of verse were published in GB, 204 of these at a minimum being original. Among the latter were the book on which Keats's fame rests, Shelley's *Cenci* and *Prometheus Unbound, and Other Poems*, some cantos of *Don Juan* and Byron's first historical drama, *Marino Faliero*, Wordsworth's *River Duddon* sonnet sequence and a four-volume collection of his *Miscellaneous Poems*, and the first publication by John Clare. These are themselves monuments in the history of English poetry; and POETRY mattered to this age in a way that it has never mattered since – neither in Britain, in other English speaking countries, nor in Europe.

Submerged reasons for the phenomenon in question

1. Perhaps the fittest way to survive the longest war in modern history was to retreat into a mental sanctuary, presiding over it as its priest, which is how Keats characterized his role as a poet in the *Ode to Psyche* (1820).
2. Poetry mattered a lot in a political, a social realm. It threatened temporal establishments.
“In spite of difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs; in spite of things silently gone out of mind, and things violently destroyed; the Poet binds together by passion and knowledge the

vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time” Wordsworth. Preface to Lyrical Ballads. Prose, 1, 141.

“Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world”... the famous end of Shelley’s *Defence of Poetry*.

Ambitious 22 year old Keats said: “I think I shall be among the English Poets after my death” (Letters, p. 161: October 14, 1818).

3. Conventional ties between poetry and an educated leisure class. There is a strain in Byron that goes back to the aristocrats; Shelley was an heir to a baronetcy and fluent in 6 languages besides English...
4. Restrictions in terms of gender. In the works of traditional English poets only one woman appears: Queen Elizabeth. The reaction of women to such ingrained exclusionary biases firmly linked gender to genre. As long as fiction could be conceived to be a woman’s genre, it could be attacked as morally pernicious, anti-intellectual, an affront to civilized values... These terms were in some sense universally accepted until midway through the second decade of the 19th century, when Austen’s genius was recognized just before her death and the early novels of Scott’s *Waverley* series took Britain by storm, simply settling the question for good. But even then, one observes that Lord Byron did not turn to writing novels; by no means - his snobbish answer to Scott's rivalry was an intentionally unending epic poem. Nor did John Keats, who needed money desperately, turn to prose to get it. If poetry had the capacity to declassify him, fiction would stamp his lower-bourgeois educational and family credentials indelibly upon him. Instead, with the consumption setting in, he projected a series of neo-Shakespearean tragedies as the never-to-be-completed fulfillments of his genius. There would have been no money in them either, nor any sense at all from the perspective of the timely or the relevant.
5. To be "among the English Poets" was a just ambition for the marginalized, who found themselves excluded from the centers of power and privilege in British society. Poetry, though celebrated as surpassing national

and even temporal boundaries in the encomia of Wordsworth and Shelley, could be characterized as a distinctly British passion, or resource. Not that other countries lacked their poets, but no nation in modern Europe had the sustained tradition of greatness, generation by generation, over several centuries that the English language could boast. Until the last decades of the eighteenth century Britain had liberally borrowed its artists (Holbein, Kneller, Van Dyke), as it did its musicians (Bononcini, Handel, Haydn), from the rest of Europe. In poetry only did the country express its heart and soul, preserve a unique national heritage. It was the symbolic center of the nation's spirit both to those who never had a chance to breathe the actual atmosphere at that center or to young intellectuals like Coleridge and Wordsworth who, having had it, retreated in disaffection from its tainted odour. It is not an accident that against "the fen / Of stagnant waters" Wordsworth saw in contemporary England in "London, 1802" he should pose the historical presence of one of the nation's greatest poets ("Milton! thou should'st be living at this hour"), nor indeed that he should attribute to poetry vatic, almost messianic, properties in the higher planes of his preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*. The poetry apostrophized by Wordsworth is beyond mere versification: it is the essential character of the British people as expressed through the English language, "the real language of men." He promises himself in the final books of *The Prelude* to begin a process of national redemption. Surely, this is mystification on a grand scale; and yet it is not laughable, and it is much more innocent and probably nobler than the similar mystification that made the English language the measure by which civilization was spread through nineteenth-century territorial or twentieth-century commercial imperialism, by Britain and then America.

Lecture 3. Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image

An abundant imagery coinciding with an equally abundant quantity of natural objects, the theme of imagination linked closely to the theme of nature. Increasingly metaphorical structure of the language. The image – be it under the name of symbol or even myth - as the most prominent dimension of the style.

An abundant imagery coinciding with an equally abundant quantity of natural objects, the theme of imagination linked closely to the theme of nature, such is the fundamental ambiguity that characterizes the poetics of romanticism. The structure of the language becomes increasingly metaphorical and the image – be it under the name of symbol or prominent dimension – come to be considered as the most prominent dimension of the style.

In everyday use words obtain for us what we want to obtain. They are used as established signs to confirm that something is recognized as being the same as before. But in poetic language words are not used as signs, not even as names, but in order to name. That's why the image is essentially a kinetic process: it doesn't dwell in a static state where the two terms could be separated and reunited by analyses; the first term of the simile has no independent existence, poetically speaking, prior to the metaphorical statement. It originates with the statement, in the manner suggested e.g. by flower-image. The image then is inspired by nostalgia for the natural object. As it is in the essence of language to be capable of origination, but of never achieving the absolute identity with itself that exists in the natural object. Poetic language can do nothing but originate anew over and over again: it is always constitutive, able to posit regardless of presence, but by the same token, unable to give a foundation to what it posits except intent of consciousness. The word is always a free presence to the mind, the means by which the permanence of natural entities can be put into question and thus negated time and again.

During the long development that takes place in the 19th century type of imagery is grounded in the intrinsic ontological primacy of the natural object. Poetic language seems to originate in the desire to draw closer and closer to the ontological status of the object, and its growth and development are determined by this inclination. It selects, for example, a variety of archetypal myths to serve as the dramatic pattern for the narration. In each case, the tension and duality inherent in the mythological situation would be found to reflect the inherent tension that resides in the metaphorical language itself. At times, Romantic thought and romantic poetry seem to come so close to giving in completely to the nostalgia for the object that it becomes difficult to distinguish between object and image, between imagination and perception, between an expressive or constitutive and a mimetic or literal language. This may well be the case in some passages where the vision almost seems to become a real landscape. At other times, the poet's loyalty towards his language appears so strongly that the object nearly vanishes under the impact of his words. But it would be a mistake to assume that the ontological priority of the object is being challenged.

E.g. Mallarme's key-symbols – sea, winged bird, night, the sun, constellations, and many others – are not primarily literary emblems but are taken, as he says, “out of nature”; they receive their meaning and function from the fact that *they belong initially to the natural world*. In the poetry they may seem disincarnate to the point of abstraction, generalized to the point of becoming pure ideas, yet they never entirely lose contact with the concrete reality from which they spring. The sea, the bird and the constellation act and seduce in Mallarme's poetry, like any sea, bird or star in nature.

Nature of Romanticism seems as Rousseau remarks take pleasure in self-opposition. Radical contradictions are peculiar to the oneiric state, where the author can deliberately mix and blur the order of the seasons and the laws of geography, as well as time and space. Oneiric state does not only express a desire

to escape from actual matter, to be relieved for a moment from the weight of gravity, but that it *uncovers a fundamentally new kind of relationship between nature and consciousness.*

Lecture 4. Mythical Phase. Symbol as Archetype

Archetypal Criticism: Theory of Myths. Apocalyptic Imagery. Demonic Imagery. Analogical Imagery. Archetype as a symbol which connects one poem with another and thereby helps to unify and integrate literary experience. Unconscious process of expanding images into conventional archetypes of literature.

At any given period of literature the conventions of literature are enclosed within a total mythological structure which may not be explicitly known to anyone, but is nevertheless present as a shaping principle.

In Western Europe an encyclopedic myth derived mainly from the Bible, dominated both the literary and the philosophical traditions for centuries. Hence Romanticism can be seen as the beginning of the first major change in this pattern of mythology, and as fully comprehensible only when as seen as much.

Of all the great English Romantic poets, William Blake was the one who grasped the implications of this change in mythology most completely. For Blake, the God who created the natural object is a projected God, an idol constructed out of the sky and reflecting its mindless mechanism. Such a God is a figment of man's alienation (*вымысел отчуждения, безумия*), for the tyranny of an absurd and meaningless nature suggests and guarantees the tyranny of exploiting ruling classes. Thus the projected sky-god is really Satan, the accuser of man and the prince of the power of the air. Similarly Shelley argues for the "necessity of atheism", and urges in his notes to "Queen Mab" that "all that miserable tale of the Devil, and Eve, and an Intercessor², with the childish mummeries³ of the God of Jews, is irreconcilable⁴ with the knowledge of the stars". In Byron's "Vision of

² заступник, ходатай 2) посредник

³ рождественская пантомима; маскарад 2) смешной ритуал, "представление", спектакль, зрелище

⁴ контрадикторный, несовместимый, противоречащий, противоречивый

Judgement” the traditional conception of God as a miraculous juggler of planets is only a subject for parody.

Romanticism, besides being a new mythology, also marks the beginning of an “open” attitude to mythology on the part of society, making mythology a structure of imagination, out of which beliefs come. At the same time, the new mythology caused old things to be believed in a new way. One is the revived sense of the numinous power of nature. Just as some Romantics are conservative and others radical in their attitudes to the structure of civilization, so some Romantics regard Mother nature as a benevolent teacher and others as a bloodthirsty ogress⁵.

The paradoxical relation of civilized and rude nature, a relation partly antithetical⁶ and partly complementary, is often expressed in Romantic fiction and drama by some variant of the struggle-of-brothers theme. This has several biblical archetypes – Cain and Abel, Esau and Jacob, Ishmael and Isaac... In the conventional interpretation of the Bible the figures of the social establishment, Isaac and Jacob, are the accepted ones; with Romanticism, there comes a transfer of sympathy to their exiled brethren. The so-called Byronic hero is often a Romantic version of the natural man, who like Esau or Ishmael, is an outcast. He has great energy, often great powers of leadership...He is often aristocratic in birth or behaviour, with a sense that, like Esau, he is the disposed rightful heir – here the theme combines with the sense of nostalgia for a vanished aristocracy. When he is evil, there is often the feeling that as with Byron’s Cain, his evil is comprehensible, that he is not wholly evil any more than society is wholly good. It was of course Byron himself who popularized the moral ambiguity of the Byronic hero, both in his poetry, and with his reputation as a wicked and infidel Lord, in his life. In Byron the struggle-of-brothers theme goes all the way back , from Cain and Abelto the rivalry of Lucifer,

⁵ великанша-людоедка (в сказках)

⁶ прямо противоположный

the disposed elder son of God, and the younger and more favoured Son. Thus of Lara it is said:

He stood a stranger in this breathing world,
An erring spirit from another hurl'd

In the "Vision of Judgement" Lucifer is an icily polite aristocrat: his rival doesn't appear, but while the prince of darkness is a gentleman, St. Peter is not quite a gentleman...

In Romanticism the main direction of the quest of identity tends increasingly to be downward and inward. That's why images of underground, caves and streams appear. The word "dark" is thematically very important here. Still the only point at which one visibly enters into an identity with nature is death, as it is all we can usually see of what may or may not be the fullest entering into life. This paradox haunts many Romantic and post-Romantic poets. The suggestion dropped by Lucifer in Byron's "Cain" says: "It may be death leads to the highest knowledge"... The sense that ecstasy and pain are really the same thing is connected with the fact that for Romantic mythology the greatest experiences of life originate in a world which is also the world of death and destruction.

The Romantic poet is a hero. For him the real event is not a historical one or universal, but the psychological and mental, the event in his consciousness. This involves a rejection of history...In Romantic poetry historical events are no more than symbols of certain aspects of the poet's own age.

Lecture 5. Dreams. The dream-like modes of Romantic poetry

The dream-world as an integral part of the most imaginative experience of the Romantics. The symbolic operation of dreams and the working of the poetic imagination. The experience of childhood in the works of Romantics. Visionary power of dreams. Rapidity of the succession of transactions. The ways Romantics use to introduce dreams into their works.

Dreams are extraordinary examples of the private and unexpected workings of the individual mind. The symbolic operation of dreams links them with the working of poetic imagination, which can allow one thing to stand for another, and can transform abstraction into symbol. It is not difficult to see why the Romantic poets were fascinated by dreams.

Their interest is related to the concern for the experience of childhood. According to Freud, dreams can involve a considerable degree of “primary process thinking”, the kind of mental activity found in babies, who are not sure where their own selves end and the outer world begins. As they develop into infants and change to “secondary process thinking”, the small child still has regressions into primary process thinking, taking refuge in fantasy from the complexities of the world of reality. Wordsworth anticipates Freud’s connection between the mental processes of infancy and the operation of dreams by describing the world of his first vision in “Immortality Ode” as: “Appareled in celestial light, / The glory and the freshness of a dream”. Blake speaks about the opposition between “the sea of time and space”, which stands for an awareness of time and space, which deflects him from the path of vision or truth, and the imagination, the unpredictable and unbounded dream-world. So too Freud’s primary process thinking has been summed up as illogical, disregarding time and space. Secondary process thinking involves logical thinking. Given these parallels, it is perhaps not surprising that the Romantics saw much in common between the dream-world and the world of imagination, and that

they were in consequence extremely interested in dreams. These could be either the dreams of sleep, or waking dreams; the latter were often described as “reveries”.

“we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul;
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things” *Wordsworth*

The idea that the soul awakes during these reveries is common in Romantic poetry. Blake associated them with visionary power; Keats describes a waking dream in the “Ode to a Nightingale”, and wonders which is real, the actual world of time and place, or the ideal world of the imagination in which the poet flies on the wings of poesy to a dark, sweet-smelling, and magic world of the nightingale.

There are further points about dreams: the great vivacity of dreams, whether sleeping or waking, and this is accompanied by variety, novelty and distinctness. There is an amazing rapidity of the succession of transactions in the dream. Dreams have relation to waking lives too. Coleridge frequently dreamed of his school desk-mate C.V. Le Grice. He noted that he was never astonished in these dreams. So, inconsistency of the dreams and total absence of surprise are remarkable properties here.

The 'marvellous poetry' of dreams is important in the Romantic period for several reasons. In the first place, dreams make new worlds, in which the imagination produces combinations and things previously unthought of. The imagination is sovereign, untrammelled and unquestioned. Secondly, Freud recognized that dreams depend to a great extent on the use of symbols: two consequences of this are of considerable interest. One is the idea that things which are now symbolically related were probably united in earlier times by conceptual and linguistic identity. If we remember the widespread belief that in primitive times figurative language was the natural speech, it is clear that Freud and the Romantic poets were thinking along the same lines. The other concerns the infinite possibilities of symbols, and the many different levels on which they can be interpreted. The multi-layered,

open text of the Romantics is strikingly akin to this: it is a poetry which does not provide a text which can be read in one way only, but which is suggestive, allowing a multiplicity of readings and reverberating in different ways in the mind. Finally in Freud's description we should observe the powerful distinction which he made between dream-thoughts and dream-content. Dream-thoughts can be written down and analysed, whereas dream-content is always compressed and transformed. In this condensation, the content is often differently centred from the dream-thoughts: Freud called this process 'dream-displacement', and linked it with dream-condensation as one of the determining factors of dreams. At the centre of them is often something deep and obscure, what Freud called 'the dream's navel, the spot which reaches down into the unknown'.²¹

The construction of a dream, and its partial interpretation, have therefore much in common with their counterparts in art; once this is observed, or even suspected, it gives rise to a distinctive kind of poetry, concerned with the nature and processes of dreaming. A good example is Byron's 'The Dream', in which he philosophizes about dreams in a nicely antithetical way: *They leave a weight upon our waking thoughts / They take a weight from off our waking toils, / They do divide our being; they become / A portion of ourselves as of our time, / And look like heralds of eternity;*

Sleep, he argues, has its own world, which is: *A boundary between the things misnamed Death and existence: Sleep hath its own world, And a wide realm of wild reality.*

He then goes on to make the significant leap between the mind in dream-work and the mind in its usual creative and active operations, seeing the two things as part of the same process:

They make us what we were not - what they will, And shake us with the vision that's gone by, The dread of vanished shadows - Are they so? Is not the past all shadow? - What are they? Creations of the

*mind? - The mind can make Substance, and people planets of its own
With beings brighter than have been, and give A breath to forms
which can outlive all flesh.*

Byron's poem is characteristically direct, tackling the question of the dream head-on. Other Romantic poets experience the dream-world as an integral part of their most important imaginative experience, and write about it without asking questions or rationalizing. They do so in several ways.

The first of these is the direct reporting of sleeping dreams, of which the most conspicuous examples are Wordsworth's account of the desert Arab in Book V of *The Prelude* and Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan'. Both poems contain examples of the mysterious and transforming power of dreams.

There is no difficulty about the starting-point for 'Kubla Khan'. In the introductory note to the poem, Coleridge described how he had been taking opium, and fallen asleep while reading a sentence from a travel book, concerning Kubla's palace and the wall around its gardens. The dream-poem which develops from this is an extraordinarily clear and sharp rendering of this into pictorial imagery, followed by the sharp contrasting section on the wild scenery outside; the two are connected by the same kind of random and chimerical association that is found in dreams. The mystery of the poem, its teasing lack of logic, is part of its fascination; although it took Coleridge a long time to pluck up courage to recognize this to the full and publish the poem.

That Coleridge was interested in 'Kubla Khan' as a dream-poem is suggested by his note in the introduction to the poem which reminds the reader that are other dreams of pain and disease, and drawing attention to his fragment 'The Pains of Sleep', published with 'Kubla Khan' and 'Christabel' in 1816. In this poem he describes three nights in succession of horrible dreams in which he saw

*a fiendish crowd Of shapes and thoughts that
tortured me: A lurid light, a trampling throng, Sense of
intolerable wrong, And whom I scorned, those only strong!*

In this extract the nightmare seems to be associated with the poet's waking thoughts of fear, guilt, and shame. On the third night he wakes from the dream and weeps, and acknowledges a connection between his own sins and shortcomings and the horrors of the night.

In this way the dreams of sleep are interesting to the Romantics because they reveal something of the strange inner workings of the mind, its astonishing capacity for beauty and its fearful and dark terrors. This is closely connected with the second way in which the romantic imagination functions in relation to dreams: its reporting of waking dreams or reveries. As we have seen, Erasmus Darwin drew attention to the mind's capacity to wander from its present circumstances, and the visionary imagination is often seen at work in this way. Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale' is a good example, as I have suggested: it is a poem which moves from a state in which it is aware of its circumstances and problems, enjoys a free-ranging imaginative encounter with the world of the nightingale, and then returns to its waking state at the end (although it is not sure which is the more 'real'). Another example of this movement, though it is described from the point of view of a *spectator ab extra* and is therefore in the third person, is Wordsworth's 'The Reverie of Poor Susan'. In the city, Susan hears the song, and sees her own country before her eyes. Then the vision disappears:

*She looks, and her heart is in heaven: but they fade, / The mist and
the river, the hill and the shade / The stream will not flow, and the hill
will not rise, /And the colours have all passed away from her eyes!*

Often the dreams or reveries are like this: not only do they disappear, but they leave the poet uncomfortably aware of the dreariness of his surroundings relative to the beautiful world of his dreams. In both sleeping and waking dreams a contrast can be made between the ideal and the actual, between the beautiful

possibility and the often undesirable reality. Blake uses this technique in 'The Chimney Sweeper' from *Songs of Innocence*, in which the little boy dreams of Heaven but wakes up to work on a dark morning.

The uncontrollable nature of dreams, together with their beauty and terror, leads us to the third way in which dreams are related to the Romantic imagination. This is when the word 'dream' is used as simile or metaphor, to indicate the blissful or strange nature of an experience. Wordsworth's poetry often has such trance-states, and in the 'Immortality Ode' the winds come to him 'from the fields of sleep'. In the same way the word 'slumber' can be used to indicate a much longer period of time than just one night, a period in which the mind was relieved from the responsibility of considering (in this case) such things as death and ageing:

*A slumber did my spirit seal; / I had no human fears: / She seemed a thing
that could not feel / The touch of earthly years. / No motion has she now, no
force; She neither hears nor sees*

(*'A slumber did my spirit seal'*)

Here the speaker is living in a 'dream' of happiness from which he awakes in the second half of the poem. This use of dream, or sleep, or slumber, to indicate a trance-like or visionary state is indicative of a whole movement away from definiteness into something unfixd, mysterious, and unpredictable. In the passage from *The Prelude* above, Wordsworth describes the circumstantial detail of the boy playing his flute upon the rocky island, and then the verse turns away into the record of his own feelings, and so into the gradual mystery of a beautiful dream. This is no longer recording experiences, whether sleeping or waking, but seeing those experiences, and others, as dream-like. It is a short step from this to a point at which questions begin to be asked about the nature of life itself in relation to such moments, and about the kind of 'reality' that exists in it.

Shelley, in particular, uses the image of a dream symbolically in pursuit of Platonic speculations about life as a semblance of reality rather than the reality itself. If life

itself is a dream, we shall awake to a greater reality when the soul is freed from the body (as described by Plato in the *Phaedo*). The lovely ending of 'The Sensitive Plant' is an example.

If love, and beauty, and delight are the only permanent things, then human life is unreal and fleeting like a dream, and our lives are mysterious in their purpose and content.

The poet's duty is to celebrate those moments of life in which love, and beauty, and delight are found. If, when they happen, it seems like a dream, or a dream come true, then that is one of the functions of the imagination, as Keats realized when he told Benjamin Bailey that 'The imagination may be compared to Adam's dream - he awoke and found it truth.' In Book VIII of *Paradise Lost* Adam recounts his falling asleep and dreaming of the creation of Eve, and then waking to find her present in the flesh. Keats, characteristically, sees the imagination as making the dream become flesh, and certainly one of the functions of Romantic poetry is to do this. In its most characteristic mode, however, the process is not so simple as recording dreams or capturing the dream-like loveliness of a moment. There is often a teasing uncertainty about the nature of the experience which is being recounted, a difficulty in distinguishing the shadow from the substance; and it is in this indeterminacy that Romantic poetry often flourishes. In its strange, beautiful, and terrifying experiences occur, *as if in* dreams; and dreams take on the qualities of waking life.

The transformation of dream into reality, or of reality into dream, is a vital activity of the Romantic imagination. It transforms strangeness into truth, as Coleridge saw: when describing the plan of *Lyrical Ballads*, he observed that his efforts were going to be directed to 'persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic'.

We suspend our disbelief, and the shadows become real: the dream seems to be true. Whether it is literally or scientifically true does not matter; in fact it is better left uncertain.

Finally, the dream-like modes of Romantic poetry have consequences for its interpretation. There is often a dark and mysterious centre to Romantic poetry, an inscrutable and magical quality that exists in image and symbol, and in the spaces between them. This is the poetic equivalent of Freud's 'the dream's navel, the spot which reaches down into the unknown': on the page there are infinite uncertainties in the gaps within the text itself, forming what Wolfgang Iser calls 'a no-man's-land of indeterminacy', and in the multi-layered possibilities of the images and symbols themselves. The reader has to accept the mysterious and respect it. It is necessary to activate an imagination in order to receive the poem at all: not, of course, to try to 'understand' it, to limit it to one interpretation, or to the confined edges of the reader's own mind, but to experience its power and its mysterious magic.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

List of books recommended for reading:

Works:

William Blake (1757-1827)

Songs of Innocence («Песни невинности»)

The Marriage of Heaven and Hell («Союз рая и ада»)

Songs of Experience («Песни опыта»)

The Tiger («Тигр»)

The Lamb («Агнец»)

William Wordsworth (1770-1850)

Lyrical Ballads («Лирические баллады»)

The Daffodils («Желтые нарциссы»)

George Byron (1788-1824)

“*The Dream*”

Oriental Tales («Восточные поэмы») :

The Giaour («Гяур»)

The Corsair («Корсар»)

Lara («Лара»)

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822)

Queen Mab («Царица Маб»)

The Cenci (Ченчи)

Prometheus Unbound («Освобожденный Прометей»)

The Cloud («Облако»)

To a Skylark («Жаворонок»)

Ode to the West Wind («Ода западному ветру»)

Winter («Зима»)

Walter Scott (1771-1832)

Waverley («Уэверли»)

Rob Roy («Роб Рой»)

Ivanhoe («Айвенго»)

OuentinDurward («Квентин Дорвард»)

Jane Austen (1795-1817)

Sense and Sensibility («Разум и чувство»)

Pride and Prejudice («Гордость и предубеждение»)

Mansfield Park («Мэнсфилд-Парк»)

Emma («Эмма»)

Persuasion («Убеждение»)

Academic books:

Павличко С. Зарубіжна література. – К.: Основи, 2001.

Черноземова Е.Н. История английской литературы. – М.: Наука, 1998.

Frye N. A Study of English Romanticism. – New York: Random House, 1968.

Man Paul de. Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image // Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism edited by Harold Bloom. – N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Company, 1970. – P. 65-77.

The Penguin Companion to Literature. Britain and the Commonwealth. — London. 1971.

Selective bibliography

Curran St. Poetic Form and British Romanticism. – New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.

English Romantic Poets. Modern essays in criticism. – London, Oxford, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1971.

Curran St. Romantic poetry: why and wherefore? // The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism. – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. – P. 216-235.

Frye N. Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays. Princeton UP, 2000.

Purkis J. The World of the English Romantic Poets. – London: Heinemann, 1982.

The Penguin Guide to English Literature. Britain and Ireland. —London, Penguin books, 1996.

Watson J.R. English Poetry of the Romantic Period 1789-1830. – London and New York: Longman, 1985.

Wolfson S.J. The Vision of Judgement and the visions of “author” // The Cambridge Companion to Byron. – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. – P. 171-185.

Reference books, dictionaries, Internet sources:

Мала енциклопедія англійської літератури. Укладач Е. Соломаха. – К.: Альтерпрес, 1998.

Widmer K. Dictionary of Literary Biography. London, 1980.

<http://wikipedia.org>

www.batrleby.com/cambridge