

# British Romanticism

1785-1832

# Beginning/Ending: How does one determine the dates of the Romantic Period?

- 1757 Birth of Blake
- 1775-1783- American Revolution
- 1784--Death of S. Johnson
- 1785—Cowper's *The Task*
- 1789--French Revolution
- 1798--*Lyrical Ballads*
- 1830--Death of Byron
- 1832--First Reform Bill
- 1837--Victoria becomes queen

# Romanticism (4, 11, 18)

Romance: literary form

- \*\*Chivalric (Medieval) Romance narratives--France

- \*\*Allegorical/fabulous stories in medieval poetry—  
later prose narrative

- \*\*Courtly/Chivalric Age--Manners/Civility

- \*\*Plot: Quest--honor, courage, loyalty

- supernatural/marvelous/magic

British Romanticism has its own aims and characteristics--but shares/adapts some of the above, e.g., individual/hero--subjective experience, psychological states, landscape, irregularity, imagination, superstition, irrationality, nationalism

# British Romanticism: Revolution as Historical/Political Event (5-6)

- Am. Revolution 1775-1783
- French Revolution (Fall of the Bastille 1789/ Rise of Napoleon)
  - Repressive measures in Great Britain in response
- Britain's War with France 1793-1815
- Romantic poetry and the FR: joy and dejection, hope and despair, certainty and fear

# British Romanticism: Revolution as Economic and Social Events (7- 10; 20-22)

- Industrial Revolution: technology, social change
  - Enclosure acts
  - Luddite Riots 1811-12 (destruction of factory machinery) Peterloo Massacre 1819 (Shelley) (771)
  - Laissez-faire philosophy
- Position of women: home & family, education and vocation Political reform (1832 Reform Bill)/nationalism/slavery/class issues
- Literacy and printing
- Revolution as Metaphor--Literature/Imagination
  - Bible: Apocalypse/Millennial expectations—French Revolution—new society (political and social change)
  - Revolution of the mind/apocalyptic imagination: break “mind-forged manacles”

## British Romanticism: Poetry/Poet (10-20)

- Spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings (recollected in tranquility)
- Introspection/focus on the individual poet/individual perception & receptive consciousness—re-create/reinvision reality
- Emotions, feelings—as opposed to outer world of senses/reason. Imagination—truth and morality—re-envision the world and see familiar things in new ways/transformation
- Expressive theory of literature
  - Compare painting to music, mirror to lamp

# British Romanticism: Nature (13, 20)

- Nature poems are meditative poems (not simply descriptive poems)
  - Ground belief and speculation in facts/observations of experience
  - Medium for intellectual expression—active mind
  - Pursuit of ideal of unity/completeness of being
- Natural objects can correspond to an inner or a spiritual world
  - Truth beyond nature – eternity and freedom
- Fitting the mind to nature and nature to the mind: Reciprocal relationship. Mind creates the “universe” it perceives (internalize nature), does not just describes it. Nature fosters the visionary imagination—freedom

# British Romanticism: Issues (10-20)

- Democratization of poetry
- The child in Romantic literature
- Supernatural—critique of realism and natural or perceived order in everyday life
- Sublime—beauty and grandeur (in nature) that overwhelms and challenges the mind
- Individualism/Freedom/Liberty/Natural Rights
- Imperfection/Striving for the infinite: knowledge/vision
- Imagination/Memory/Consciousness

# British Romanticism: Literature (22-27)

- **Essay:** debates about politics and literature  
“Literary” style/Familiar essay: “intimate-feeling commentaries”
  - **Novel:** Gothic, Romance/Historical: Jane Austen, Walter Scott, Mary Shelley
  - Social/Political/Psychological
  - Details of everyday life/”history of society”
- **Drama:** social mixing, disorder, restrictions
  - Varieties of entertainment/closet dramas