

# English Romantic Poetry

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Please Silence Cell Phones

# William Blake (1757-1827)

- Humble Origins
- Sent to apprentice at the workshop of a master-engraver
- At age of 22 entered the Royal Academy, but his art was too unconventional to be accepted
- Not fully recognized until the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries
- <http://www.blakearchive.org/blake/>

# “Songs of Innocence and Experience”

- Mature reflection on the poems from Songs of Innocence
- Published both sets together as *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, 1794
- Objective: to show the “two Contrary States of the Human Soul”
- Colored prints accompanied each poem.



# HOLY THURSDAY

It was on a Holy Thursday their innocent faces clear,  
 The children walking two & two in red & blue & green,  
 Grey-headed beadles walk'd before with wands as white as snow,  
 Till into the high dome of Pauls they like Thames waters flow.  
 O what a multitude they seem'd these flowers of London town,  
 Seated in companies they sit with radiance all their own,  
 The hum of multitudes was there, but multitudes of lambs,  
 Thousands of little boys & girls raising their innocent hands,  
 Now like a mighty wind they raise to heaven the voice of song,  
 Or like harmonious thunderings the seats of heaven among,  
 Beneath them sat the aged men wise guardians of the poor,  
 Then cherish pity lest you drive an angel from your door.



# Holy Thursday I

- Parade of children is orderly and colorful
- Children appear as a natural phenomena
- Their Voices in St. Paul's Cathedral also are a natural simile: "like harmonious thunderings"
- The beadles, who supervise the orphans, are "wise guardians of the poor"
- The last line likens the orphans to angels



## HOLY THURSDAY

Is this a holy thing to see  
In a rich and fruitful land  
Babes reduced to misery  
Fed with cold and usurous hand?

Is that trembling cry a song?  
Can it be a song of joy?  
And so many children poor?  
It is a land of poverty!

And their sun does never shine,  
And their fields are bleak & bare,  
And their ways are fill'd with thorns,  
It is eternal winter there.

For where'er the sun does shine,  
And where'er the rain does fall,  
Babe can never hunger there,  
Nor poverty the mind appall.

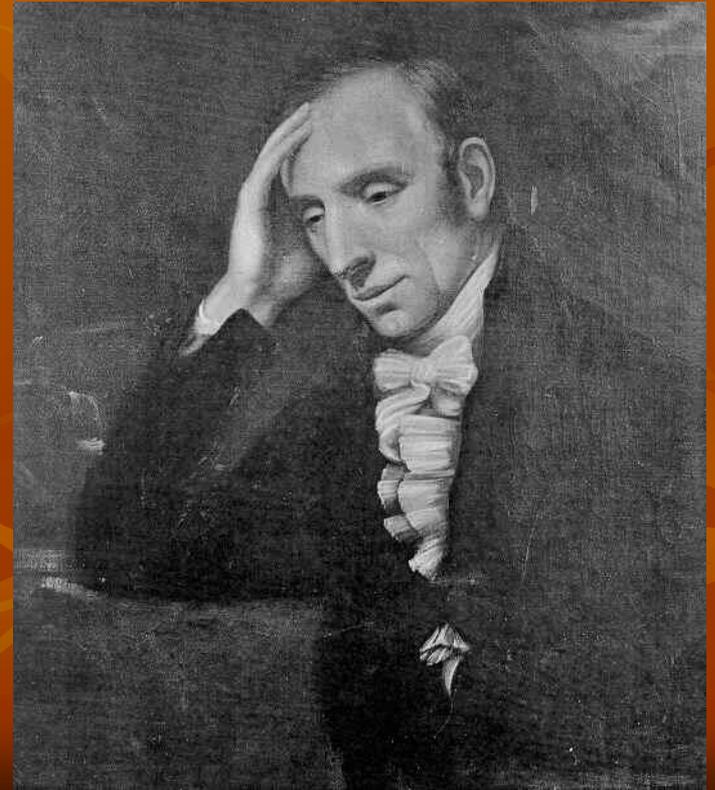


# Holy Thursday II

- Poses a series of Rhetorical questions about the parade of orphans to St. Paul's
- Is it holy?
- The natural metaphors of the first poem are revealed to be false metaphors
- Sun doesn't shine; Fields are bleak and bare; Paths are full of thorns; Eternal Winter;
- Final Stanza: In a land with Sun and Rain, there should no babes in hunger and poverty
- Questions both the idealism of Religious Charity and the idealism of Romantic Naturalism

- Childhood in Lake District
- 1790s, visited France and sympathized with Revolutionaries
- After War between England and France, he was conflicted
- 1804, Rise of Napoleon and Wordsworth becomes a Royalist
- Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, 1798, with Samuel Coleridge

# William Wordsworth



# Controlling Ideas of Wordsworth's Preface

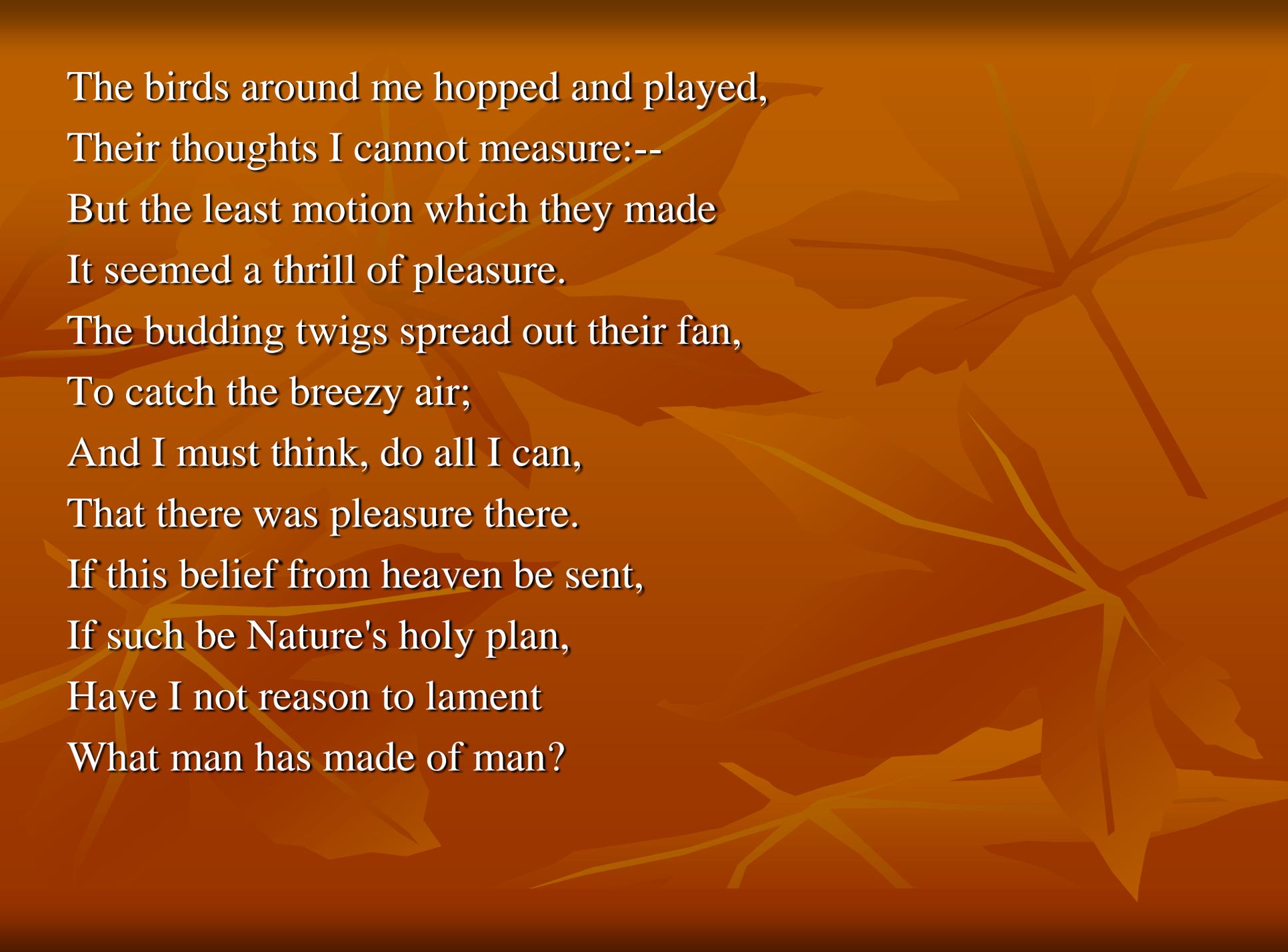
- Sympathy of Nature and Man
- Use of Natural Language of Men
- Focus on Simple Men, Farmers (Pastoral?)
- Passion over Reason: Interest in feelings
- Poet as a man who feels more intensely than most men.
- Imagination

# Emotion in Poetry

- Poetry should evoke an emotional reaction, but it should not aim at “outrageous stimulation...” He comments on the “extraordinary incidents” of the time and the “increasing accumulation of men in cities” as a cause. The objective is to provide a counter stimulus, which is emotive, but not destructive or overwhelming. Other romantics will disagree with Wordsworth.

# Lines Written in Early Spring, 1798

■ I HEARD a thousand blended notes,  
While in a grove I sate reclined,  
In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts  
Bring sad thoughts to the mind.  
To her fair works did Nature link  
The human soul that through me ran;  
And much it grieved my heart to think  
What man has made of man.  
Through primrose tufts, in that green bower  
The periwinkle trailed its wreaths;  
And 'tis my faith that every flower  
Enjoys the air it breathes.



The birds around me hopped and played,  
Their thoughts I cannot measure:--  
But the least motion which they made  
It seemed a thrill of pleasure.  
The budding twigs spread out their fan,  
To catch the breezy air;  
And I must think, do all I can,  
That there was pleasure there.  
If this belief from heaven be sent,  
If such be Nature's holy plan,  
Have I not reason to lament  
What man has made of man?

# Intimations of Immortality:

<http://www.bartleby.com/101/536.html>

- Natural connection of Children with Nature: “Child is the Father of the Man”
- Loss of “Immediacy” with Nature as we Age
- From Grief to Joy in Apprehension of Nature
- Joyful Exuberance is purpose of existence
- Loss; Tree; Is it Tree of Knowledge? Fall of Man?
- We still get glimpses of immortal, transcendent world in Nature
- “Trailing clouds of glory do we come/From God”

# Samuel Coleridge, *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, 1798

- Poetic Narrative
- Harmony of Man and Nature and God is disrupted: the Albatross as a symbol
- Remorse: need for confession
- Mariner: the simple man with simple words
- <http://www.bartleby.com/41/415.html>

# Kubla Khan, 1816

- <http://www.bartleby.com/41/416.html>
- Poetry as dreamlike experience
- Immediate relation of sensation: unlike Wordsworth idea of mediated reflection
- Poet was interrupted and result is fragmentary
- Poet is tapping into unconscious through dreams or drugs or some other transcendental connection
- Poet as Prophet

- Pleasure Dome represents sensuous Nature as Eden; womblike in shape; “fertile ground”; natural metaphors of fertility and sensuality: “gardens” and “sinuous rills” and “incense-bearing tree”
- “Romantic chasm”: opposing Dome; “savage”; “woman wailing for her demon-lover!”
- Out of the Chasm a fountain rises
- He embraces opposites: “sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!”
- Poet imagines that “with music loud and long” he will build the Dome, inducing people to cry “Beware!”
- Poet as Prophet

# Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1827)

- Aristocratic family; father a squire and member of Parliament
- Evicted from Oxford in 1811; *Necessity of Atheism*
- Eloped with 16 yo; traveled
- 1813, *Queen Mab*
- 1814, Traveled with Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin
- 1816: wife drowned herself; married Mary
- 1816: visit with Byron (*Mont Blanc*)
- Died in a boat accident

# Defense of Poetry

- Foundation and nature of poetry
- Effects of poetry upon society
- Inspiration of poet
- Poet's influence for moral good
- Response to Thomas Love Peacock's assertion of the uselessness of poetry in *The Four Ages of Poetry*, 1821;  
<http://www.thomaslovepeacock.net/FourAges.html>
- Reprisal of Philip Sidney's *Defense of Poesie*

# Imagination vs. Reason

- Imagination is superior to reason.
- Regarding reason and imagination, he writes, “the former may be considered as mind contemplating the relations borne by one thought to another, however produced; and the latter as mind acting upon those thoughts so as to color them with its own light, and composing from them, as from elements, other thoughts, each containing within itself the principle of its own integrity.”
- Το ποιειν versus Το λογιζειν
- “Reason respects the differences, and imagination the similitudes of things.”
- “The cultivation of those sciences which have enlarged the limits of the empire of man over the external worlds has, for want of the poetical faculty, proportionally circumscribed those of the internal world; and man, having enslaved the elements, remains himself a slave.”

# Mutability, 1821

The flower that smiles today  
Tomorrow dies;  
All that we wish to stay  
Tempts and then flies.  
What is this world's delight?  
Lightning that mocks the night,  
Brief even as bright.

Virtue, how frail it is!  
Friendship how rare!  
Love, how it sells poor bliss  
For proud despair!  
But we, though soon they fall,  
Survive their joy, and all  
Which ours we call.

Whilst skies are blue and bright,  
Whilst flowers are gay,  
Whilst eyes that change ere night  
Make glad the day;  
Whilst yet the calm hours creep,  
Dream thou - and from thy sleep  
Then wake to weep.

# Lord Byron (1788-1824)

- Traveled to Italy; fought in Greek war of Independence
- Aristocratic libertine; rejected traditional morality and religion
- Long Narrative Poems: *Don Juan* and *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*
- “Hebrew Melodies”: poems set to Jewish music; includes most lyric, “She Walks in Beauty.” Inspired by a cousin he met at a ball who was in mourning, dressed in black.

# She Walks in Beauty

- She walks in beauty, like the night  
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;  
And all that's best of dark and bright  
Meet in her aspect and her eyes:  
Thus mellow'd to that tender light  
Which heaven to gaudy day denies.

One shade the more, one ray the less,  
Had half impaired the nameless grace  
Which waves in every raven tress,  
Or softly lightens o'er her face;  
Where thoughts serenely sweet express  
How pure, how dear their dwelling-place.

And on that cheek, and o'er that brow,  
So soft, so calm, yet eloquent,  
The smiles that win, the tints that glow,  
But tell of days in goodness spent,  
A mind at peace with all below,  
A heart whose love is innocent!

# Summary

- English Romantic Poets believed in the power of the poet to shape the moral fiber of society
- Natural Sympathy of Man and Nature; the divide is transcended by the sheer Beauty upon our senses
- Natural sympathy of Man and Nature leads to Sympathy of Man and Man
- The power of Nature to influence and shape us
- Beginning of the idea of poet as prophet: poetry compensate for the Loss