

English Literature of the Romantic Period, 1798-1832
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Romantic Poetry 4:
Politics: Race, Empire, Tyranny

Hello everybody, so we continue lessons on politics and the English Romantic writers as part of our lessons on English Romantic writing 1798 to 1832. Having looked at gender and class, we now move onto the politics of race, empire and Tyranny.

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Romanticism had strong ties with imperialism and colonial conquest, and therefore a keen interest in race.

During Romanticism, Europe discovered the East. William Jones, the Clapham Sect, various humanitarian societies worked to document, translate and propagate Eastern texts. Humanitarian and evangelical societies set up networks in the East, generating a new humanitarian globe, so to speak.

Raymond Schwab's monumental work demonstrated how Romanticism overlaps with an 'Oriental Renaissance' from the late 18th century through the availability of Eastern texts for European consumption.

The making of a Romantic Orientalism.

The scholar Saree Makdisi summarizes it thus:



Romanticism had strong ties with imperialism and colonial conquest and therefore it also had by extension a keen interest in race. During Romanticism Europe discovered the East. William Jones, the Clapham sect, various humanitarian societies worked to document, translate and propagate eastern text. Humanitarian and evangelical societies set up 2 networks in East, generating a new humanitarian globe, so to speak.

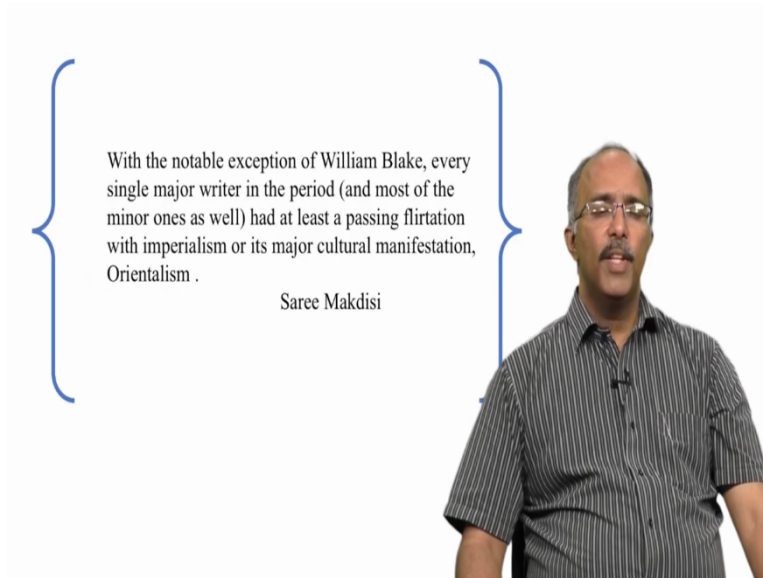
And if you look at the work of geographer like Alan Lester he will make this connection about how humanitarianism begins to spread across the globe in conjunction with imperial conquest and imperial expansion. Raymond Schwab's monumental work demonstrated how Romanticism overlaps with an oriental Renaissance from the late 18th century.

This was made possible Schwab demonstrates and the volume has (1:22) advert sign. Schwab demonstrates that Romanticism overlaps with oriental Renaissance was made

possible to the availability of eastern text translated from Sanskrit for example into English and this marks the beginning of a romantic Orientalism. The scholar Saree Makdisi summarizes it thus.

Here is a quote from Makdisi which somehow captures what we are trying to do here on the slide now.

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With a notable exception of William Blake writes Makdisi every single major of in the period and most of the minor ones as well had at least a passing flirtation with liberalism or its major cultural manifestation Orientalism. But it is not adequate to say that all of England had any imperialistic attitude towards the rest of the world. Within England itself there were differences in approaches towards race and empire for example.

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In its attitudes towards race and Empire, there were differences within England itself.

- the curiosity about other races and cultures,
- The appeal of the exotic,
- the humanitarian ideal of uplifting the 'poor' racial other,
- The economic imperative of having such possessions,
- The availability of a vast body of knowledge from the late 18th c of other cultures and races
- The East as a career.

One of the key debates revolved around the second – the humanitarian ideal. Statesmen Burke argued that while England may have made technological progress and was superior to other races, this did not give them any kind of cultural or moral superiority over peoples they governed.

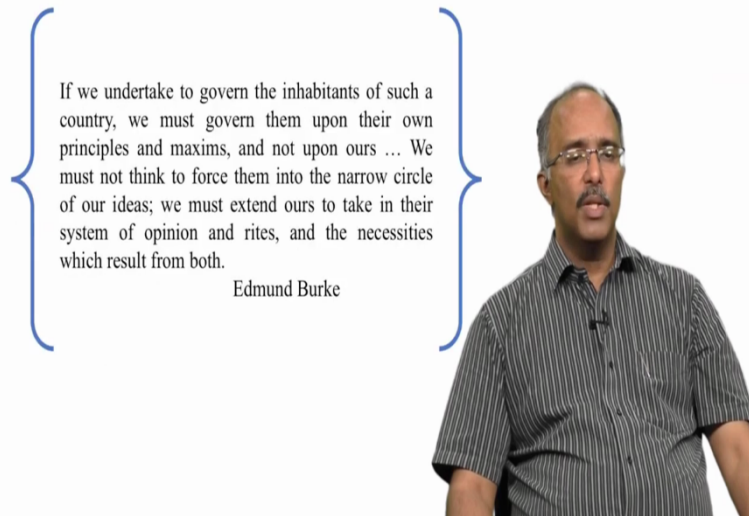
Burke would say...



And there is a brief list that I would like to run past you. The curiosity about other races and cultures, the appeal of the exotic, the humanitarian ideal of uplifting the poor racial other, the economic imperative of having such possessions, the availability of a vast body of knowledge from the late 18th century about other cultures and races and distinct parts of the world and of course finally the East as a lucrative career.

One of the key debates of this period revolved around the 2nd one that is the humanitarian ideal. Statements such as Burke argued that while England may have had made some technological progress and was superior to other races, this did not in any way give them cultural, moral superiority over the races or the people they governed. That is you may have made economic and material progress but that does not make you morally superior.

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Burke would say and here is a quote from Burke on your screens. If we undertake to govern the inhabitants of such a country, we must govern them upon their own principles and maxims, and not upon ours. We must not think to force them in the narrow circle of our ideas, we must extend hours to take Indian system of their opinion and rights and the necessities which result from both.

Burke also noted that what would be an acceptable behavior in England was deemed legitimate in the colonies, what he famously termed the graphical morality. That is whatever action would be found an acceptable within the shores of England would perform elsewhere in the colonies. Burke use that the graphical morality to say that England was basically hypocritical. What it would not tolerate for a minute within its geopolitical borders was a free for all in the other parts of the world.

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Burke also noted that what would be unacceptable in behaviour in England was deemed legitimate in the colonies – what he famously termed geographical morality.



The British began to produce a huge apparatus of knowledge, grammar textbooks, treatises, documents, translations, historical ethnographic archaeological commentaries roughly around this period. And there is a key moment here, the key moment here is the founding of the Asiatic Society in Bengal that is 1 Park Street even now by Sir William Jones. And tasked with providing authentic material from Indian languages, Indian literatures for Western consumption.

William Jones's grammar of the Persian language 1771, Nathaniel Halhed's Gnetoo laws 1776, Charles Wilkins translations of the Bhagavad-Gita in 1785 were all part of this great movement towards romantic Orientalism. The translations and the textual archive not only provided the literature the material for imperial rule but also for literary production by the English writers themselves.

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England defined itself in this period by comparing and contrasting itself with its cultural and racial Others.

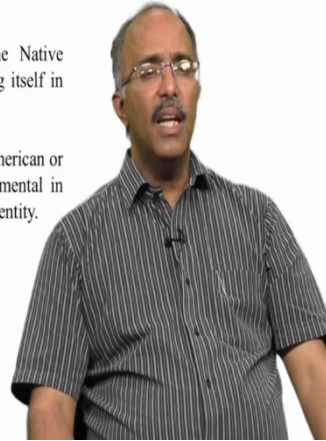
This means, cultural difference was important for England's sense of self as a nation.

Even 'serving', 'saving' or studying the aboriginal, the Native American or the East Indian meant that England was seeing itself in contrast to these 'others'.

Tropes of the Noble Savage, the injured/vulnerable Native American or East Indian woman, so common to the period, were instrumental in exoticizing the Other but also in creating a sense of English identity.

Some samples of the politics of race, Empire and Othering:

Slide... The Noble Savage trope in Pope and Wordsworth



England as Edward famously demonstrated begin to define itself during this period by comparing and contrasting itself with cultural and racial others. This means, cultural difference was important for England's sense of self as a nation. Even serving, saving or setting the aboriginal, the Native American or the East Indian meant that England was seeing itself in contrast to these others.


Tropes of the noble savage we have already looked at this, the injured and the vulnerable Native Americans or the East Indian woman, a saving of the Indian woman like in poems such as "her eyes her while" by William Wordsworth were very common to this period. They were instrumental we can see very clearly in exotic sizing the other. But you see only when you exotic size other do you gain a sense of yourself.

I define myself as not that, not him, not her, so England was setting up a sense of Englishness by calling into question or bringing into the picture or the equation the racial cultural other. Some samples of the politics of race, empire and other you can see in the noble savage trope in Pope and Wordsworth.

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Lo, the poor Indian! whose untutored mind
Sees God in clouds, or hears Him in the wind;
His soul, proud science never taught to stray
Far as the solar walk, or milky way;
Yet simple Nature to his hope has given,
Behind the cloud-topped hill, an humbler heaven;
Some safer world in depth of woods embraced,
Some happier island in the watery waste,
Where slaves once more their native land behold,
No fiends torment, no Christians thirst for gold.
To be, contents his natural desire,
He asks no angel's wing, no seraph's fire;
But thinks, admitted to that equal sky,
His faithful dog shall bear him company.

Alexander Pope, 'An Essay on Man'




Here is Pope on your slide now. An essay on man which is a description that begins low, the poor Indian! Whose untutored mind sees God in clouds or hears him in the wind. And look at what he is saying here is this kind of innocence to the Indian and the phrase untutored mind is supposed to show the purity of the soul. It has not been cluttered by the knowledge of any kind.

It is not being contaminated by knowledge of any kind. So what Pope is doing here is to say that, the Indian is pure as opposed to the perhaps corrupt Western whose education has actually damaged him and following from that is something very well-known as well.

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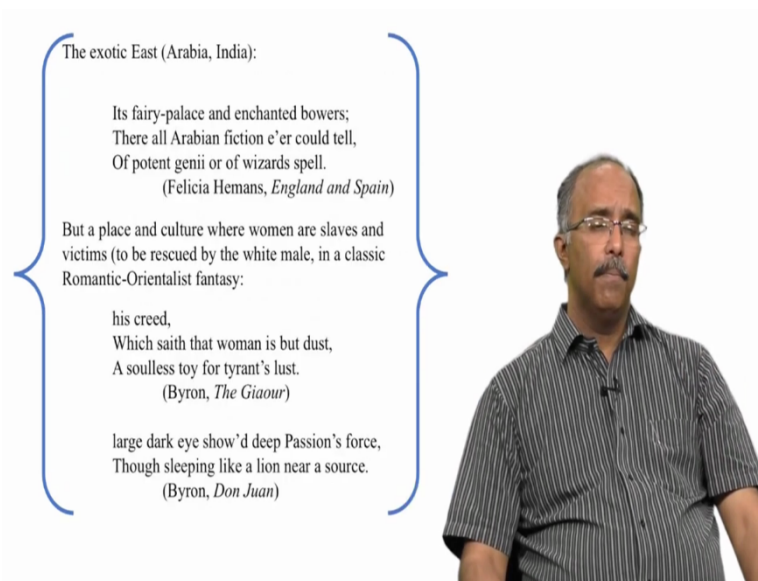
Oh, many a time have I, a five year's child,
A naked boy, in one delightful rill,
A little mill-race severed from his stream,
Made one long bathing of a summer's day;
Basked in the sun, and plunged and basked again
Alternate, all a summer's day, or coursed
Over the sandy fields, leaping through groves
Of yellow groundsel; or when crag and hill,
The woods, and distant Skiddaw's lofty height,
Were bronzed with a deep radiance, stood alone
Beneath the sky, as if I had been born
On Indian plains, and from my mother's hut
Had run abroad in wantonness, to sport
A naked savage, in the thunder shower.

Wordsworth, *Prelude* Book 1



This is William Wordsworth prelude book 1. Where he will again compare himself to an Indian boy. By Indian here please understand we are referring to is not Indian Indian here as in not us. He describes himself as a 5-year-old child, and naked boy, in one delightful rill, a little will race severed from his stream and he goes on to talk about he is so free as though he were born in the Indian location in the United States.

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The exotic East (Arabia, India):

Its fairy-palace and enchanted bowers;
There all Arabian fiction e'er could tell,
Of potent genii or of wizards spell.
(Felicia Hemans, *England and Spain*)

But a place and culture where women are slaves and victims (to be rescued by the white male, in a classic Romantic-Orientalist fantasy):

his creed,
Which saith that woman is but dust,
A soulless toy for tyrant's lust.
(Byron, *The Giaour*)

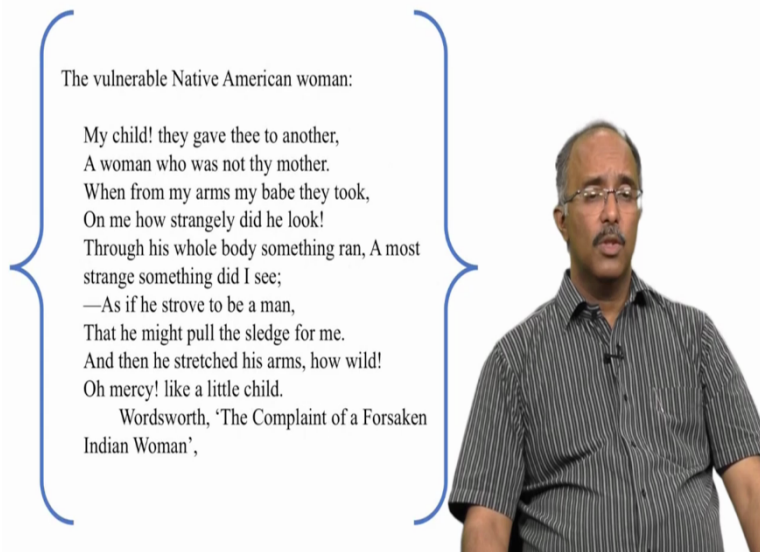
large dark eye show'd deep Passion's force,
Though sleeping like a lion near a source.
(Byron, *Don Juan*)

Some more examples coming up on your screen now. The exotic East Arabia and India. that's a set of 3 lines from Felicia Hemans, England and Spain. These other places become the site for classic romantic Orientalist fantasies. Where (())(7:50) we will look at the lines from Byron, the Giaour. He will say his great, which saith that woman is but dust, a soulless tyrant's lust.

it presents the woman in certain way and what the assumption is, is that oh! In places like Arabia and India the woman is always vulnerable we are not addressing this but your overlapping theme here would be Sati and female infanticide and during some parts of the early decades of 19th-century the campaign against Sati and female infanticide often presented the native woman as vulnerable, helpless, non-essential.

As Gayatri Spivak would famously described it as a project of imperialism the white men who is saving the brown woman from the brown men And you can see many of those illustrated in these texts.

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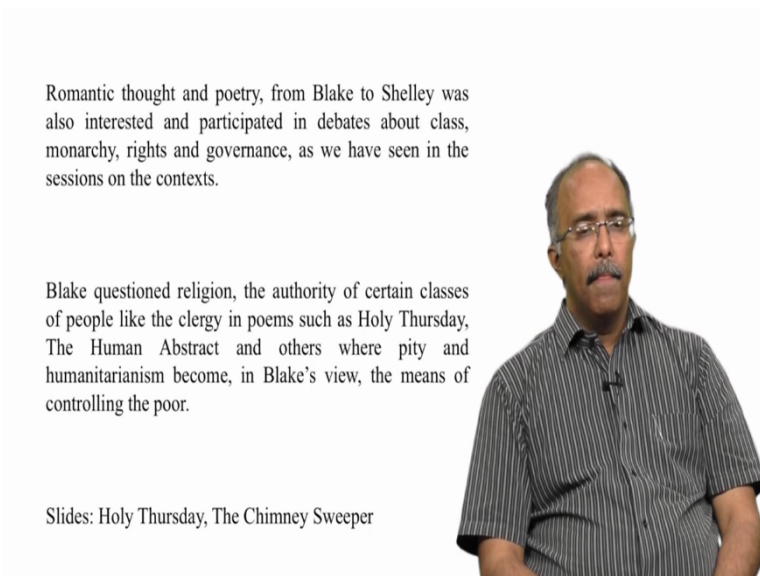


The vulnerable Native American woman:

My child! they gave thee to another,
A woman who was not thy mother.
When from my arms my babe they took,
On me how strangely did he look!
Through his whole body something ran, A most
strange something did I see;
—As if he strove to be a man,
That he might pull the sledge for me.
And then he stretched his arms, how wild!
Oh mercy! like a little child.
Wordsworth, 'The Complaint of a Forsaken
Indian Woman',

And here is on your slide now the small excerpt from Wordsworth “the complaint of a forsaken Indian woman” which is here again in Native American. Please look at your screen for this. My child! They gave thee to another a woman who was not thy mother. When from my arms my babe they took on me how strangely did he look? And there is this description of the woman who is devastated because her child has been taken away.

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Romantic thought and poetry, from Blake to Shelley was also interested and participated in debates about class, monarchy, rights and governance, as we have seen in the sessions on the contexts.

Blake questioned religion, the authority of certain classes of people like the clergy in poems such as Holy Thursday, The Human Abstract and others where pity and humanitarianism become, in Blake's view, the means of controlling the poor.

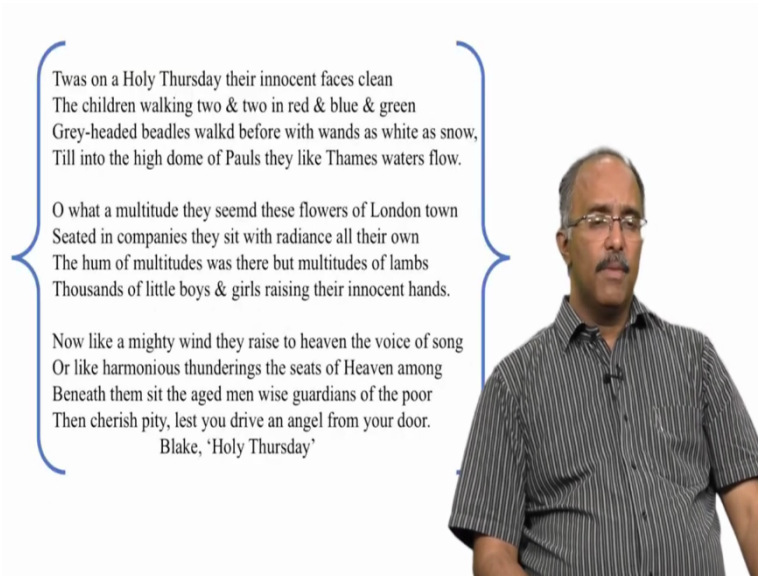
Slides: Holy Thursday, The Chimney Sweeper

That's one part. Our next thing is to look at the debates about last, monarchy, rights and governance. We have seen in the sessions on context of the English Romantic writers. Some of these concerns coming in for example (9:24) the demand for rights by Tom Paine and

(())(9:28) and things like that. So this is actually a continuation of the context's lecture but our instances are all from the Romantic poets.

William Blake's questioned religion, the authority of certain classes of people like for example the priest and the clergy in poems such as Holy Thursday. The human abstract and several others for Blake pity and humanitarianism become methods of controlling the poor.

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Twas on a Holy Thursday their innocent faces clean
The children walking two & two in red & blue & green
Grey-headed beadles walkd before with wands as white as snow,
Till into the high dome of Pauls they like Thames waters flow.

O what a multitude they seemd these flowers of London town
Seated in companies they sit with radiance all their own
The hum of multitudes was there but multitudes of lambs
Thousands of little boys & girls raising their innocent hands.

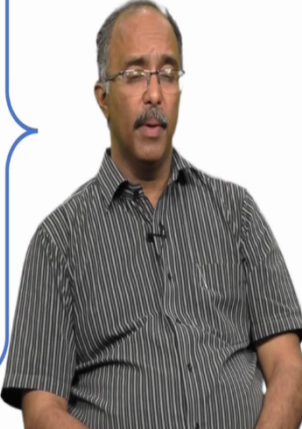
Now like a mighty wind they raise to heaven the voice of song
Or like harmonious thunderings the seats of Heaven among
Beneath them sit the aged men wise guardians of the poor
Then cherish pity, lest you drive an angel from your door.

Blake, 'Holy Thursday'

Will now see on our next slide excerpts from 2 poems by Blake holy Thursday and the chimney sweeper. Here it is. Look at the description. The children walking two and two in red and blue and green. All very systematic all (())(10:10) and he refers to them as multitudes of lambs they are all raising your hand, they are all working together there is no sense of the creative energy of a child.

And now here is Blake chimney sweeper which is arguably one of the more anthologised of the Blake poems.

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A little black thing among the snow,
Crying "weep! 'weep!" in notes of woe!
"Where are thy father and mother? say?"
"They are both gone up to the church to pray.

Because I was happy upon the heath,
And smil'd among the winter's snow,
They clothed me in the clothes of death,
And taught me to sing the notes of woe.


And because I am happy and dance and sing,
They think they have done me no injury,
And are gone to praise God and his Priest and King,
Who make up a heaven of our misery.

Blake, 'The Chimney Sweeper'

Coming up on your screen now William Lynn the chimney sweeper. What is Blake talking about? Blake is talking about deprivation, about class conflict and some of you might recall the poem London where you will refer to the charter streets, valuable refer to the way certain classes of people the prostitute, the soldiers, the chimney sweeper having marginalized although they are essential to the society.

This theme of class-based exploitation about social justice is also the subject of poems by people like Percy Shelley.

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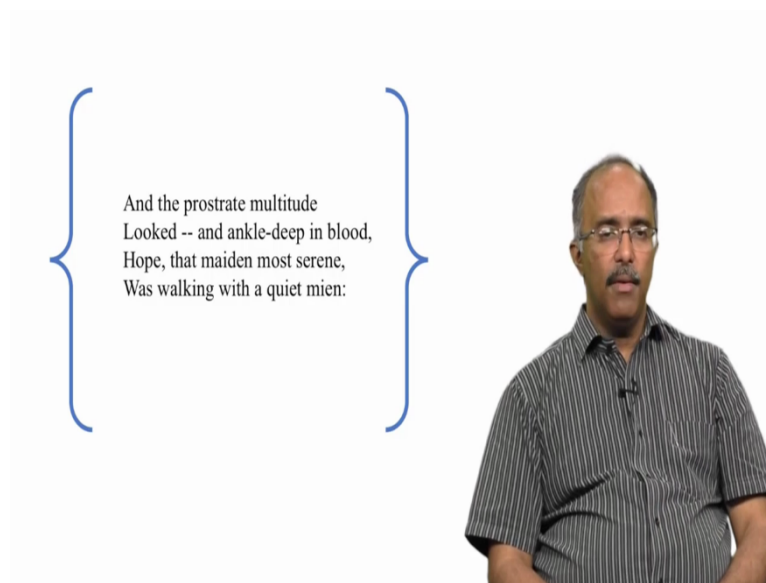
Poets like Shelley were concerned about the despotism of England's monarchs and the collapse of welfare and social justice, exploitation and unending tyranny.

His best-known poem on the subject, with numerous images of such exploitation, is 'The Mask of Anarchy'.

Shelley was concerned with the despotism of England's monarchs and the collapse of the welfare and social justice. Here is an excerpt from the mask of anarchy for you.

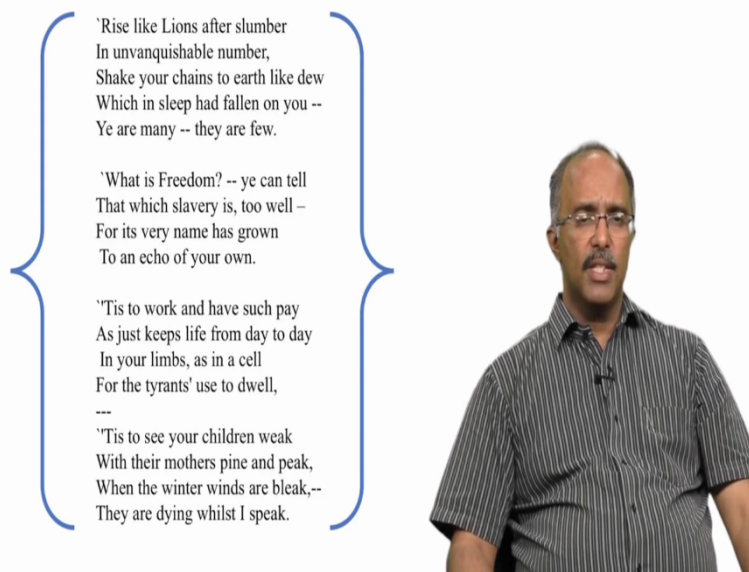
And he will categories murder the action as a person personification and the persons face is Castlereagh. So what he does in mask of anarchy is to present these horrible upper-class ruling class people and attributing various kinds of criminal and sinful attitudes and actions to them.

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On your screen excerpt from the mask of anarchy by Percy Shelley and they are spread over 2 slides where he will speak about the prostrate multitude and he will, the poem in the form of a kind of spiritual depth talk kind of thing where he will say.

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'Rise like Lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number,
Shake your chains to earth like dew
Which in sleep had fallen on you --
Ye are many -- they are few.

'What is Freedom? -- ye can tell
That which slavery is, too well --
For its very name has grown
To an echo of your own.

'Tis to work and have such pay
As just keeps life from day to day
In your limbs, as in a cell
For the tyrants' use to dwell,

'Tis to see your children weak
With their mothers pine and peak,
When the winter winds are bleak,--
They are dying whilst I speak.

Rise like lions after slumber in unvanquishable number and he will say don't worry that they are in power and you are not Ye are many they are few. As in the people who will actually do this are few in number but you there is plenty of you and just take a look at the rest of the slides here. So clearly the Romantic writers were not escaping from politics. They were not as dating from the everyday messy politics of either the monarchy of class or of gender.

I hope this cautions you against treating the English Romantic writers as entirely devoted poems about nature, skylight and sparrows and crows and what not and I'm just pulling it like that. The Harley poems about sparrows and crows. but the point remains and you cannot any longer have a depoliticize reading of the English romantics. Conservative critics will continue to fight the argument that there are only interested in aesthetic approaches to the land which may or may not be true.

But we do understand that aesthetic itself is a political choice that they make, so you please when you read those poems, written to some of the poems be aware of the fact that they all encode politics of a certain kind, thank you.