

**History of English Language and Literature**  
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**Lecture 14 a**  
**The Revival of Romance (Continued)**

Hello everyone. Welcome to yet another session of the NPTEL course the history of English language and literature. Today's lecture is in continuation with the previous lecture where we begin to identify and locate the various influences during the transition period which signalled the transition from the Augustan and the age of Johnson towards the romantic age of the 19th century.

We noted how a certain kind of a foundation was being laid by the publication of the work the Castle of Otranto and also a renewed interest in middle ages or in mediaeval history which followed in the coming years and of course which lasted through the century and even went into the next century, the 19th century. If we look at the works of some of the writers of the later period of the 18th century we begin to notice that many of these writers begin to anticipate the arrival of the romantic age of the 19th century.

And some of those writers though they do not contribute directly to the spread of romanticism, their works were quite instrumental in showing how a transition had become quite necessary to not just react against the tenets of the Augustan school but also to indicate the shift towards a new kind of literary tendency.

So some of the major writers of this period of the later half of the 18th century include Richard Hurd, Bishop Percy, Thomas Chatterton about whom we have noticed even in one of the earlier sessions, William Collins and James Macpherson. And all of these writers Hurd, Percy, Chatterton, Collins and Macpherson they were also part of the age of Johnson when we talk about literary periodization.

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+ Anticipating the Romantic Age

- Richard Hurd ✓
- Bishop Percy ✓
- Thomas Chatterton ✓
- William Collins ✓
- James Macpherson ✓
- Thomas Gray
- Robert Burns
- William Cowper

Part of the Age of Johnson

But however if we talk about the dominant tendencies of their work we can also see that they could be classified as among the forerunners of the romantic age. There were also the set of writers mainly Thomas Gray, Robert Burns and William Cowper about whom we shall take a closer look at in one of the later sessions.

And these three writers it is very difficult to classify them either as 18th century writers or as 19th century romantic writers because in their works we see more of the transition elements, the dominant element of romanticism getting manifested. In that sense these three writers Gray, Burns and Cowper can also be treated as among the earlier romantic writers. When we talk about romanticism in the 18th century we also need to have a proper understanding of what constitutes romanticism in the 18th century.

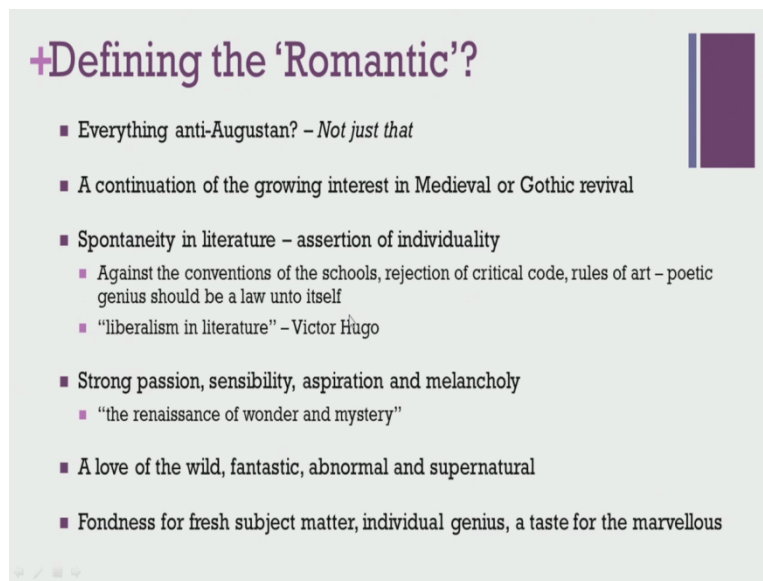
Of course this is the term and the talking that we shall come back to again look at in detail in the 19th century but however at this stage we need to have a preliminary understanding of the term in order to get more conceptual clarity about this age of transition. In the previous lecture we noticed that there was a tendency to react against everything Augustan.

In that sense loosely one can say that the romantic could come to define everything that is anti Augustan. But however when will look at this term in a closer detail, in a more analytical literary critical way it just does not suffice. It is not just about everything that is anti Augustan. It is perhaps a little more than that. And one of the dominant tendencies of this period is the continuation of the growing interest in the mediaeval or Gothic revival,

something that we began to notice even from the publication of the Castle of Otranto onwards.

And when we talk about the major tenets of the romantic traits of the later 18th century, it is useful to identify a few major elements. The first major influence and the first major tenet of this period was spontaneity in literature and this could be read in tandem with that of the assertion of individuality which was also getting reflected in the spirit of the politics of those times.

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**+Defining the 'Romantic'?**

- Everything anti-Augustan? – *Not just that*
- A continuation of the growing interest in Medieval or Gothic revival
- Spontaneity in literature – assertion of individuality
  - Against the conventions of the schools, rejection of critical code, rules of art – poetic genius should be a law unto itself
  - “liberalism in literature” – Victor Hugo
- Strong passion, sensibility, aspiration and melancholy
  - “the renaissance of wonder and mystery”
- A love of the wild, fantastic, abnormal and supernatural
- Fondness for fresh subject matter, individual genius, a taste for the marvellous

And one of the major things of this display of spontaneity is a certain way in which writers were trying to go against the conventions of any proper literary school or proper literary criticism. In that sense there was also rejection of the critical code and the rules of art. In fact it was even felt that poetic genius itself should be a law unto itself because there was no room for any other external force dictating a particular kind of a law or a code of conduct when it came to this expression of true genius.

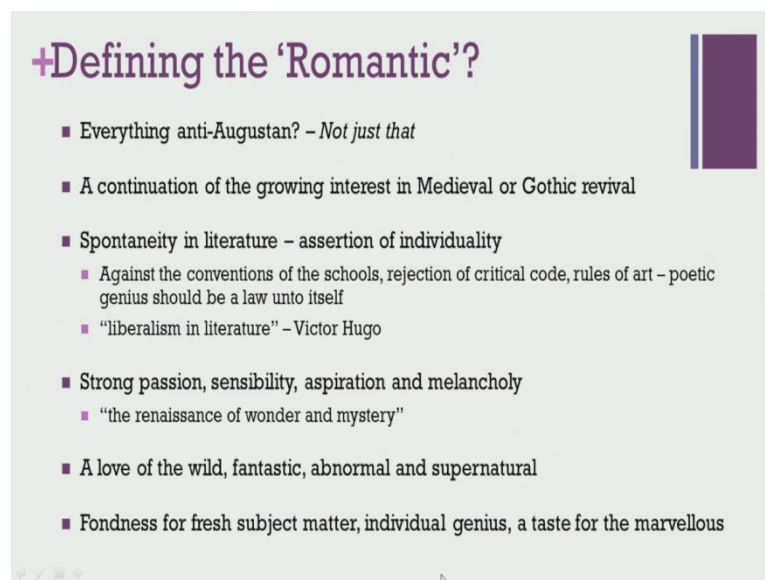
Perhaps in the continuation with that Victor Hugo, one of the influential writers of those times who influenced all of Europe, he opined that this was an age which inaugurated liberalism in literature. So we begin to see that writings of these times were freer from the dominant political socio-cultural influences. More than that there was a certain stamp of individuality in everything that was getting artistically expressed.

All of these expressions were also characterized by strong passion, sensibility, aspiration and aspects of melancholy. Accordingly many writers and thinkers and critics of these period

they also felt that it was the renaissance of wonder and mystery. So we see that whatever was lost and forgotten in the mediaeval ages were being brought back in the later 18th century and also more significantly in the 19th century. And this also resulted in the love of the wild, the fantastic, the abnormal and supernatural.

And this new found love was manifested not just in the writings of those times but also in the general passion and interest of the common people of England. And accordingly as a result of all of these things together we find that even the general public had a fondness for (fresh) subject matter, they also appreciated individual genius much more than any other kind of literary or artistic lineage and there was also a growing taste for the marvellous which (finds its culmination in the 19th century).

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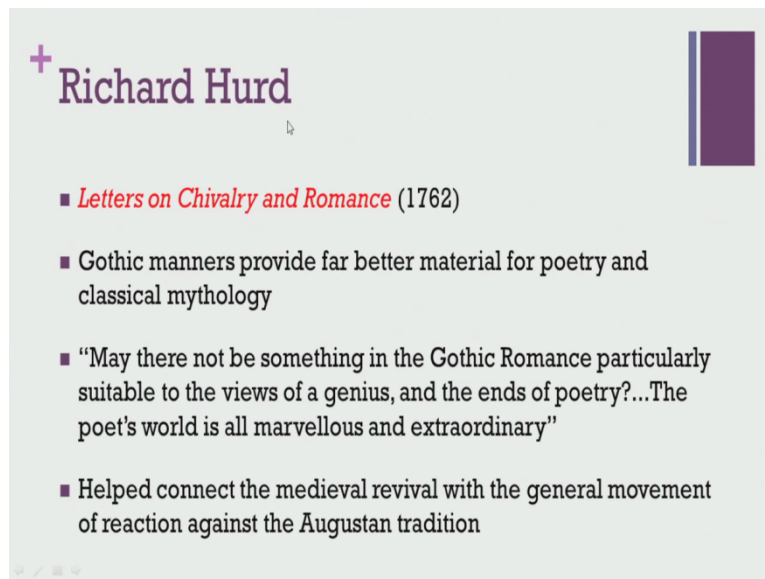
Perhaps one of the foundational influences of the later half of the 18th century is that of Richard Hurd. More than the artistic or the poetic writings of Hurd what was more influential was his Letters on Chivalry and Romance published in 1762. And in this he celebrated the Gothic manners and he argued that the Gothic element provided a far better material for poetry than classical mythology.

We also need to understand that this was around the same time when the Castle of Otranto had grown immensely popular not just in England but also in different parts of Europe. So the arguments of Hurd did go very well with the common reading public of those times. So one of his arguments included, May there not be something in the Gothic Romance particularly

suitable to the views of a genius and the ends of poetry? The poet's world is all marvellous and extraordinary.

So here we find that Hurd was making it possible for infusing even poetry with the Gothic and the supernatural elements and it need not be restricted to the aspects of prose romance or prose fiction. And in that sense his work significantly helped to connect the mediaeval revival with the general movement of reaction against the Augustan tradition.

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The slide features a purple plus sign icon to the left of the name 'Richard Hurd'. Below the name is a list of four bullet points. The first bullet point is in red text. The second and fourth bullet points are in black text. The third bullet point is in black text and contains a quote. The slide has a light grey background and a dark purple vertical bar on the right side.

- *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762)
- Gothic manners provide far better material for poetry and classical mythology
- “May there not be something in the Gothic Romance particularly suitable to the views of a genius, and the ends of poetry?...The poet's world is all marvellous and extraordinary”
- Helped connect the medieval revival with the general movement of reaction against the Augustan tradition

So we also find that not just in terms of the treatment of subject matter but even in the matters of poetic rendition there is a way in which the mediaeval aspects play a significant role in moving against the dominant tenets of the Augustan tradition. Another influential figure was Bishop Percy and his most important work was published in 1765. It was a ballad book titled *Relics of Ancient English Poetry*, followed by the subtitle, *Consisting of Old Heroic Songs Other Pieces of Our Earlier Poetry together with Some Few of Later Date*.

This long and winding title does talk about the contents of this work as well. So this was as the title implies it was a collection of many years and the works of many authors put together and it also needs to be seen in continuation with the ballad revival which was becoming popular in the latter half of the 18th century. And this publication instantly was also suggested by Shenstone. And this work was immensely influential in spreading the romantic taste of those times.


And if you remember this ballad revival was also one of the ways in which the common public as well as the writers were trying to react against the dry intellectuality and the

ornamental expressions of the Augustan tradition. So this work was particularly influential in the intellectual development of Scott which we shall take a look at, at the later point. It is also said that this work led to the immediate inspiration of Beattie's work *Minstrel*.

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## + Bishop Percy

- *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry: Consisting of Old Heroic Songs Other Pieces of Our Earlier Poetry; together with Some Few of Later Date* (1765)
  - A ballad book, collections of many years
    - The publication suggested by Shenstone
  - A great influence in spreading romantic tastes
  - Influential in the intellectual development of Scott
  - The immediate inspiration of Beattie's *Minstrel*

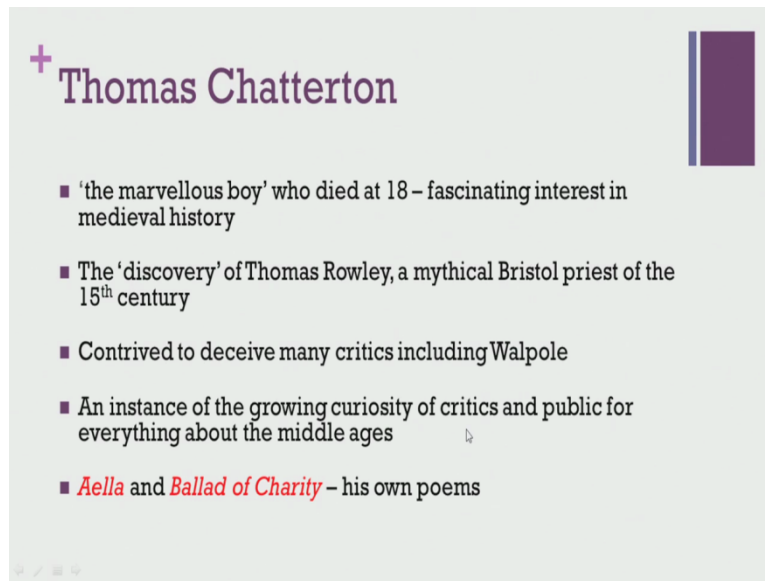


And like many other works of these times this work was also immensely popular. It was a much in demand, it ran to many editions as well. The other important figure is that of Thomas Chatterton about whom we had taken a look at even earlier. He was considered as the marvellous boy who committed suicide at the age of 18 and in spite of this very short period of time he had left a tremendous mark in English literary history.

And he was one who had a fascinating interest in mediaeval history and we also noticed that even at an earlier point that his claim to fame was his supposed discovery of a certain Thomas Rowley, a poet whom Chatterton claimed was a mythical Bristol priest of the 15th century. But however many critics had different opinions about this and some even dismissed this entire claim saying that it was completely aconite and it was completely forged out of the imaginations of young Thomas Chatterton.

But however he was found immensely fascinating by many of his contemporaries including major later writers such as William Wordsworth. And at least for a brief time he even successfully led even critics such as Walpole into believing that character such as Thomas Rowley did exist.

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## + Thomas Chatterton

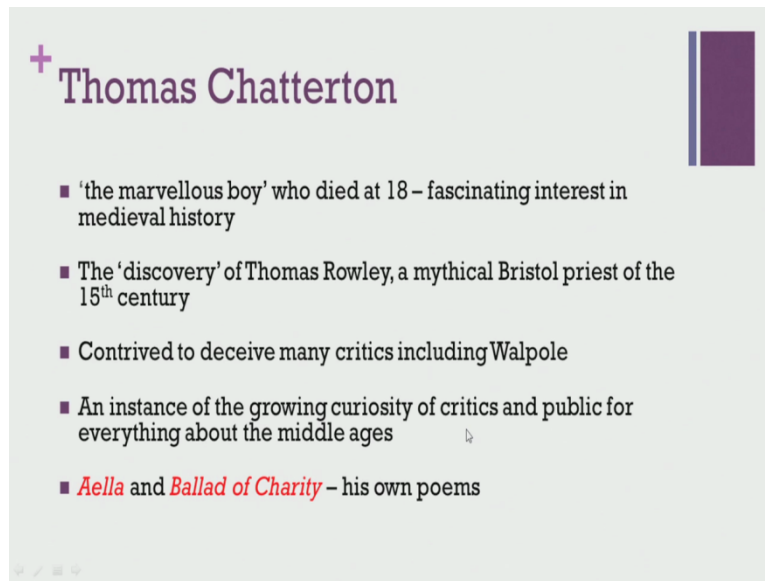
- 'the marvellous boy' who died at 18 – fascinating interest in medieval history
- The 'discovery' of Thomas Rowley, a mythical Bristol priest of the 15<sup>th</sup> century
- Contrived to deceive many critics including Walpole
- An instance of the growing curiosity of critics and public for everything about the middle ages
- *Aella* and *Ballad of Charity* – his own poems

This continues to be a matter of dispute but however the common interest in anything regarding the medieval ages or medieval history was quite significant that people were willing to buy anything out of curiosity when it came to a discussion about the middle ages. So this growing curiosity of not just the critics but also the public for listening to something about the middle ages, it does talk a lot about this age of transition.

Chatterton (ha) himself wrote just a couple of works just *Aella* and *Ballad of Charity*. His poetical works however are considered as of a supreme quality given that he was very young. His work was still maturing and that many feel that he did have the potential and genius to turn into a better poet had he lived for longer years.

And this historical interest in the medieval times was quite significant in the sense that it was not just about the poetry which was getting produced in the 18th century but people were willing to consume even the forgotten writers or the lost writers of the medieval history even if it was brought to them in certain spurious form such as Chatterton had did.

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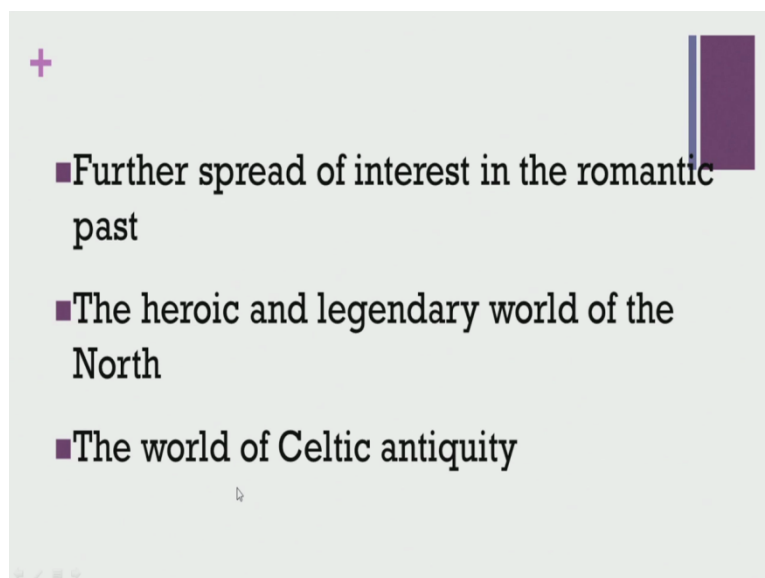
**+ Thomas Chatterton**

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- *Aella* and *Ballad of Charity* – his own poems

So this is more important not just in terms of the work itself but in laying a foundation to the growing interest in the medieval history which would again come back to us as a major influence in the 19th century. So during this period we find that there is a further spread of interest in the romantic past and also this in some form or the other we find that this interest spreads out of the island of England.

It spreads a further north and also there is a growing interest in the heroic and legendary world of the north. And accordingly we find the English people as well as the Scottish people all of a sudden turning to the world of Celtic antiquity thereby renewing this interest in the medieval ages and taking it to another level altogether.

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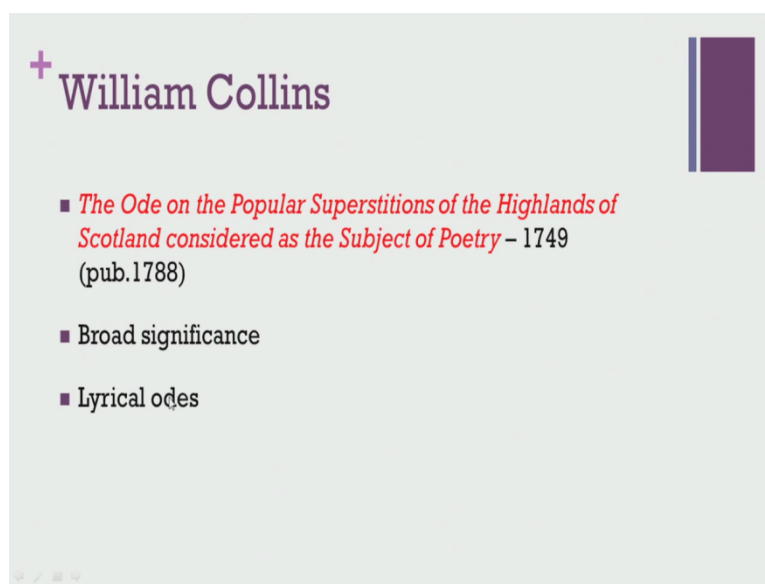
- Further spread of interest in the romantic past
- The heroic and legendary world of the North
- The world of Celtic antiquity



So it is in this context that we need to look at the work of William Collins who published his *The Ode on the Popular Superstition of the Highlands of Scotland considered as the Subject of Poetry* in 1788 and this work was originally written in 1749 with given the kind of increasing interest and the curiosity and the historical curiosity that critics and public had on such a theme, we find Collins publishing enthusiastically at later point 1788.

This work had a very broad significance not just in the history of England but also in the literary history of Scotland. And he also had published a set of other lyrical odes which were not commented well by most of the critics.

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But nevertheless his work in multiple ways tried to connect the growing medieval interest within England with that of the growing interest in other parts just Scotland and Ireland. So it is in this context again we try to understand the work of James Macpherson who was a young Scotch school master. And his most important work was *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* collected in the Highlands of Scotland and translated from the Galic or Erse language.

And in this work he tries not to publish original work but he tries to compile major works which were lost or forgotten from the ancient Galic history. So this was also celebrated as the genuine remains of ancient Scottish poetry and in this context we will also recall your attention to the elements of Scottish enlightenment that we had discussed. And this is also an opportunity trying to remember that there is a way in which the English literary history and Scottish literary history remains intertwined in these respects.

So following the success of his *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* we find Macpherson setting off on a literary pilgrimage in quest of fresh material.

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## + James Macpherson



- A young Scotch schoolmaster
- *Fragments of Ancient Poetry collected in the Highlands of Scotland and translated from the Galic or Erse Language*
  - 'genuine remains of ancient Scottish poetry'
- Macpherson started on a literary pilgrimage in quest of fresh material
- *Fingal*, an Epic Poem in six books, 1762
- *Temora*, an Epic Poem in eight books, 1763
- Public interest in Edinburgh and London

This is also with the understanding that there is always a possibility of identifying or discovering lost works from the medieval times. So maybe it was the same kind of curiosity that had inspired young Chatterton as well. Understanding this from the Scottish point of view this also had another nationalist appeal because there was a way in which the Scottish writers were also trying to identify their own lost history and keep it at par with that of the British history.


So accordingly as a result of this pilgrimage that Macpherson undertakes, he also identifies a number of other works which he publishes as *Fingal*, an Epic Poem in six books in 1762 followed by *Temora* with eight books in 1763. So there is a dispute about many of these works. Many critics also feel that Macpherson had heavily mediated the earlier writings and some even feel that he himself had manipulated many of these works to fit in with the kind of interest that was growing in London and in Edinburgh.

But nevertheless this work was hugely successful and was received with much enthusiasm both in Edinburgh as well as in London. And this growing public interest also led to the popularization of the mythical creation which resulted from Macpherson's works.

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**+ James Macpherson**

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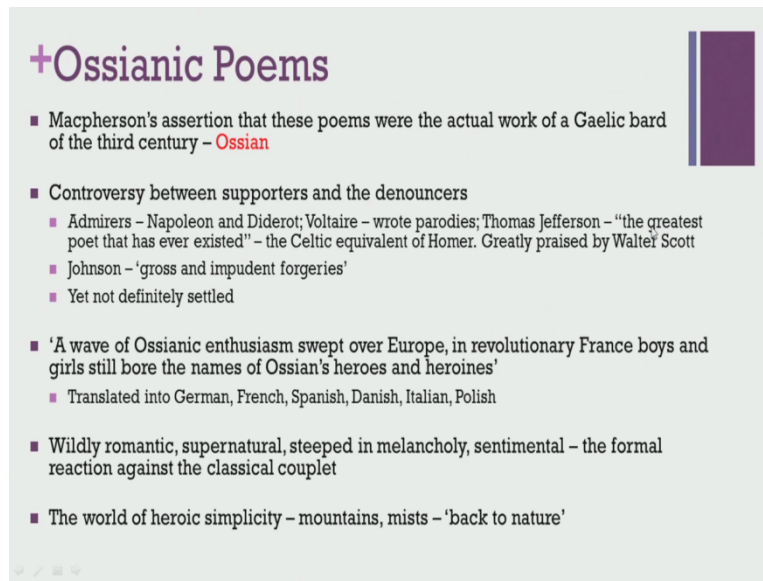


The mythical creation which resulted from the popularization of Macpherson's work namely The Legend of Ossian. A set of the Ossianic poems were used as rubric term to talk about the most of the works which Macpherson successfully compiled together from the medieval ages. And Macpherson began to assert that all of these poems that he had compiled and he had collected after his pilgrimage throughout Scotland he began to assert that this poems were the actual work of a Gaelic third century bard named Ossian.

And this also led to a lot of literary and social controversy and there were supporters who were convinced that Ossian did exist and that Macpherson had successfully unearth all these forgotten poems. There were also denouncers who felt that Macpherson was going a little overboard and trying to fool the critics as well as the public given that there was a growing interest in the medieval times.

So the admirers of these Ossianic poems included Napoleon and Diderot and Voltaire even wrote parodies about the Ossianic poems which also led to its immense popularity across Europe. Thomas Jefferson believed that Ossian, though we do not know whether he was a real figure or a mythical figure, Jefferson nevertheless believes that he was the greatest poet that has ever existed. And many other critics also believed that Ossian was the Celtic equivalent of Homer.

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## +Ossianic Poems

- Macpherson's assertion that these poems were the actual work of a Gaelic bard of the third century – **Ossian**
- Controversy between supporters and the denouncers
  - Admirers – Napoleon and Diderot; Voltaire – wrote parodies; Thomas Jefferson – “the greatest poet that has ever existed” – the Celtic equivalent of Homer. Greatly praised by Walter Scott
  - Johnson – ‘gross and impudent forgeries’
  - Yet not definitely settled
- ‘A wave of Ossianic enthusiasm swept over Europe, in revolutionary France boys and girls still bore the names of Ossian's heroes and heroines’
  - Translated into German, French, Spanish, Danish, Italian, Polish
- Wildly romantic, supernatural, steeped in melancholy, sentimental – the formal reaction against the classical couplet
- The world of heroic simplicity – mountains, mists – ‘back to nature’

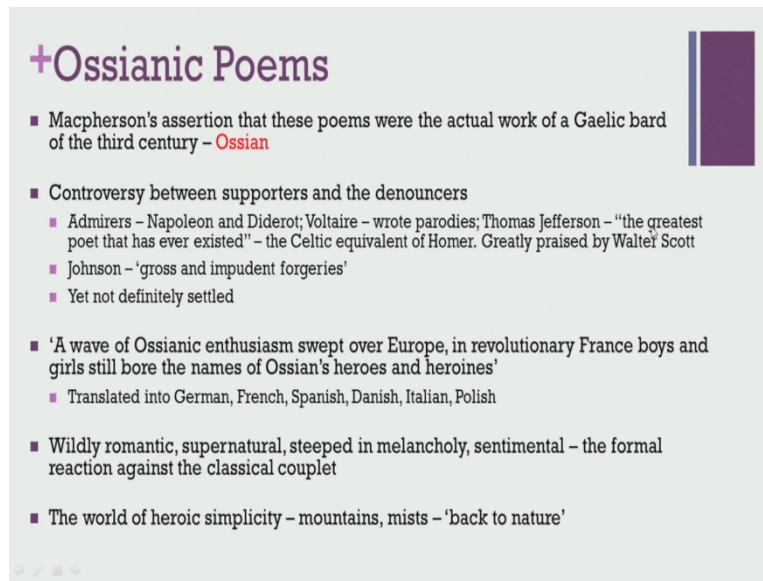
So as we mentioned earlier there was a nationalist element also built into it. In a way the people were willing to buy this argument provided it would give them some kind of a superiority in whole of Europe in terms of the literary myths or the literary legends. This collection of poems later known as the Ossianic poems were also greatly praised by Walter Scott. We also noticed that Scott was generally quite lavish and extravagant with his praise for literary works.

However there were also people on the other side such as Samuel Johnson who found this as a gross and impudent forgery. He was never willing to be convinced by the arguments of any of the critics and he was quite convinced that a poet such as Ossian did not exist and it was all a fragment of imagination and a very manipulative creation of Macpherson.

This dispute is yet not definitely settled but however what sustains our interest is that a wave of Ossianic enthusiasm swept over Europe, in revolutionary France boys and girls still bore the names of Ossian's heroes and heroines. It is in this way that the historian Hudson records the popularity of Macpherson's Ossianic poems.

And the popularity and the immense influence of Macpherson's work could be understood from the single fact that these poems were translated in the 18th century and in the 19th century into different European languages such as German, French, Spanish, Danish, Italian and Polish.

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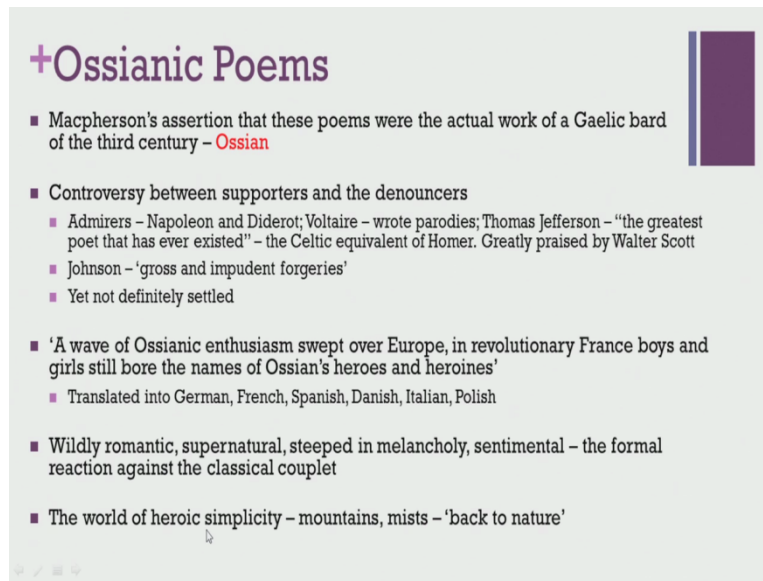
So across Europe there was a growing interest in these kind of works and in the light of this immense popularity even the disputes were quite overshadowed. What made these works immensely popular apart from historical curiosity about them was the element of wild romanticism built into them.

It also had a lot of supernatural elements so there is always the suspicion that Macpherson in a certain way was trying to play to the gallery and had deliberately included most of these elements which would continue to impress the people even in the 18th century. The work in terms of its subject to matter and treatment it was steeped in melancholy, it was also sentimental in its nature.

So for a third century poet to write in a way that would influence the 18th century readers, it was a quite a feat which is why perhaps the suspicions about the historical veracity of Ossian also exist. In terms of the poetic form or the form of writing also it was quite an exact fit because we find that even the Ossianic poems it rejected the classical couplet and it also celebrated a freer form of verse.

So all of these elements put together it continues to raise the suspicions against a veracity of Macpherson's work. But nevertheless its popularity cannot be contained or cannot be disputed at all. And more than everything what these set of Ossianic poems did was it in many ways cemented this call to return to nature. And it in that sense celebrated the world heroic simplicity, it brought back to discussion the elements of nature such as mountains and mists and also reiterated this call to return to nature.

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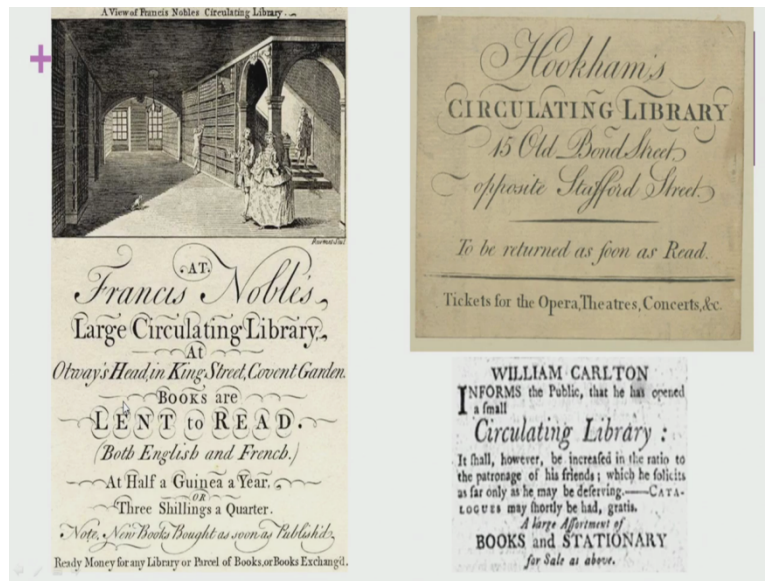
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As we begin to wrap up this lecture it is useful to again remember that the circulating libraries which had become extremely popular by the end of the 18th century also ensure that all of these works had wide currency and it was getting read by a wider public than ever. Though books continued to be expensive in some form or the other these circulating libraries ensured that almost everyone had equal access irrespective of class and gender to reading material.

So these are some of the advertisements which were put up even as early as 18th century about the relevance and the popularity of the circulating libraries. And this fact almost made a printing and the dissemination of reading material quite a natural fact and no longer a spectacle in the 19th century.

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So just as books have become almost quite a common item in today's world, from the beginning of the 19th century onwards we find this transition happening and from this time onwards we no longer draw attention to the difficulties of getting a book or the difficulties of accessing reading material.

But it becomes part and parcel of the cultural ethos of England and we do find that the common people they take a huge advantage from this growing fact and also it becomes easier for the writers also to get across and communicate to the readers in multiple ways. So in the 19th century as a result of this we also see a growing population of critics alongside there is also growth of literary criticism which also reiterates the fact that any kind of literature can grow only with the help of sustain and informed literary criticism.

So with this we begin to wind up today's lecture and in the next lecture we shall come back to again look at some of the other foundational influences which paved the way towards the romantic age of the 19th century and we continue to also remember that this was also in terms of periodization, the age of Johnson. And after this we shall be moving to the age of Wordsworth or the age of romanticism.

And we also begin to notice that from this time onwards from the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century we also moved to a very different level of understanding of literature all together. And also that from this point of time onwards what dominates the discussion when literary history is mostly of literary events and we find lesser and lesser of non literary events except when it is of a supreme relevance or importance.

So, on this note it is time for us to wind up today's lecture. Thank you for listening and look forward to seeing you in the next session.