

LECTURE, 6:50

Please make sure that you get all three. One is a selection of Goethe's poems, the other is a reading list of suggested secondary literature on Goethe's poetry and on Werther and the third is a handout on versification, just some guidance on the analysis of poems, so those are going round, please make sure you get all of those. There's also the attendance list which is going round, so please make sure you sign that and let me have it at the end.

Right, well from now up to the Easter break I'm going to be talking about works on your list that belong to the Sturm and Drang. I said a bit about the Sturm and Drang in the first lecture and I'm going to say a little more about it now, before I begin talking about Goethe's poetry in particular.

Now, the Sturm and Drang was a short lived but immensely influential literary tendency in Germany, and it's normally thought of as lasting from the late 1760's to the mid 1770's and it was the work of a circle of young writers, so we've moved on, in a sense a generation from Lessing, and the most important and prominent of these young writers was Goethe. Now, Goethe's own Sturm and Drang phase began in 1770 when he came to Strasbourg to study at the university and it ended in 1775 when he left his home town, Frankfurt-am-Main at the invitation of Duke Karl August of Sachsen Weimar Eisenach, and went to Weimar, where he spent most of the rest of his life, in fact nearly all of the rest of his life.

And after 1775, when this break in Goethe's life occurred, really the Sturm and Drang broke up, and the writers around Goethe were dispersed, and if they went on to write, they went on to write other things, just as Goethe did, and some gave up writing altogether.

Now, for the next two weeks I want to look at a selection of Goethe's early poems from this period, 1770-1775, and this week I want to concentrate on the forms and themes of these early lyrics. Next week I want to look in greater detail at two of the poems, Ganymed and Prometheus, so if you happen not to have your copies of "deutsche Gedichte" with you, please make sure you do bring them with you next week because I shall want to refer to them in some detail.

Now, I want to go on to give you a general introduction to Goethe's poetry today and say a little about all of the poems and put them a little more in context.

Now, Goethe was a lyric poet all his life, from childhood to old age, and he experimented with many many different forms and styles. As even your small selection shows, each poem is different. But there's also a great coherence and continuity in Goethe's poetry, even within this diversity. One source, I think, of this coherence in Goethe's poetry is his sense of the order of nature, and the place of human beings within that order.

Goethe believed that nature, the external world with its order, its stability and its inner dynamism and vitality, was a great system of which human/ human beings were part, and that by observing nature we observe the inner rhythms of our own lives, and through that we gain intimations of higher spiritual realities. Goethe was not a conventionally religious man, he was not a believing Christian, he was not a man who believed in God as, as it were, a separate entity at all,

though of course he uses religious imagery, ahm not only Christian, ahm but imagery from other world religions deliberately in all of his work, but he himself was not a conventional believer. But what he did believe in was the essential unity of nature and the divine. Ahm for that reason people often call Goethe a pantheist, because the pantheist sees nature and the divine as one, and there's no sense in which the divine and nature are separate, and nature is the only way in which the divine manifests itself to us, or is operative, so to speak.

On the other hand having said that Goethe draws on experience in order to transmute it in such a way that to make it show, we should be very careful about seeing his poems as somehow being about himself as an individual. What I mean is that we may find that biographical detail provides us with a framework and perhaps a starting point for looking at Goethe's poetry and other parts of Goethe's work, but that biographical ahm framework is only a starting point by no means tells us what the work is about or its significance or ahm what its resonance is for us.