

History of English Language and Literature
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Lecture 14 b
The Revival of Romance

Hello everyone. Welcome again to yet another session of the NPTEL course the history of English language and literature. Today's lecture is also a continuation of the previous lecture titled The Revival of Romance. We have been looking at the change in literary seen towards the end of the 18th century and also the various transitional elements which were also featuring as the forerunners of the upcoming romantic age of 19th century. So a (())(00:46) sweeping literary changes which were dominating the scene.

Historically it was also a very significant time in terms of the politics culture and all the other related societal aspects. England was continuing to be ruled by the Hanoverian Kings, the cabinet system of government had come into place and it was also going pretty strong in England.

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The slide features a title 'Historical Background' with a purple plus sign icon. To the right of the text is a vertical purple bar. Below the title is a bulleted list of seven historical events.

- England under Hanoverian Kings
- Cabinet system of government
- American war of Independence
- French Revolutionary wars
- The Rise of Napoleon
- The Age of Hospitals in England
- The beginning of Industrial Revolution

It was also a (turbu) time of turbulent political affairs across the world and especially this period towards the end of the 18th century we witnessed the American War of Independence which was also that changed the course of the entire world history in the coming centuries and decades.

And this is also the time of the French Revolutionary Wars and also we have noted multiple times that the French Revolution was a major influence in shaping the writing of many English writers of not just the end of the 18th century but also of the 19th century. This period also featured the rise of Napoleon which again was to redirect the course of political history into a different form all together.

And when we look at this age of England it was also the age of hospitals and we also see the nation taking newer strides in terms of the ways in which the state takes care of its citizens in a way that it was hitherto unknown. And notably this was also beginning of industrial revolution. Though it had a lot of positive effects to begin with, it would also led to a lot of counter recess, some of which we shall be taking a look at when we talk about the 19th century.

Continuing the discussion from the previous session we take a look at three major poets who signalled a major transition towards romantic age of the 19th century. They were Thomas Gray who lived from 1716 to 1771, Robert Burns from 1759 to 1796 and William Cowper who lived from 1731 till 1800.

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When we look at that time period in which they lived we can say that they were all contemporaries and also heavily influenced by all of the things which were happening towards the end of the 18th century not just in England but also in other parts of the world. When we look at the life and works of Thomas Gray we begin to notice that his initial works

were not that of a romantic nature but they were in a way a continuation of the Augustan school.

He was heavily influenced by the works of Pope and Dryden and he begins writing these versified pamphlets two of which are quite noted, *The Address to Ignorance* and also *The Alliance of Education and Government*. However it is said that both of these works remained incomplete and he did not go back to writing these kinds of works in the later stages.


And then in the next phase we find him writing certain odes which were mostly (riri) lyrical poems and this was all also along the lines of Pope and Dryden and I find him composing quite a few odes such as the ones titled *To the Spring*, *On a Distant Prospect of Eton College*, *A Hymn to Adversity*, *A Hymn to Ignorance*. So there were many more odes which he composed during this period and most of them were very conventional in terms of its form and also in terms of the treatment of the poetic quality.

And these were mostly fashioned on the basis of Dryden's lyrics who also had a major influence on the writings of Thomas Gray especially during his initial days. But what made him depart from the existing traditional forms of writing was the composition of *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* in 1751. And this work completely altered not just the career graph of Thomas Gray but also the way in which English literature was beginning to be fashioned.

It was in a way refashioned in such a way that the Augustan tenets which were dominating the 18th century poetry almost completely disappeared and we find the *Elegy* setting new trends and also setting a new kind of standard in English literary writing. So this particular work was noted for a multiple reasons and also this signalled a development of the distinctive romantic mood by the end of the 18th century.

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+ Thomas Gray (1716-1771)



- *Address to Ignorance*
- *The Alliance of Education and Government*
- Lyric poems, Odes – *To the Spring, On a Distant Prospect of Eton College, A Hymn to Adversity, A Hymn to Ignorance* – very conventional, fashioned on Dryden's lyrics
- ***Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*** - 1751 – the development of the distinctive romantic mood – i. the use of nature as a background, ii. the churchyard scene, the twilight atmosphere, iii. the brooding melancholy, iv. the contrast between the country and town
 - Gray's thoughts following the death of Richard West in 1742
 - published by Robert Dodsley, popularised by Horace Walpole, a literary sensation

Augustan school
- incomplete


So there are four major elements which are highlighted in terms of this Elegy which came to be known as The Elegy throughout the 19th century. The first and foremost one was the use of nature as a background. Though the major theme of this work is related to the impermanence of men, the most of this discussion happens in the background of nature.

So in that sense there was a way in which nature was being brought back to the discussion within the poetic (05:44) and secondly he introduced the churchyard scene which was a very significant kind of development in the 18th century poetry. And there was also a twilight atmosphere which gave a certain kind of a mood to this Elegiac writing. And thirdly the treatment as well as the turn of the poem was said to brooding melancholy and fourthly there was a very stark contrast being portrayed between the country and the town.

If you remember this was one of the most significant changes which came into being towards the end of the 18th century as people were getting increasingly wary of the artificial and the town centric poetry dominated by the Augustan writers. Except that the Elegy was a result of the Grays's thoughts following the death of co-poet Richard West in 1742.

So this is a result of an intense kind of mourning that Gray had after the death. And this work initially it was popularized by Horace Walpole in the London Circus and it was later published by Robert Dodsley. It became an instant literary sensation because it was a very new kind of a poetry and a new kind of theme that the people were receiving.

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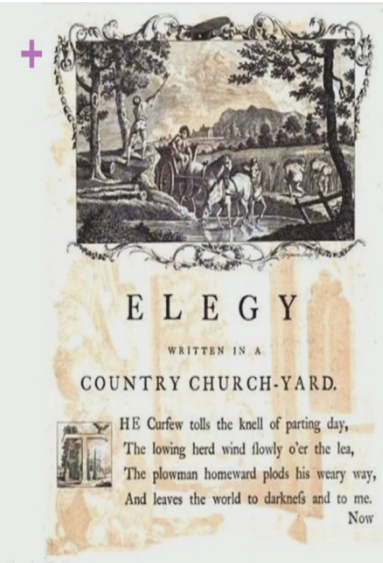
+ **Thomas Gray (1716-1771)** 


- *Address to Ignorance*
- *The Alliance of Education and Government* } Augustan school
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- Lyric poems, Odes – *To the Spring, On a Distant Prospect of Eton College, A Hymn to Adversity, A Hymn to Ignorance* – very conventional, fashioned on Dryden's lyrics
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The Elegy became a quite popular in such a way that it almost became synonymous to the identity of Thomas Gray. So the first few lines are quite famous and oft quoted even in the contemporary. It goes like this. The Curfew tolls the knell of parting day, the lowing herd wind flowly o'er the lea, The plowman homeward plods his weary way, And leaves the world to darkness and to me. So this continues to be quoted in a lot of contexts whenever there is a discussion related to death, parting, etc.

And it also was significantly engraved into a lot of memorials about Thomas Gray. The first line of the poem it almost became very significant in identifying not just the poet but even this age of transition.

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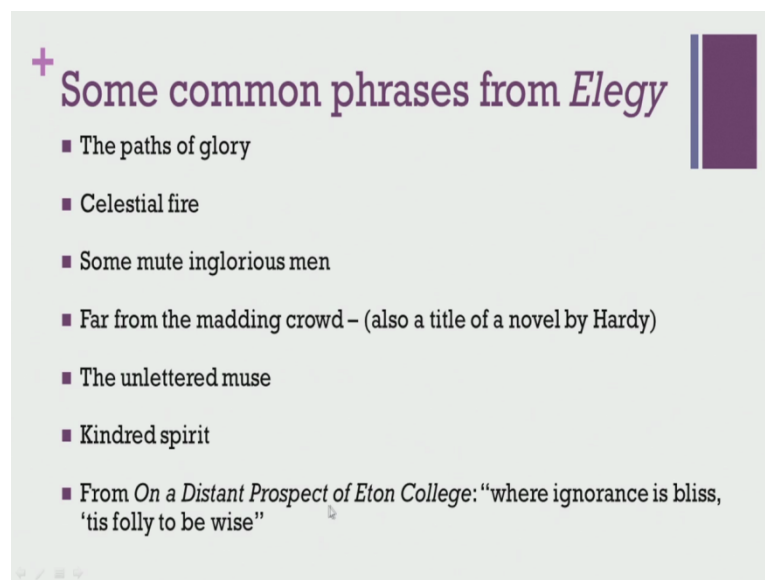
+ 
ELEGY
WRITTEN IN A
COUNTRY CHURCH-YARD.
THE Curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd wind flowly o'er the lea,
The plowman homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.
Now



And we continue to see that a lot of phrases were borrowed into English language from this Elegy. For example certain phrases such as the paths of glory, celestial fire, some mute inglorious men, far from the madding crowd which incidently was also borrowed by Thomas Hardy for the title of his novel at a later point, the unlettered muse, the kindred spirit. All of these phrases which were used in Gray's Elegy became part of a various kinds of expressions in English language.

And in that sense it is also important to take a look at the kind of humour that Gray portrayed in some of his works for example in one of his odes *On a Distant Prospect of Eton College*, there is a famous line which was oft quoted and even misquoted in multiple context even later. Where ignorance is bliss, it is folly to be wise.

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+ Some common phrases from *Elegy*

- The paths of glory
- Celestial fire
- Some mute inglorious men
- Far from the madding crowd – (also a title of a novel by Hardy)
- The unlettered muse
- Kindred spirit
- From *On a Distant Prospect of Eton College*: “where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise”

Though the Elegy was hugely popular and was considered as one of the most important works of Gray it was only a stage of his career in a sense that at a later point we do not find Gray continuing to write any kind of poetry in that mood. He also became increasingly romantic as he grew older. So most of his later works could be classified among the poets of romantic century.

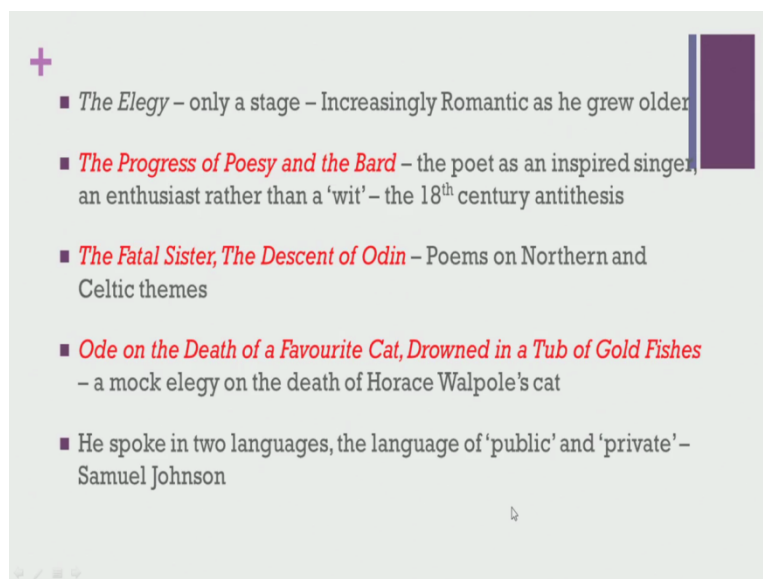
In one of his works *The Progress of Poesy and the Bard* he even clarifies that the poet is not a product of genius but he is an inspired singer, he is an enthusiast rather than a wit. This was in stark contrast with the dominant use of poet in poetry which was held during the Augustan times. And it in that sense could be seen as an antithesis of the predominant 18th century

conventions about writings about poetry and about art and artist in general. And in a couple of other works that followed *The Fatal Sister* and *The Descent of Odin*.

He also talks about the kind of Celtic revival which was dominating the 18th century scene. This also needs to be read alongside the interest in the medieval ages and the revival of medievalism in the 18th century. So he also composed these poems which are primarily about the northern and Celtic themes. So in that sense we do not find him being confined to what is considered as stated in English literature but also moves out of these boundaries and we also see him moving out of these boundaries.

He also had composed a mock elegy on the death of Horace Walpole's cat which was also a source of much humour during those days. It was titled *Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat Drowned in a Tub of Gold Fishes*. Samuel Johnson once wrote about him that he spoken two languages, the language of public and private.

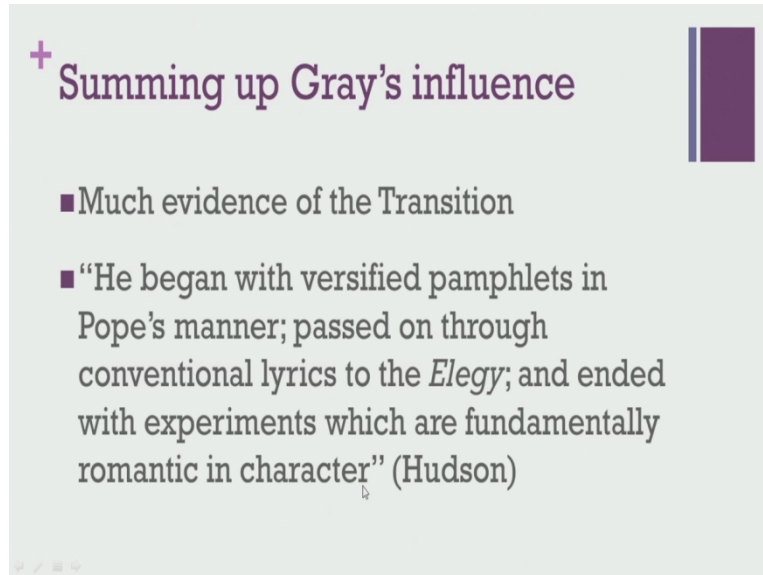
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This was what made him quite enduring to the readers of those times because it was not removed from their reality it also was the kind of poetry which was closer to their heart and closer in a way that the artificial poetry of the Augustan period could not achieve. So if we try to sum up Grays's influence during this transition phase from the 18th century dry artificial wit towards the 19th century romantic mood we find much evidence of this transition and Gray's general poetic career.

As Hudson notes it, he began with versified pamphlets in Pope's manner, passed on through conventional lyrics to the *Elegy* and ended with the experiments which are fundamentally romantic in character.

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+ Summing up Gray's influence

- Much evidence of the Transition
- "He began with versified pamphlets in Pope's manner; passed on through conventional lyrics to the *Elegy*; and ended with experiments which are fundamentally romantic in character" (Hudson)

Having said that we now move on to take a look at the life and works of Robert Burns who could be seen as a quite a different kind of a person from that of Thomas Gray. He was a Scottish peasant and he was endowed with a spontaneous power of genius. So this is also one of those instances where we find English literature in a certain way sort of benefiting a lot from not just English writers but also from writers of Scottish origin.

Though he was a peasant many historians are of the opinion that it would be quite a mistake to regard him as an unlettered plowman. He was received as an equal by his contemporaries and other men of letters and he was also a guest at many aristocratic gatherings in the 18th century. So in a society which was quite ridden by these hierarchical structures for a peasant to pick instead as an equal among these other men of letters he certainly must have been a man of very rare intro genius.


In terms of his poetry his ancestry was mostly Scottish and it could be even concluded that his poetic genius was influenced only in very little ways by the standard English literature. But however one of his earliest works *The Cotter's Saturday Night* does show a profound influence of Spenser. It was written in the Spenserian stanza.

But apart from that it also reflected the general political temperament of the period as well. We find a strong democratic quality coming through his writings. He also contrasted the

homely life and the simple piety of the peasant with the wealth and the vulgar ostentation. The luxury and the artificial refinements of the fashionable world.

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+ Robert Burns (1759-1796)




- A Scottish peasant - Endowed with a spontaneous power of genius
- "quite a mistake to regard him as an unlettered plowman"
 - Received as an equal by other men of letters, a guest at aristocratic gatherings
- Poetic ancestry - Scottish; influenced little by standard English literature
- However, *The Cotter's Saturday Night* - written in the Spenserian stanza
 - Strong democratic quality, contrasts the homely life and the simple piety of the peasant WITH the wealth and vulgar ostentation, the luxury and the artificial refinements of the fashionable world
- Chief influences: songs and ballads of the Scottish peasant folk
- Brought natural passion back into English verse
- Strong faith in Liberty, Equality and Fraternity

So in that since we also find him moving away from the leisure of the town centric life towards a more rustic and nature centre affection. He was majorly influenced by the songs and ballads of the Scottish peasant folk and we do not find him believing in a thought kind of poetry or an entrained kind of poetry and we did not find him showing any indignation to follow or imitate the great masters of the ancient period.

He is said to have brought back natural passion into English verse and also many of his writings as well as his personal convictions they show a very strong faith in the dominant political tenets of those times that of liberty, equality and fraternity.

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+ Robert Burns (1759-1796)



- A Scottish peasant - Endowed with a spontaneous power of genius
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- However, *The Cotter's Saturday Night* – written in the Spenserian stanza
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Robert Burns interesting is considered as the National Poet of Scotland. He was also chosen as the greatest Scott in an opinion poll conducted as recently as 2009. He is generally considered as a pioneer of the Romantic Movement though he lived in the 18th century. And one of his folk kind of poetry Auld Lang Syne, it was set to a folk tune and published in 1788. It continues to be traditionally used as a song to bid farewell to the old year at the stroke of midnight.

It also has been a significant part of popular culture even in the contemporary times. He also wrote a number of poems such as To a Louse, To a Mouse, The Battle of Sherramuir and A Red Red Rose which continues to be one of the most significant poems of the 18th century.

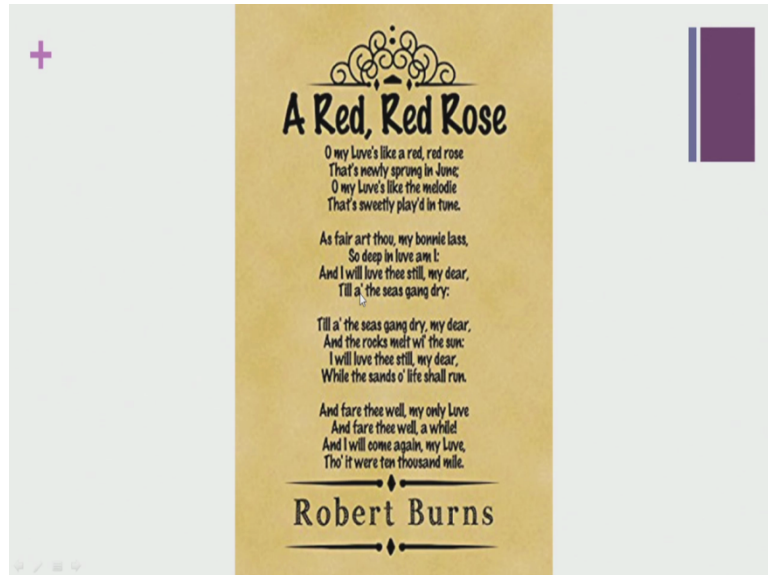
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+ Robert Burns (1759-1796)

- Regarded as the **National Poet of Scotland**
 - chosen as "the greatest Scot" in 2009
- A pioneer of the Romantic movement?
- *Auld Lang Syne* – set to folk tune - 1788 – traditionally used to bid farewell to the old year at the stroke of midnight
- *To a Louse, To a Mouse, The Battle of Sherramuir, A Red, Red Rose*
- "His person was strong and robust; his manners rustic, not clownish, a sort of dignified plainness and simplicity which received part of its effect perhaps from knowledge of his extraordinary talents. I never saw such another eye in a human head, though I have seen the most distinguished men of my time" (Walter Scott)

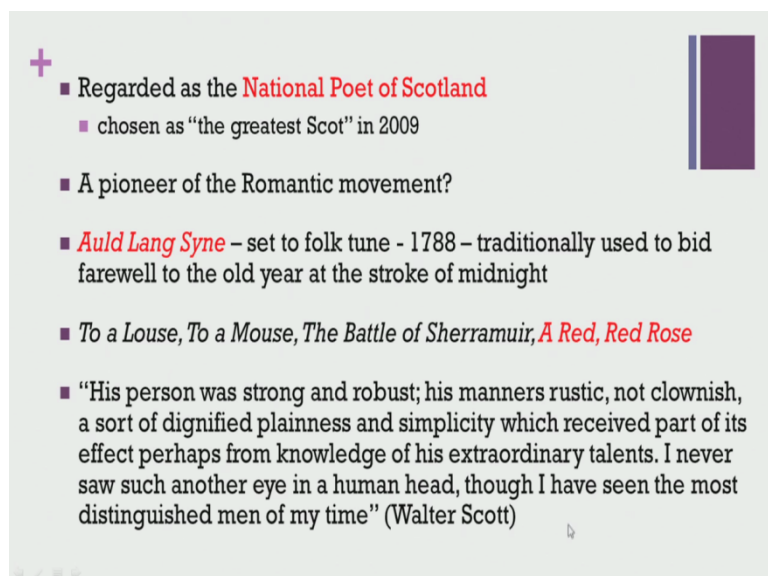
And the poem A Red Red Rose is much a courted. It is part of popular culture. It is also considered as a major influence which went beyond the national boundaries and was quite translated and quite used in many parts of Europe then and even at a later point.

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Summing up the influence Walter Scott once wrote, His person was strong and robust, his manners rustic, not clownish, a sort of dignified plainness and simplicity which received part of its effect perhaps from knowledge of his extraordinary talent. I never saw such another eye in a human head, though I have seen the most distinguished man of my time.

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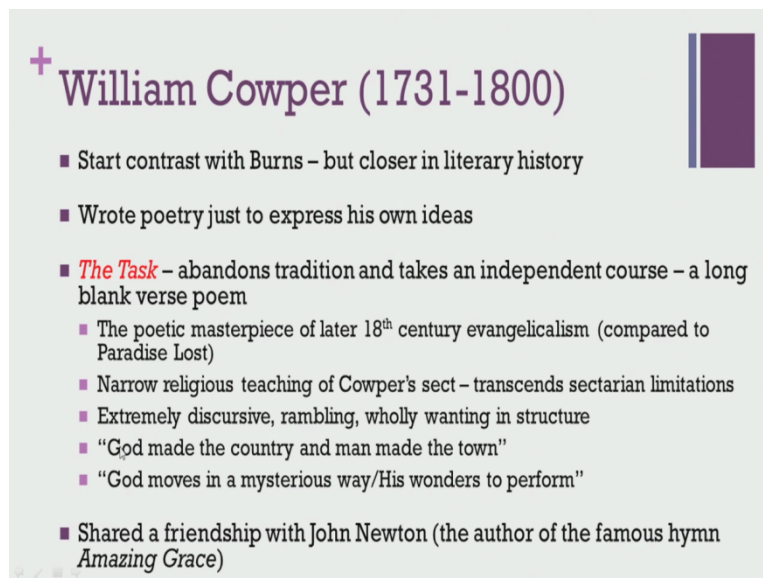


With this we move to another very significant writer William Cowper in whom we can find a stark contrast with Burns. But however irrespective of the kind of differences that they might have borne in terms of their personal and their literary challenges, they are quite closer to each other in terms of literary history. And William Cowper keeping in tune with the true spirit romanticism that was to follow.

He wrote poetry just to express his own ideas and did not believe in proving it with the help of rules or regulations. His most influential and the most significant work as entitled *The Task*. And in this poem he abandons traditions and he takes an independent course and we do not find him imitating or even being overly influenced by any of the earlier writers. *The Task* was a long blank verse poem and this poem is generally considered as the masterpiece of later 18th century evangelicalism.

So it is also useful to remember that William Cowper was heavily influenced by the ideas of evangelicalism and he was also a radical evangelist in a certain way. And his work was even compared to that of *Paradise Lost* in terms of the (fava) (())(16:30) and the passion that it displayed.

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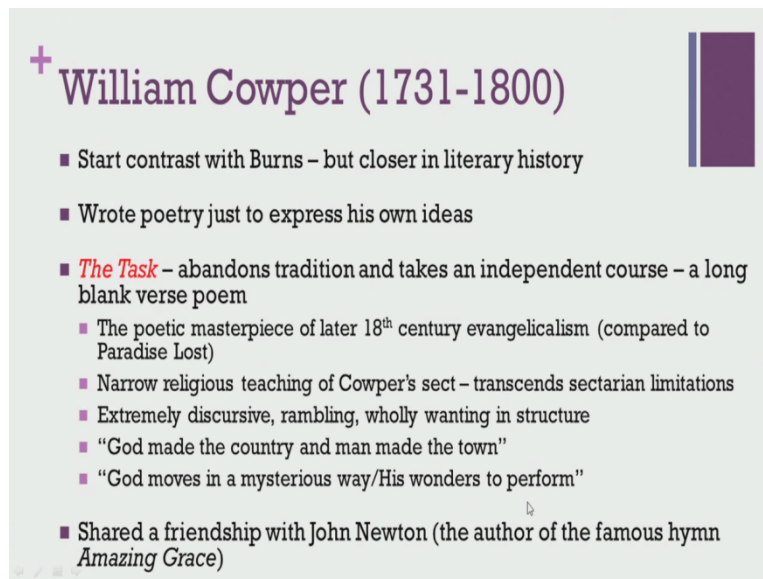
+ William Cowper (1731-1800)

- Start contrast with Burns – but closer in literary history
- Wrote poetry just to express his own ideas
- *The Task* – abandons tradition and takes an independent course – a long blank verse poem
 - The poetic masterpiece of later 18th century evangelicalism (compared to *Paradise Lost*)
 - Narrow religious teaching of Cowper's sect – transcends sectarian limitations
 - Extremely discursive, rambling, wholly wanting in structure
 - “God made the country and man made the town”
 - “God moves in a mysterious way/His wonders to perform”
- Shared a friendship with John Newton (the author of the famous hymn *Amazing Grace*)

Cowper was heavily influenced by certain narrow religious teachings of the sect that he believed in. But however in his work we find him transcending the sectarian limitations and also there was this major complaint about *The Task* that it was extremely discursive, rambling and wholly wanting in a proper structure.

But nevertheless we find him contributing significantly to the development of English languages as well through certain very innovative kind of proverbial sayings such as God made the country and man made the town, God moves in mysterious way His wonders to perform. So in his writings also we find him drawing a stark contrast between the town centric life and the rustic life that many of the later 18th century poets and the 19th century poets seemed to prefer.

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+ William Cowper (1731-1800)

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- Wrote poetry just to express his own ideas
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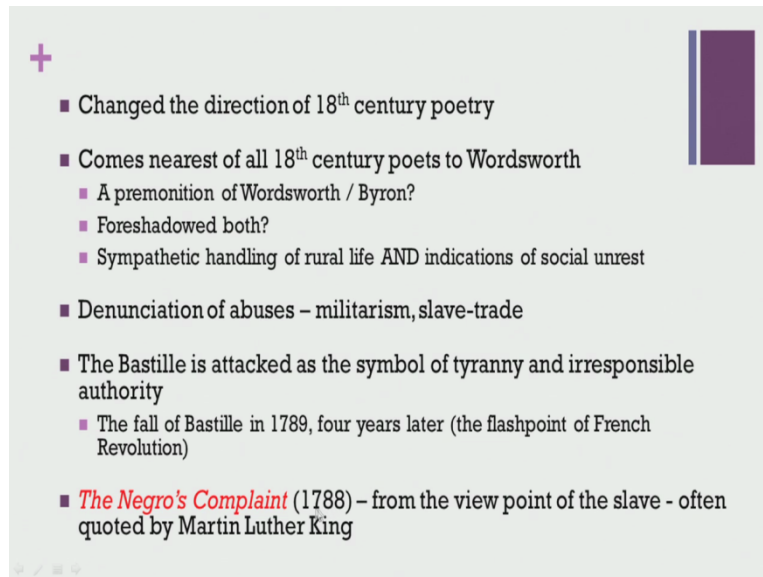
He shared an amazing friendship with John Newton who was much famous as the author of the hymn the Amazing Grace. And with Newton he is also said to have shared a very deep relationship which influenced each other's work and writings as well. Overall it is possible to say that William Cowper changed the direction of 18th century poetry. And among all the other later 18th century poets he was the one who came the closest to that of the genius of Wordsworth. Critics are of diverse opinion when it comes to this.

Some of them feel that he is a premonition of Wordsworth while the others argue that he is a premonition of Byron. But it is possible to say that he perhaps foreshadowed both of them, Wordsworth and Byron because he had a certain sense of sympathetic handling of rural life in his work and in his passion and also there were indications of social unrest that we could read into his works just like Byron's work turned out to be at a later point.

We find Cowper denouncing a number of abuses during his life against militarism and slave trade and significantly soon after his poetic denunciation of the prison of Bastille which was seen as a symbol of tyranny and irresponsible authority across Europe. We find that the fall of

Bastille happens in 1789, four years after the publication of *The Task*. And this event as we know it also was considered as a flash point of the French Revolution.

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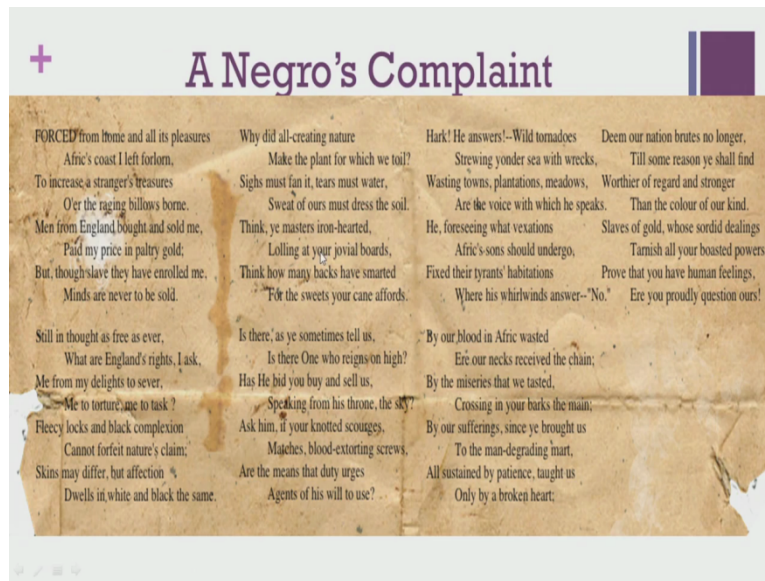
- Changed the direction of 18th century poetry
- Comes nearest of all 18th century poets to Wordsworth
 - A premonition of Wordsworth / Byron?
 - Foreshadowed both?
 - Sympathetic handling of rural life AND indications of social unrest
- Denunciation of abuses – militarism, slave-trade
- The Bastille is attacked as the symbol of tyranny and irresponsible authority
 - The fall of Bastille in 1789, four years later (the flashpoint of French Revolution)
- *The Negro's Complaint* (1788) – from the view point of the slave - often quoted by Martin Luther King

Another more lasting impact that he left was the publication of a short poem *The Negro's Complaint* in 1788. It was the complaint from the viewpoint of the slave and also had heavily and quite vehemently written against the slave trade which was dominating the 18th century and even the early 19th century.

And it is also useful to remember that amongst all of these things the colonialism and the overseas trade was a significant development which was happening and this also was a political need of the hour. So we do find that a lot of thinkers such as Cowper and many others who followed, they had a lot of differential opinions about the political stances and the political policies especially the colonial policies that the British government was taking.

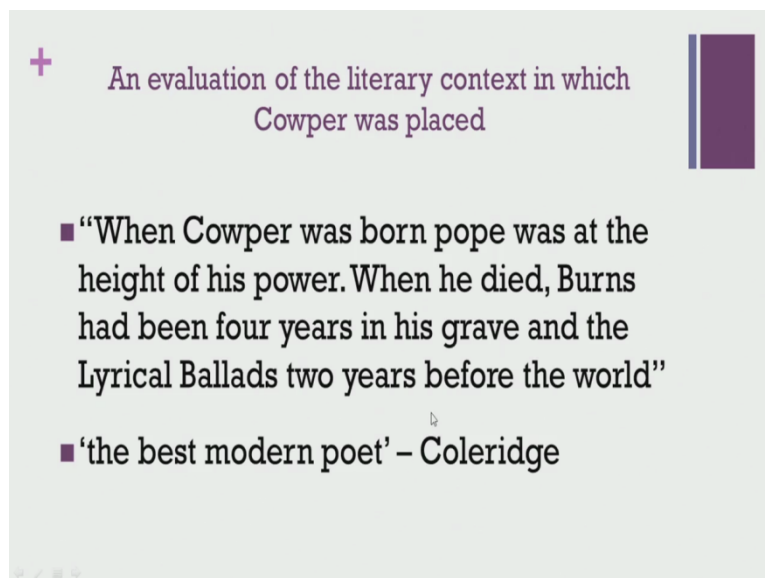
But nevertheless we also find that there was a more freedom for these writers to critique and also to write against the policies that they thought were inherently evil. And coming back to this poem *The Negro's Complaint* was often quoted by Martin Luther King.

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And this poem was also seen as one of those works which signalled the transition as well as enabled other similarly oppressed people to talk against such kind of oppressive authority. If we try to evaluate the literary contexts in which Cowper was placed, it would be useful to quote Hudson again. He notes, when Cowper was born Pope was at the height of his power. When he died, Burns had been four years in his grave and the Lyrical Ballads two years before the world.

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So in that sense he is perhaps the perfect transitional poet who entirely caught the best of the outgoing world and also what is yet to come in the coming world. In that sense Coleridge also


talks about him as the best modern poet. So all these three poets together they signalled and completed the transition from the 18th century towards the 19th century of romanticism.

And when we move on to discuss the 19th century poets and the tenets of romanticism we also will begin to recognise and realise that the transition was made smoother perhaps with the intervention of these major poets. And if we look ahead to the 19th century and also the ways in which it depart away from the tenets of the 18th century Augustan world we notice that there is a very radical shift in the view of nature and the function of poetry.

There is also celebration of the liberation of poetry also getting replicated in the major social political events of the period as well. And we also find that there is a way in which the poet's role itself gets redefined and reshaped. There is a focus on individual purpose of pleasure and edification and also a focus on the expression of the poet's emotion. We also find that poetry is no longer limited to the refined civilized group.

This also find its culmination in the romantic age with the publications by Wordsworth and Coleridge. We also find that there is a celebration of the imitation of human nature and there is a way in which more stress is placed on the value of life in an urban industrial society. And overall looking ahead we see a sense of change and also the impossibility of keeping static.

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+ Looking ahead

- Shifts in the view of the nature and function of poetry
- Liberation of poetry
- The dual purpose of pleasure and edification – the expression of the poet's emotion
- No longer limited to the refined, civilised group
- Imitation of human nature - The value of life in an urban, industrial society
- A sense of change – the impossibility of keeping static

And we also begin to notice at a later point that all of these things together it made possible the romantic revolution to happen in the 19th century. So, on that note of anticipation we begin to wrap up today's lecture. Thank you for listening. I will look forward to meeting all of you in the next session.