

A New Anthology of English Literature Volume II

Edited & Annotated By Luo Jingguo

新编英国文学选读

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罗经国 编注



北京大学英语系教材

**A NEW ANTHOLOGY OF
ENGLISH LITERATURE**

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Chapter Eight

THE AGE OF ROMANTICISM

浪漫主义时期

From the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* by Wordsworth and Coleridge in 1798 to the death of Sir Walter Scott in 1832, a new movement appeared on the literary arena. The essence of this new movement is the glorification of instinct and emotion, a deep veneration of nature, and a flaming zeal to remake the world.

1. Historical background

The political and social factors that gave rise to the romantic movement were the three revolutions. Under the influence of the American and French revolutions, national liberation movements and democratic movements swept across many European countries. England was no exception. Though the government allied hand in glove with the reactionary forces on the Continent, political reforms and mass demonstrations violently shook the very foundation of aristocratic rule in England. No less important were the consequences of the industrial revolution. It brought great wealth to the rich and worsened the working and living conditions of the poor. With the invention of new machines, many skilled workers were replaced by women and children and working hours for young children lasted fourteen to sixteen hours a day. Ignorant of the real causes that brought them such disaster, workers in various places attributed their miseries and growing poverty to the introduction of the new machines. Hence there broke out a machine-breaking movement, called the Luddite movement, named after Ned Ludd, who in a fit of temper, destroyed some stocking frames in 1779. Workers organized themselves and gave voice to their distress by breaking machines. The riots lasted from 1811 to 1818. The government took repressive measures against it.

2. Intellectual background ^{文化背景}

The shift in literature from emphasis on reason to instinct and emotion was intellectually prepared for by a number of thinkers in the later half of the 18th century.

Rousseau (1712-1778), the French philosopher, is generally regarded as the father of romanticism. He rejects the worship of reason. Reason, he maintains, has its use, but it is not the whole answer. In the really vital problems of life it is much safer to rely on feelings, to follow our instincts and emotions. He contrasts the freedom and innocence of primitive men with the tyranny and wickedness of civilized society, and even insists that the progress of learning is destructive to human happiness. He preaches that civilized men should "return to nature", to a primitive state of life. He praises the natural man as "the noble savage" and attacks the civilized man as "the depraved animal". *The New Heloise* (1761) and *Emile* (1762) sowed the seeds of romanticism.

Another thinker who contributed to this shift of emphasis from reason to instinct and emotion was Edmund Burke (1729-1797). As a political philosopher he is known for his *Reflection on the Revolution in France* (1790), in which he repudiates the revolution, claiming that no one has the right to destroy the institutions and traditions that have been passed down to him through generations and to destroy them is to destroy civilization itself. However, Burke's early work *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1756) is an important piece that deals with aesthetics, i. e., the theory of beauty. He distinguishes between two kinds of beauty—the sublime and the beautiful. The idea of sublimity is first found in *The Poetics* by Aristotle (382 B. C. -322 B. C.) and *On the Sublime* by Longinus (213? - 273?). According to Longinus, sublimity is a kind of masculine beauty, more powerful and loftier than the beautiful. Burke further associates this kind of beauty with the feeling of danger and power whereas the beautiful is associated with smallness, elegance, and smoothness. He links the sublime and the beautiful to human emotions and physical senses as well as imagination, thus elevating the

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function of instincts and emotions.

Still another thinker who exerted much influence on this change was Thomas Paine (1737-1809). He published The Rights of Man in 1791, an answer to Burke's Reflection published in the previous year. The Rights of Man asserts that "man has no property in man" and justifies the radical actions of the French people in the revolution, claiming that it is the right of the people to overthrow a government that oppresses humanity. This assertion of individual rights is in direct opposition to Neo-classicist's thinking of binding oneself to traditions and conventions.

4834 意义

3. Characteristic features of the romantic movement

~~3.1~~ (1) Subjectivism: Instead of regarding poetry as "a mirror to nature", the source of which is in the outer world, romantic poets describe poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" which expresses the poet's mind. The interest of the romantic poets is not in the objective world or in the action of men, but in the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of the poets themselves. Even the description of natural and human objects is modified by the poets' feelings. In short, romanticism is related to subjectivism, whereas neo-classicism is related to objectivism. The poetry of the Romantic Age in England is distinctive for its high degree of imagination.

~~3.2~~ (2) Spontaneity. Wordsworth defines poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of feelings". This emphasis on spontaneity is opposed to the "rules" and "regulations" imposed on the poets by neo-classic writers. Romanticism is an assertion of independence, a departure from the neo-classic rules. A work of art must be original. The role of instinct, intuition, and the feelings of "the heart" is stressed instead of neo-classicists' emphasis on "the head", on regularity, uniformity, decorum, and imitation of the classical writers.

~~3.3~~ (3) Singularity. Romantic poets have a strong love for the remote, the unusual, the strange, the supernatural, the mysterious, the splendid, the picturesque, and the illogical. All these qualities are those that the neo-classic writers tried to avoid.

(4) Worship of nature: The romantic poets are worshippers of

nature, especially the sublime aspect of a natural scene. Romantic poets read in nature some mysterious force. Some treat nature as a living entity that shares the poet's feelings. Some even regard nature as the revelation of God.

直引 (5) Simplicity: Romantic poets take to using everyday language spoken by the rustic people as opposed to the poetic diction used by neo-classic writers. Under the influence of the American and French revolutions, there was a growth of democratic feelings, and an increasing belief that every human being is worth being praised. Hence there was a revival of folk literature, a real awakening of interest in the life of the common people, a sense of universal brotherhood, and a growing sympathy for the suffering of the people. The romantic movement is characterized by a humanitarian idealism. Many poets had a vision of the brotherhood of mankind, universal sharing, and the ultimate freedom of human spirits.

(6) There is a dominating note of melancholy in the poems of the romantic poets. The theme of exile, isolation, and a longing for the infinite, for an indefinable and inaccessible goal is commonly found in their works.

(7) It was an age of poetry by which the poets outpoured their feelings and emotions. Romantic poets loved to use a freer verse form, not the standard form of "heroic couplets" preferred by neo-classic writers.

Romanticism is a term that denotes most of the writings that were written between 1798 and 1832. However, it cannot be applied to all writings. Nor is it applicable to all writings of a particular writer. Many different qualities contradicting each other are seen in the works of different writers or in the work of a single writer, so there might be elements that are not romantic.

It should be known that the term "romanticism" was not known to the poets themselves in their lifetime. It was a term applied to them half a century later by literary historians. Contemporary critics treated them as independent individuals or grouped them into separate schools.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH (1770-1850)

Wordsworth was born and grew up near the Lake district, a beautiful scenic spot in northwestern England. From his very early years, he had a profound love for nature, which characterizes all his works. His parents died when he was very young, and he was put under the care of his relatives. He went to study at Cambridge from 1787 to 1791. In 1791 he went to France to learn French in preparation for the career of a tutor. There he was greatly impressed by the revolutionary zeal, and he would have joined in the revolution if there had not been pressures from his relatives across the channel to call him back to England. He was also involved in a love affair with a French girl and would have married her if the war had not broken out between England and France. His revolutionary enthusiasm died down as he was shocked at the massacre during the Reign of Terror under the rule of Robespierre. From 1799 to his death he was politically very conservative and lived in retirement at Grasmere in the Lake district in the company of his sister Dorothy Wordsworth and his friend Coleridge. In 1843 after the death of Southey he was made poet laureate.

The life and thinking of Wordsworth are illustrated in the long poem *The Recluse* which remains unfinished. *The Prelude* (1850) is also a long poem which tells the growth of his mind. In 1798 he published *Lyrical Ballads* in collaboration with Coleridge. The preface to this collection of poems is an important piece of literary criticism in English literature. It can be read as a declaration of romanticism, in which Wordsworth openly expresses his theory of poetry, which is contrary to the theory of neo-classicism.

Wordsworth is most celebrated for his poetry of nature. His love for nature is boundless. To him nature means more than rivers, trees, rocks, mountains, lakes, and so on. Nature has a moral value and has its philosophical significance. Nature is for him the embodiment of the Divine Spirit. He believes that God and universe are identical, that God is everything and everything is God. To Wordsworth nature is the greatest of all teachers, and those who are uncorrupted by urban society, especially those simple rustic people, can communicate directly with nature which gives them power, peace, and happiness.

nature

PREFACE TO *LYRICAL BALLADS*

In the preface Wordsworth makes clear the points below.

1. He will write about the life of common people, especially the humble life of rustic people.
2. He will try to transform the incidents and situations of the common people by his imagination and present them in such a way that they will seem novel and wonderful.
3. He will try to trace through these humble incidents the essence of humanity—the primary laws of humanity.
4. He will try to compose the poems in the kind of language that comes naturally to people in normal conversation. For people in the countryside live in close contact with nature and lead a simple life.
5. There is a moral purpose in every poem he writes. The moral of a poem should not be arbitrarily added to it. A poem is the outcome of the strong emotions of a poet. The poet should train and regulate his feelings by deep and long thinking, to such a degree that these feelings will be connected with important subjects.

... The principal object, then, which I proposed¹ to myself in these poems was to choose incidents² and situations³ from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men; and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination,⁴ whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way; and, further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing⁵ in them, truly though not ostentatiously,⁶ the primary laws of our nature; chiefly, as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement. Low and rustic life was generally chosen, because in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity,⁷ are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic⁸ language; because in that condi-

tion of life our elementary feelings co-exist in a state of greater simplicity, and, consequently, may be more accurately contemplated,⁹ and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate¹⁰ from those elementary feelings; and, from the necessary character of rural occupations, are more easily comprehended; and are more durable; and lastly, because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with¹¹ the beautiful and permanent forms of nature. The language, too, of these men is adopted¹² (purified indeed from what appear to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust) because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived;¹³ and because, from their rank in society and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse, being less under the influence of social vanity they convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions.¹⁴ Accordingly, such a language, arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings, is a more permanent, and a far more philosophical language, than that which is frequently substituted for it by poets, who think that they are conferring¹⁵ honour upon themselves and their art, in proportion as they separate themselves from the sympathies¹⁶ of men, and indulge in¹⁷ arbitrary and capricious¹⁸ habits of expression, in order to furnish food for fickle¹⁹ tastes, and fickle appetites, of their own creation.

I cannot, however, be insensible of the present outcry against the triviality and meanness both of thought and language, which some of my contemporaries have occasionally introduced into their metrical compositions; and I acknowledge, that this defect, where it exists, is more dishonorable to the writer's own character than false refinement or arbitrary innovation,²⁰ though I should contend at the same time that it is far less pernicious in the sum of its consequences. From such verses the poems in these volumes will be found distinguished at least by one mark of difference, that each of them has a worthy *purpose*. Not that I mean to say, that I always began to write with a distinct purpose formally conceived; but I believe that my habits of meditation have so formed my feelings, as that

my descriptions of such objects as strongly excite those feelings, will be found to carry along with them a *purpose*. If in this opinion I am mistaken, I can have little right to the name of a poet. For all good poetry is the spontaneous²¹ overflow of powerful feelings; but though this be true, poems to which any value can be attached, were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who, being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply. For our continued influxes²² of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings;²³ and, as by contemplating the relation of these general representatives to each other we discover what is really important to men, so, by the repetition and continuance of this act, our feelings will be connected with important subjects, till at length, if we be originally possessed of much sensibility, such habits of mind will be produced, that, by obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits, we shall describe objects, and utter sentiments, of such a nature and in such connection with each other, that the understanding of the being to whom we address ourselves, if he be in a healthful state of association, must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections ameliorated.²⁴

* * *

... For a multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt²⁵ the discriminating powers²⁶ of the mind, and, unfitting it for all voluntary exertion, to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor.²⁷ The most effective of these causes are the great national events²⁸ which are daily taking place, and the increasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity²⁹ of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident, which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies. To this tendency of life and manners the literature and theatrical exhibitions³⁰ of the country have conformed themselves.³¹ The invaluable works of our elder writers, I had almost said the works of Shakespeare and Milton, are driven into neglect by frantic novels,³² sickly and stupid German tragedies,³³ and deluges³⁴ of idle

and extravagant³⁵ stories in verse. . . .

* * *

Taking up the subject, then, upon general grounds, I ask what is meant by the word "poet"? What is a poet? To whom does he address himself? And what language is to be expected from him? He is a man speaking to men; a man, it is true, endued with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions,³⁶ and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them. To these qualities he has added a disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present; an ability of conjuring up in himself passions, which are indeed far from being the same as those produced by real events, yet (especially in those parts of the general sympathy which are pleasing and delightful) do more nearly resemble the passions produced by real events, than any thing which, from the motions of their own minds merely, other men are accustomed to feel in themselves; whence, and from practice, he has acquired a greater readiness and power in expressing what he thinks and feels, and especially those thoughts and feelings which, by his own choice, or from the structure of his own mind, arise in him without immediate³⁷ external excitement.

NOTES

1. **proposed**: put forward for consideration.
2. **incident**: an event, especially a minor one.
3. **situation**: state of affairs.
4. **to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination**: a metaphor of painting, i. e., to add to the beauty of the picture by putting on some colour. Here it means that the poet would add his own imagination to the

incidents and situations of the common people.

5. **tracing**: discovering.
6. **ostentatiously**: showily.
7. **maturity**: "Maturity" means "ripeness, full development". Here it means that in the rustic people the essential passions are fully developed.
8. **emphatic**: more clearly spoken.
9. **contemplated**: considered or looked at attentively.
10. **germinate**: begin to grow.
11. **incorporated with**: joined with.
12. **adopted**: used. Here it means that Wordsworth will use the language of the rustic people.
13. **derived**: obtained.
14. **unelaborated expressions**: "Elaborated" means "worked out in detail"; "unelaborated expressions" means "simple and plain expressions."
15. **conferring**: granting.
16. **sympathy**: the ability to share another person's feelings or sensations.
17. **indulge in**: gratify one's desire freely.
18. **arbitrary and capricious**: "Arbitrary" means "based on personal opinion or choice rather than on reason"; "capricious" means "often changing".
19. **fickle**: often changing.
20. **false refinement or arbitrary innovation**: They may refer to the ostentatious expressions or conceits invented by neo-classic poets.
21. **spontaneous**: produced from natural feelings or causes without outside force.
22. **influx**: inflow.
23. **thoughts... representatives of all our past feelings**: Here we can see Wordsworth's emphasis on the importance of feelings. According to him, our thoughts come from our feelings.
24. **ameliorated**: made better.
25. **blunt**: become dull.
26. **discriminating power**: the power to distinguish difference.
27. **torpor**: condition of lazy inactivity.
28. **the great national events**: referring to the wars against France, the industrial urbanization, and the rapid popularization of daily newspapers.
29. **uniformity**: monotony.
30. **theatrical exhibitions**: performance in theatres.
31. **have conformed themselves to**: are in agreement with.
32. **frantic novels**: here referring to the Gothic novels.
33. **Germanic tragedies**: here referring to the melodramas written by German

playwrights.

34. **deluge**: an overwhelming flow.
35. **extravagant**: going beyond what is reasonable.
36. **volition**: one's power to control, decide, or choose.
37. **immediate**: direct.

COMPOSED UPON WESTERMINSTER BRIDGE¹

The sonnet was written in the early morning on September 3, 1802. London in the early hours of the day was as serene and peaceful as nature itself, and to Wordsworth, even more beautiful than nature. Wordsworth's mystic thinking is clear in the last two lines.

Earth has not anything to show more fair;²
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty;
This City now doth, like a garment, wear
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,³
Ships, towers, domes, theaters, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
Never did sun more beautifully steep⁴
In his first splendour valley, rock, or hill;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
The river glideth at his own sweet will;⁵
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still!⁶