

Literature for Competitive Exam
Prof. Aysha Iqbal
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras

Module - 05
Lecture - 17
The American Romanticism

Welcome back friends. So, when we are talking about the English romanticism I thought it very relevant that to talk about American romanticism. As well although they are not interconnected, the British or the English romanticism owes to the European ideals and a particularly the French revolution the idea of some liberty, equality, fraternity, the slogan of French revolution and also the publication of political violence which heralded the beginning of a English romanticism. American romanticism flourished a little later than in Europe the designated period is 1825 to 1865, 1825 to 1865 which see the end coincides to the end of the civil war.

The period is also called the American renaissance and the age of transcendentalism at the core at the center of American romanticism. The key names are the transcendentalist Emerson Thoreau Walt Whitman and then we have another category of the dark romantics Edgar Allan Poe Herman Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne all these writers are immensely important. So, in this week 5 we will be talking a lot about these names and many more. Emerson and Whitman refer to America as the poem which needed to be written.

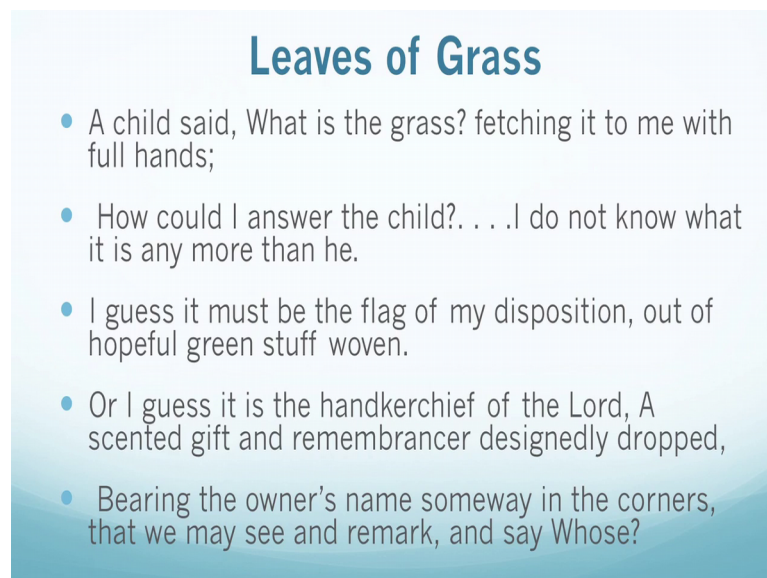
Whitman called expression of individual identity quite a similar or akin to national identity therefore so, much of emphasis on American individualism. It sort of revolted against the age of reason and rationality and scientific spirit of the age. They felt the transcendentalist felt that the that reason played an important role in the American revolution and the declaration of independence after all Thomas Paine and his pamphlet common sense which was published in 1776 is the work that challenged the authority of the British government and the monarchy and is completely it owes its allegiance to the age of reason.

The reason control conformity order rationality all these are concepts of reason the age of reason whereas, romanticism is all about imagination, individualism, emotion and

spontaneity. As we know that romantic literature was also always very subjective saturated within emotional intensity and again the idea the emphasis on the common man could be the hero and this is found in Walt Whitman who lived between 1817 to 1892 Walt Whitman the great 19th century.

American poet in his songs of myself who is known for his song of myself, but most importantly for leaves of grass where he declared a poets manifesto that is 1855 leaves of grass manifesto that the new American poet would and should create new forms, and subject matter for poetry rejecting conventional language and rhyme. Please look at the slide here.

(Refer Slide Time: 04:01)



Leaves of Grass

- A child said, What is the grass? fetching it to me with full hands;
- How could I answer the child? . . . I do not know what it is any more than he.
- I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green stuff woven.
- Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord, A scented gift and remembrancer designedly dropped,
- Bearing the owner's name someway in the corners, that we may see and remark, and say Whose?

Leaves of grass look at the poem here and again look how close he is to William words worth in the sense that his attention is on Childs imagination, individualism rustic rural life closer to nature. A child said what is the grass fetching it to me with full hands.

How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is anymore than he. I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green stuff woven or I guess it is the handkerchief of the lord a scented gift and remembrancer designedly dropped bearing the owners name some way in the corners that we may see and remark and say whose.

(Refer Slide Time: 04:47)

- Or I guess the grass is itself a child. . . .the produced babe of the vegetation.
- Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic, And it means, Sprouting alike in broad zones and narrow zones, Growing among black folks as among white, Kanuck, Tuckahoe, Congressman, Cuff, I give them the same, I receive them the same.

Continuation or I guess the grass is itself a child the produced babe of the vegetation or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic and it means sprouting alike in broad zones and narrow zones growing among black folks as among white, Kanuck, Tuckahoe, Congressmen, Cuff, I give them the same, I received them the same. Equality one of the foremost poets to include so many to be inclusive of so many.

(Refer Slide Time: 05:20)

“Dalliance of the Eagles” (1880)

- Skirting the river road, (my forenoon walk, my rest,) Skyward in the air a sudden muffled sound, the dalliance of the eagles,
The rushing amorous contact high in space together,
The clinching interlocking claws, a living, fierce, gyrating wheel,
Four beating wings, two beaks, a swirling mass tight grappling,
In tumbling turning clustering loops, straight downward falling,
Till o'er the river pois'd, the twain yet one, a moment's lull,
A motionless still balance in the air, then parting, talons loosing,
Upward again on slow-firm pinions slanting, their separate diverse flight,
She hers, he his, pursuing.

Look at another poem by Whitman dalliance of the eagles 1880 and look at the imagery again skirting the river road my forenoon work my rest Skyward in the air a sudden

muffled sound the dalliance of the eagles, the rushing amorous contact high in space together, the clinching interlocking claws a living fierce gyrating wheel four beating wings two beaks a swirling mass tight grappling, in tumbling turning clustering loops straight downward falling till over the river.

Poised the twain yet one a moments lull a motionless still balance in the air, then parting talons losing upward again on slow firm pinions slanting the separate diverse flight she hers he his pursuing.

(Refer Slide Time: 06:18)

Wallace Stevens, a Modernist poet

- *In the far South the sun of autumn is passing
Like Walt Whitman walking along a ruddy shore.
He is singing and chanting the things that are part
of him,
The worlds that were and will be, death and day.
Nothing is final, he chants. No man shall see the
end.
His beard is of fire and his staff is a leaping flame.*

I also want you to look at Wallace Stevens, who is a modernist poet and look at his ideas here. In the far south the sun of autumn is passing like Walt Whitman walking along a ruddy shore. He is singing and chanting the things that are part of him the worlds that were and will be death and day nothing is final he chants no man shall see the end his beard is full of fire and his staff is a leaping flame.

So, these are the kind this is the kind of honor given to Walt Whitman and his ideas the themes. Other writers of this period of American romanticism are William Bryant Washington Irving the writer of sleepy hollow and rip van winkle, Longfellow, Margaret Fuller, James Fennimore Cooper who gave us the noble savage in his natty bumppo novels and of course, the great Harriet Beecher Stowe Uncle Tom's Cabin. Ralph Waldo Emerson who lived between 1803 to 1882 assured in officially assured in American

romanticism a leading exponent of transcendentalism and his works influenced people such as Thoreau Whitman and Emily Dickinson.

And also George Eliot and Turgenev in Europe, his seminal as a nature best testimony to his romantic worldview. He expresses his nature expresses several of his ideas on individualism, where he believes that neither is perceptible only to the eye and heart of the child and someone who has retained the spirit of infancy nature is part of god. Emerson says the whole of nature is a metaphor of the human mind, this relation between the mind and matter is not fancied by some poets.

But it stands in the will of god and so, is free to be known by all men he also wrote the American scholar the great essay where which was delivered at phi beta kappa society in 1837, here and this is important he called for a distinctively American writing free from European influence. See this is important watershed time of era or moment in American literature; American writing should have a distinct American flavor. It was a call for Americans to trust their instincts and individuality and act as representative American representatives to the world.

The major influence on the scholar included here according to Mathon not only nature, but also the mind of the past. So, in this way you can connect him to Eliot's tradition and the individual talent, that everything is in a state of continuum and Eliot also suggests that the individual writer should subordinate himself to the mind of Europe to tradition. For Emerson the mind of the past being restrictive is exactly what contemporary writers must transcend and express the reality of their own period, there is one man one o in capital m in capital.

There is one man according to Emerson and the final influence on the scholar is action without it he is not yet man, without it thought can never ripen into truth. Emerson wrote self reliance another essay where he says who so, would be a man must be a nonconformist. So, therefore, individualism remember that. So, American scholar, self reliance, nature three great works by Emerson leaves of grass by Whitman and also his several other poems as well and then another great writer of the same school Henry David Thoreau who lived between 1817 and 1862.

And essayed philosopher poet, but also a mystic, he was a keen observer of nature a lover of solitude and exponent of the simple life. He famously said that government is

best which governs not at all which is quoted which is a line from his civil disobedience in 1849. Thoreau's Walden in 1854 is a template for an authentic life that can be lived if one leads a simple life free of materialism. In his writings the writer becomes one with nature and the ecological and the spiritual unite, we will be discussing more of these works in our subsequent classes when we go deeper into American literature.

Nathaniel Hawthorne who lived between 1804 to 1864 is another exponent of the romantic American romantic period, he drew upon immerses theories of individualism and also European theories of enlightenment and also colleagues view on imagination. Along with Herman Melville he derided the twin issues of mechanism and consumerism in American society. He was also obsessed with themes of sin and guilt as is best reflected in his discarnate letter. We will be talking about that great novel also in detail soon and then of course, we have Edgar Allan Poe the representative of the so called dark romanticism. Poe lived from 1809 to 1849 he is a poet short story writer, writers of suspense and thrilling stories and also a critic and occasional critic nevertheless a critic literary critic. Great works include the fall of the house of usher the murders in the rue morgue the tell tale heart.

And of course, the raven along with Melvin and Hawthorne he was a dark romantic, he followed the gothic tradition that we have been talking about in some of our earlier classes. So, creepy symbols, horrific themes psychological effects of guilt and sin terrors lurking in the shadows, all these are parts of Poes over. Poe followed the believed in the close analysis of our work and in his essay philosophy of composition which was published in 1846; he explains the process of writing in the raven he also explains that instead of working in a fine frenzy of ecstatic intuition.

A poet chooses a consistent emotional atmosphere that takes primacy over incident character and versification. In his the poetic principle which was published in 1850, he assert that aesthetic appreciation rather than didactic purpose was of chief literary value. Remember that and how this was to influence the aesthetics the decadent movement he Poe also believed that the death of a beautiful woman is the most political topic in the world. Poe reviewed Nathaniel Hawthornes tales and offered his celebrated views on the genre of prose fiction, and Poe was not too fond of the allegoric or allegorical writing, but his vision was more dark was darker and more mystic.

(Refer Slide Time: 14:39)

Raven (1845)

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore—
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
“Tis some visitor,” I muttered, “tapping at my chamber door
—Only this and nothing more.”

Here is an example from raven his 1845 poem please look at it. Once upon a midnight dreary while I pondered weak and weary over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore. While I nodded nearly napping suddenly there came a tapping as of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door. “Tis some visitor,” I muttered, “tapping at my chamber door only this and nothing more.”

(Refer Slide Time: 15:07)

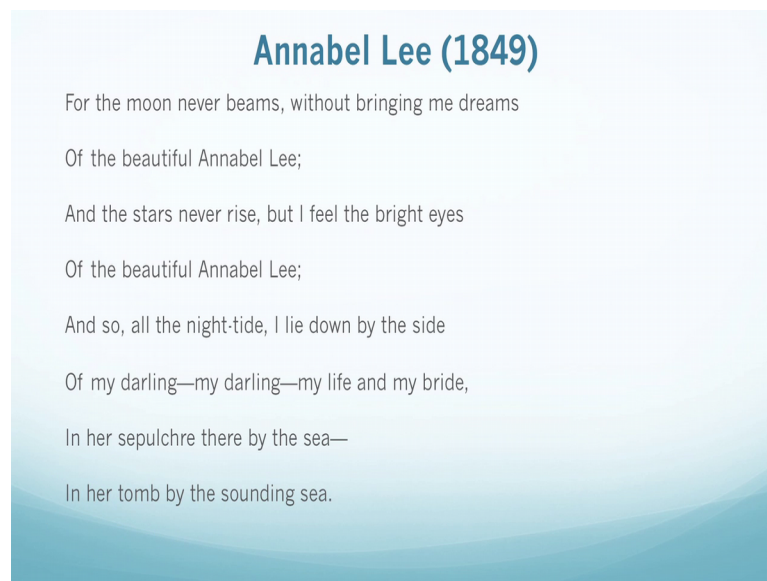
Contd....

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December;
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.
Eagerly I wished the morrow;—vainly I had sought to borrow
From my books surcease of sorrow—sorrow for the lost Lenore—
For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore— Nameless here for evermore.
And the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain
Thrilled me—filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;
So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating “Tis some visitor entreating entrance at
my chamber door—Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door;—
This it is and nothing more.”

Distinctly I remember it was in that bleak December and each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor, eagerly I wished the morrow vainly.

I had sought to borrow from my books surcease of sorrow sorrow for the lost Lenore, for the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore, nameless here for evermore. And the silken sad uncertain rustling of each purple curtain thrilled me filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before. So, that now to still the beating of my heart I stood repeating tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door, some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door, this it is and nothing more.

(Refer Slide Time: 15:56)



When then also look at his ballad; Annabel lee of 1849 for the moon never beams without bringing me dreams of the beautiful Annabel lee.

And the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes of the beautiful Annabel lee and so all the night tide I lie down by the side of my darling my darling my life and my bride in her sepulcher, there by the sea in her tomb by the sounding sea. In tale writing and Nathaniel Hawthorne Poe believed that Hawthorne's lack of originality and his dependence on allegory limits him as a writer so, Poe again a nonconformist one of the greatest examples of a nonconformist American writers of the romantic period. So, the primary features of American romanticism the celebration of individualism comes first celebration of our expression of deep emotions.

And also believe or close proximity with in nature. The romantics asserted the importance of the individual the unique even the eccentric as is reflected in Poe, and they oppose the character typology of neoclassical period or drama most important

contribution is individualism. Individualism can also lead to isolation and as we all understand therefore, as Emerson worries in the American scholar, he warns us of cautions us against imitation and parity he looks inward to find divine essence.

Which he claims we all share Thoreau also isolates and purifies himself at Walden pond and Poe is habitually aristocratic though in real life he was not but he portrays aristocratic characters, hypersensitive young and in gothic circumstances and then you have Melville who has the greatest individualistic hero captain Ahab aboard Pequod in Moby dick. He is Homeric his say experience in his grandeur here is an excerpt from Melville's Moby dick please take a look at it Ahab's description please look at the slide here.

(Refer Slide Time: 18:34)

Melville's Moby Dick

Ahab's description :

He looked like a man cut away from the stake, when the fire has overrunningly wasted all the limbs without consuming them, or taking away one particle from their compacted aged robustness. His whole high, broad form, seemed made of solid bronze, and shaped in an unalterable mould, like Cellini's cast Perseus.

He looked like a man cut away from the stake, this is our hero when the fire has overrunningly wasted all the limbs without consuming them or taking away one particle from their compacted aged robustness. His whole high broad form seemed made of solid bronze and shaved in an unalterable mould like Cellini's cast Perseus.

(Refer Slide Time: 19:08)

- Threading its way out from among his grey hairs, and continuing right down one side of his tawny scorched face and neck, till it disappeared in his clothing, you saw a slender rod-like mark, lividly whitish.
- It resembled that perpendicular seam sometimes made in the straight, lofty trunk of a great tree, when the upper lightning tearingly darts down it, and without wrenching a single twig, peels and grooves out the bark from top to bottom ere running off into the soil, leaving the tree still greenly alive, but branded. Whether that mark was born with him, or whether it was the scar left by some desperate wound, no one could certainly say.

Look at the description it continues threading its way out from among his grey hairs and continuing right down one side of his tawny scorched face.

And neck till it disappeared in his clothing, you saw a slender rod like mark lividly whitish. It resembled that perpendicular seam sometimes made in the straight lofty trunk of a great tree when the upper lightning tearingly darts down it and without wrenching a single twig peels and grooves out the bark from top to bottom ere running off into the soil, leaving the tree still greenly alive, but branded. Whether that mark was born with him or whether it was the scar left by some desperate wound no one could certainly say a great description of a great hero. Individualism other instances of individualism and in uniqueness you find in Emily Dickinson.

She did not go public by publishing her verse and this is one of the. So, we are going to do Dickinson also in detail, but remember one of the foremost writers in American literature. Coming back to Whitman going back to Whitman he embraces the democratic masses yes, but he also calls his major work a song of myself. So, belief in individualism lacks or stays at the center of all great American writing, sincerity is spontaneity faith in emotion. Belief in natural goodness of man as portrayed in Cooper's figuration of the noble savage. Believes that what is special in a man is to be valued over what is represented is not a type, but a special delight and self-analysis, affirmation of the values of democracy and the freedom of the individual.

Thank you very much and we will continue with more on American literature in our subsequent classes.