

19th century poetry

Objective of the course:

The Chief Aim of teaching poetry is developing aesthetic sense among the learners. The purpose of teaching poems in the secondary schools is to reduce the monotony of teaching learning process. During the teaching and recitation the learners enjoy the rhyme and rhythm.

Introduction:

Some of the main characteristics of Romantic literature include a focus on the writer or narrator's emotions and inner world; celebration of nature, beauty, and imagination; rejection of industrialization, organized religion, rationalism, and social convention; idealization of women, children, and rural life.

Paper pattern:

There will be 3 questions in mid-term paper. In first question, students will be asked to explain the set of lines with reference to context.

2 subjective questions of equal marks will be given to solve.

Course outline for mid term

Prelude: William Wordsworth

a) Wordsworth's love for nature(pantheism)

The Prelude is a poem both of the young man's maturation and of his poetic education. In the first few books, Wordsworth explores his childhood, his first few years at the university, and in general his theories of the poet as divine seer. The Prelude is, in its own way, an epic poem comparable to The Iliad or Paradise Lost, yet it is also vastly different, for Wordsworth now believes that the epic subject is the inner world of one's self.

For Wordsworth, "Nature" is not only the biological, natural world, but also that of human nature, and he judges life as most authentic when it is lived more closely to a natural (the rural) setting and with simplicity (living "naturally"). At the same time, the phenomenon of human consciousness is experienced in not only one's mental judgments

and imagination, but also in the emotions by which we undergo joy, fear, energy and repose. It is highly inward or subjective. While Wordsworth's concern with life's meaning is not what philosophers would call that of theodicy, it is a matter of the problem of evil and suffering—namely, on what grounds does one come to terms with the world's threats to one's moral and existential meaning—those high matters of truth, beauty, love, and freedom.

The Central Ideas in Wordsworth's Poetic Theory

M. H. Abrams in *The Mirror and the Lamp* summarizes Wordsworth's poetic theory as the following:

- 1) Poetry is the expression or overflow of feeling, or emerges from a process of imagination in which feelings play the crucial part.
- 2) As the vehicle of an emotional state of mind, poetry is opposed not to prose, but to unemotional assertions of fact, or 'science.'
- 3) Poetry originated in primitive utterances of passion which, through organic causes, were naturally rhythmic and figurative.
- 4) Poetry is competent to express emotions chiefly by its resources of figures of speech and rhythm, by means of which words naturally embody and convey the feelings of the poet.
- 5) It is essential to poetry that its language be the spontaneous and genuine, not the contrived and simulated, expression of the emotional state of the poet.
- 6) The born poet is distinguished from other men particularly by his inheritance of an intense sensibility and a susceptibility to passion.
- 7) The most important function of poetry is, by its pleasurable resources, to foster and subtilize the sensibility, emotions, and sympathies of the reader.

What is the subject matter of poetry? "incidents and situations from common life"

In what language is poetry written? "language really used by men"

What exactly is poetry? "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" but also

"emotion recollected in tranquility" leading to the creation of a new emotion in the mind

What is the truth that poetry discovers for us?

"the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement"

What is the larger cultural role of poetry?

"the poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society" as opposed to the scientist who is after a particular fact/discovery in isolation

What is the nature of the poet as compared to other people?

"nothing differing in kind from other men, but only in degree"; "more lively sensibility"; "more enthusiasm and tenderness"; greater knowledge of human nature"; "more comprehensive soul"

What is the training required to be a poet?

"habits of meditation," particularly, it seems a development of the associative powers of the mind

How does poetry create its meaning? through the ability to be affected by "absent things as if they were present" and to express "thoughts and feelings" that arise without immediate external excitement.

Brief Commentary and Discussion Questions

Book First [Introduction: Childhood and School-time]

1.1-32—Why the poet finds freedom in the countryside. [The classical theme of the city versus the country is part of the background here and will be expanded in books seven and eight.]

1.33-54—A general poetic shalom—life and language, energy, joy, dignity, and so forth. Notice the importance of breath and wind (i.e. spirit). [Also notice how the 1850 version (1.31-45) places this creativity closer to the life of liturgy.]

1.55-67—A rather classic statement of the Romantic language of the poet as prophet-seer.

1.68-115—The next two stanzas describe how the poet, returned to Grasmere Valley, experiences refreshing renewal of the day, yet also the disappointment in a failed attempt at composing verse.

1.116-156—He next explores the hopes and disappointments that he has had for his calling. Notice how he narrates the consciousness of his desires and feelings. 1.141-156 focus on a maternal image of the poetic, meditative mind.

1.157-271—The next longer sections look at the preparation necessary for a great work of (epic) poetry—the spiritual helps, the use of memory, and the search for a proper theme for the epic. [He expands this topic somewhat in the 1850 version cf. 1.170-185.] He wonders if a more philosophical theme, such as human brotherhood might serve, but he focuses more on the sense of bewilderment and confusion at lacking any truly noble subject.

1.272-350—He describes memories of his childhood at age 5 (bathing in the summer stream), at age 9(hunting woodcocks), picturing himself in the later as a dark destroyer in his own mind. An interesting meditation on what aspect of boyhood violence is necessary to adult character.

Recommended sources:

https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/183583/7/07_chapter%203.pdf

<http://www.armytage.net/pdsdata/Jonathan%20Wordsworth%20and%20The%20Prelude.pdf>

b) Autobiographical elements in the Prelude

The Prelude by Wordsworth has the subtle ‘growth of a poets mind’, for it was intended to be great poem tracing Wordsworth’s development as a poet. For this purpose he recounts the most important experiences of childhood, and concentrates most on the role of nature in shaping and stimulating his growing imagination. Although the poem is an apparent biography, it is important to remember that the poet was more concerned with his moral and spiritual growth. In the sense The Prelude can only be called a subjective autobiography. Although many childhood experiences may have been remembered, only these which are concerned with nature and which modified his sensibilities find a place in the poem.

The poet feels that nature itself had determined that he ought to be a poet. Therefore when Wordsworth seeks a topic grand enough to be of poetic material, he lights upon the

poet's mind. The poet brings by recalling the experience that he had in a river when he was five years old. The physical pleasure offered by nature led him to drench himself in it.:

Basked in the sun and plunged and basked again.....

Over the sandy fields, leaping through groves.

This bathing was a kind of baptism, a baptism into a life of nature's influences. But the poet's soul was to develop through these successive stages into a nature awareness of nature's pantheistic power. If in the first stage nature was only the back drop for his glad 'boyish movements' and if in the second he would be haunted by the mysterious beauty of nature, in the third he would realize the vital formative influence of nature:

Fair sad time my soul and I grew up

Fostered alike by beauty and by fear.....

There are three significant episodes in the Prelude which would be direct examples of nature's influence over the 'nature worshipper'. Wordsworth was a naughty child who was once tempted to rob woodcocks from other people's snares, his feeling of guilt does not originate from a moral sense embedded from the adults. Nature itself impresses him with the knowledge that he is a 'life destroyer'. He hears sounds of 'low breathings' coming after him. Although his fear may have been a psychological projection of guilt, the boy is conscious of having violated 'Nature'.

The next episode is the one involving the bird-nesting. Here he is a predator looting from the nests of rooks. He plucks out eggs from the mountain side nests while the mother bird is engaged in bringing food. Yet this act of plunder disturbs the tranquility of nature and the boy suddenly finds himself hanging precariously on the mountain side, giddy with fear, he still realizes that this is nature's way of instructing him. Thus, although his object was inglorious such was the solicitousness of nature that 'the end' was not ignoble.

The third occasion on which he realizes the conscious and brooding presence of nature over all human misdeeds is when he tries to steal a boat. Although at first he feels exhilarated, his action also brings him a feeling of queasiness. The 'act of stealth' was to result in an illusion which Wordsworth would assume to be fostered by nature itself,

..... a huge cliff,

As if with voluntary power instinct,
Uprear'd its head.

The spectacle fills him with “grave and serious thoughts.” For the first time he looks on nature the mere back drop for the glad animal movements of his boyish days. Neither is it source of youthful appreciation of exquisite beauty.

Therefore, The Prelude is patently an autobiography. Wordsworth himself admitted that “it was a thing unprecedented in literary history that a man should talk so much about himself.” Yet he points out that this autobiographical account results not from “self conceit” but from “real humility”. The Prelude remains a rare poetic autobiography uniting, nature, poetry and Man.

Recommended sources:

https://www.slideshare.net/daya_123/the-prelude-an-autobiographical-poem

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/277814175_The_Prelude_A_Spiritual_Autobiography_of_William_Wordsworth

c) Theme of Prelude: growth of a poet's mind

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WMmJZ0DZVN0>

https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/how-prelude-growth-poets-mind-418674?_

https://www.bachelorandmaster.com/britishandamericanpoetry/the-prelude.html#.XoS_cYgzbIU

note: first 300 lines of the prelude book 1 are selected for explanation.

Final term syllabus outline

John Keats:

Autobiography of the poet

Keats as a romantic poet

Characteristics of Keats' poetry:

- i. Hellenism
- ii. Sensuousness
- iii. Negative capability

- i. **"Ode to a Nightingale" (1819)**
Negative capability in ode to melancholy

- ii. **"Ode on a Grecian Urn" (1820)**
Discuss Keats' theory of art with reference to his ode on a Grecian urn

- iii. **"Ode on Melancholy" (1820)**
Keats' use of five senses in ode to melancholy

- iv. **"To Autumn" (1820)**
How is nature presented in "To Autumn"?

Percy Bysshe Shelley:

- i. "Ode to the West Wind"

Discuss Shelley's idea of spiritual and imaginative force with reference to Ode to the West Wind.