THE ROMANTIC PERIOD (1785-1830)
Week 2
REVOLUTIONS

- **The American Revolution** (last half of the 18th century)

- **The French Revolution** (1789-99): the Declaration of the Rights of Man (Woman)
  - 1792: The French First Republic (waging war upon England)
  - 1793: King Louis XVI executed
  - 1793-94: The Reign of Terror (under the Jacobin Club)
  - 1804: Napoléon Bonaparte crowned Emperor of the First French Empire
  - 1815: Napoléon defeated at Waterloo

- **The Industrial Revolution** (the mid-18th and 19th centuries)
  The country vs. the city
  The poor vs. the rich (or capital vs. labour)
THE BIG SIX ROMANTIC POETS

- **The first generation**
  - William Blake (1757-1827)
  - William Wordsworth (1770-1850): the Lake School
  - S. T. Coleridge (1772-1834): the Lake School

- **The second generation**
  - Lord Byron (1788-1824): the Satanic School
  - Percy Shelley (1792-1822): the Satanic School
  - John Keats (1795-1821): the Cockney School
A NEW STYLE IN POETRY

- Wordsworth, *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* (1802)
- Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (1817)
- Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry* (written in 1821, published posthumously in 1840)
THE CONCEPT OF THE POET & THE POEM

- The expression of the poet’s inner feelings
  1. Wordsworth: poetry is “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”
  2. The prevalence of lyric poetry

- The poet-prophet
  Shelley: “Poets are the mirrors of the gigantic shadows that futurity casts upon the present”
SPONTANEITY & THE IMPULSES OF FEELING

- Disregard conventional rules and the deliberate act of composing poetry
  Keats: “if poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree it had better not come at all”

- The essential role of passion in art and in thinking in general
  Coleridge: “Deep thinking is attainable only by a means of deep feeling”
THE GLORIFICATION OF THE ORDINARY

- All things (notably ordinary, humble, and trivial) are equally fit subjects for poetry
  Wordsworth: urges poets “to choose incidents and situations from common life” and describe them in a “language really spoken by men”

- De-familiarise the familiar and thereby arouse the sense of wonder
ROMANTIC “NATURE POETRY”

- Natural scenes (as opposed to urban scenes) effectively stimulate the creative imagination

- Poets project onto natural scenes their life, passion, and expressiveness
  1. Wordsworth: loves nature in the way human beings love God, a father, a mother, or a beloved
  2. Blake and Shelly: natural objects are meaningful only when they link us to an inner or spiritual world
THE SUPERNATURAL, THE ROMANCE, & PSYCHOLOGICAL EXTREMES

- The interest in the effect of wonder and strangeness
  1. The supernatural: demonology, folklore, occult powers, and Gothicism (Coleridge)

  2. (Medieval) Romances: strange adventures into distant pasts and/or exotic places

  3. Psychological extremes (as an attempt to explore the mysteries of mental life): ecstasy, horror, pain, melancholy, etc.
INDIVIDUALISM & ALIENATION

Solitude:

1. Freedom from social laws:
The poet as a loner striving for the impossible ideal

2. Alienation from industrial achievements and civilisations:
The poet as a loner finding pleasure in the natural scene
William Blake (1757-1827)
*Songs of Innocence* (1789) & *Songs of Experience* (1794)
DUALISM: INNOCENCE & EXPERIENCE

- “Without contraries is no progression” (The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, p. 112)

- **Innocence**: joy, freedom, tenderness, carelessness, nature, the country, etc.

- **Experience**: suffering, restraint, cruelty, carefulness, culture, the city, etc.

- Innocence cannot be fully apprehended in human terms without an awareness of experience, and vice versa. They both are essential to the human condition.

Balance of Yin and Yang: in yin lies the seed of yang, and vice versa.

「天下皆知美之為美，斯惡已。皆知善之為善，斯不善已。故有無相生，難易相成，長短相較……」 (Lao-tzu, Chapter 2, Tao Te Ching)
MAJOR SYMBOLS

- The child/lamb: the state of innocence
- The father/tiger: the state of experience
- Christ: the state of a higher innocence
Piping down the valleys wild
Piping songs of pleasant glee
On a cloud I saw a child.
And he laughing said to me,

Pipe a song about a Lamb:
So I piped with merry cheer;
Piper, pipe that song again—
So I piped, he wept to hear.

Drop thy pipe thy happy pipe
Sing thy songs of happy cheer,
So I sung the same again
While he wept with joy to hear

Piper sit thee down and write
In a book that all may read—
So he vanished from my sight
And I pluck’d a hollow reed.

And I made a rural pen,
And I stain’d the water clear,
And I wrote my happy songs,
Every child may joy to hear.

Hear the voice of the Bard,
Who present, past, & future sees;
Whose ears have heard
The Holy Word
That walk’d among the ancient trees;

Calling the lapsèd Soul,
And weeping in the evening dew;
That might controll
The starry pole,
And fallen, fallen light renew!

“O Earth, O Earth, return!
Arise from out the dewy grass;
Night is worn,
And the morn
Rises from the slumbrous mass.

“Turn away no more;
Why wilt thou turn away?
The starry floor,
The watery shore,
Are giv’n thee till the break of day.”
INNOCENCE

- The piper has a prevailing joyful tone whilst aware of the immediate future is experience.
  - The past: the primal unity
  - **The present: innocence**
  - The immediate future: experience

EXPERIENCE

- The Bard has a solemn and yet promising tone.
  - The past: innocence
  - **The present: experience**
  - The future: a higher innocence (the second coming of Christ)
NURSE’S SONG

When the voices of children are heard on the green
And laughing is heard on the hill,
My heart is at rest within my breast
And everything else is still.

‘Then come home, my children, the sun is gone down
And the dews of night arise;
Come, come, leave off play, and let us away
Till the morning appears in the skies’

‘No, no, let us play, for it is yet day,
And we cannot go to sleep;
Besides, in the sky the little birds fly,
And the hills are all covered with sheep!’

‘Well, well, go and play, till the light fades away,
And then go home to bed.’
The little ones leaped and shouted and laughed,
And all the hills echoed.

NURSE’S

When the voices of children are heard on the green
And whisperings are in the dale
The days of my youth rise fresh in my mind,
My face turns green and pale.

‘Then come home my children, the sun is gone down
And the dews of night arise.
Your spring and your day are wasted in play
And your winter and night in disguise.’
‘I have no name, 
I am but two days old!’
‘What shall I call thee?’
‘I happy am, 
Joy is my name – 
Sweet joy befall thee!’

‘Pretty joy, 
Sweet joy but two days old – 
Sweet joy I call thee! 
Thou dost smile, 
I sing the while – 
Sweet joy befall thee!’

My mother groaned, my father wept, 
Into the dangerous world I leapt – 
Helpless, naked, piping loud, 
Like a fiend hid in a cloud!

Struggling in my father’s hands, 
Striving against my swadling bands, 
Bound and weary I thought best 
To sulk upon my mother’s breast.
“We may figure to ourselves, the boy called from the bag of soot on which he slept, oftentimes walking a mile or two to his work. We seldom behold his nocturnal toils, and combats with the literal powers of darkness; but in the day we frequently see him, blasted with chilling cold, wet to the skin, without shoes, or with only the fragments of them; without stockings; his coat and breeches in tatters, and his shirt in smutty rags; sometimes with sores bleeding, or with limbs twisted or contracted, whilst his misery is rendered more pungent by his task-master, who has no feeling of his sorrows!” (qtd. in http://www.sweepmasters.com/role-of-children.html)
LONDON, SONGS OF EXPERIENCE

I wander thro’ each charter’d street,
Near where the charter’d Thames does flow,
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every Man,
In every Infant’s cry of fear,
In every voice, in every ban,
The mind-forg’d manacles I hear.

How the Chimney-sweeper’s cry
Every blackening Church appalls;
And the hapless Soldier’s sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls.

But most thro’ midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlot’s curse
Blasts the new born Infant’s tear,
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.