**Midterm prep: Sample Themes**

Here is a quick and *partial* list of potential themes in our exploration of Romantic and Victorian literature (focused on the works we’ve read, obviously). This list is nowhere near comprehensive, and you are in no way limited to these ideas in your midterm exam. Not every one of these themes were covered explicitly in discussion, though many were noted in “overview” pages.

Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and Experience*:

* Naivete of innocence—typically a biased or limited understanding
* Troubling nature of experience—complex issues without easy answers; sees injustice supported by authoritative institutions such as church and government

Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*:

* Society’s treatment of women as less than fully rational beings
* The limiting, harmful impact of how women were typically “educated” (“accomplishments” rather than practically useful learning that would make them better wives and mothers, e.g.)

Wordsworth:

* Revolutionary idea of poetry using common language and common subjects
* The nurturing, healing power of nature
* Nature giving access to the divine (seeing into the “life of things”)

Coleridge:

* Also nurturing power of nature
* Seeing all of Nature connected (i.e. including humanity): Pantheism
* Nature as Religion: especially *the Ancient Mariner*

Percy Shelley:

* Immense power in nature, communicated to only few (poets, e.g.)—connection with the divine, pantheism
* Radicalism, calls for revolutionary changes against social injustice, more democratic

John Keats:

* More on power of poetry than typically Romantic views of Nature, etc.
* Grecian Urn and Nightingale on the power of art
* Intersection of reality and “elevated” realm of different sorts: mortals and immortals, “reality” and imagination, the mundane and the poetic

Elizabeth Barrett Browning:

* Harsh criticism of abuses in industrialization
* Power of love
* Unequal views of women, especially by men—desires freedom for woman poet

Tennyson:

* Recurrent concern for loss (Shalott, Ulysses’ vigor and power in his prime, Light Brigade)
* Victorian ideal of gutting up and striving for action and progress
* Lady of Shallot allegory of the artist or of the Victorian woman??

Robert Browning:

* Not give much to *themes* per se—more interest in portraying individual minds in dramatic monologue

*Great Expectations* (just a very few possibilities among many):

* Sympathetic view of childhood (particularly with neglect or abuse, etc.)
* *Bildungsroman*: novel of maturation (moral and other)
* The path from error and guilt to redemption
* Critical of class snobbery (deeply): compare Pip’s ideas of being a gentleman and others’ (Pumblechook, Magwitch’s etc.) vs. Joe, the “gentle Christian man”
* Fidelity of family (Joe, not Mrs. Joe)
* Being broken by trauma (heartbreak!)
* Views of the law or legal profession
* The makings of criminals
* The nature of villainy
* Many, many, many more!