

An Introduction to British Romanticism



BA Second Semester
English Poetry



Romanticism Defined:

Romantic has come to mean basically two things:

- 1.** The loving or potentially loving relationships b/w men and women.
- 2.** A way of looking at the world that looks beyond, or ignores, the world as it is and perceives a visionary world.



History of Romanticism

- **The most important event that led to the Romantic period (1789-1830):**
- **The French revolution – which was supposed to create a new society in France, creating a model for the world that would lead to the liberation of the human spirit.**



No True Revolution

- **The revolution accomplished none of these things.**
- **The Treaty of Versailles in 1815.**
- **Young people profoundly disappointed.**

Individual Responses of Poets

- Blake bitterly attacked the social, political, and spiritual abuses.
- Wordsworth nostalgic & democratic.
- Shelley's poetry consistently revolutionary.

William Blake



- William Blake, an engraving by his wife Catherine done in 1785, when Blake was 28.

William Wordsworth



- Wordsworth – looking a little dour. He was born in 1770, so this must be from the mid 1790's.

Percy Bysshe Shelley as a young man



- Died before he turned 30, so this is about as old as he got.



Intellectual Foundations of Romanticism

- **Reaction to the literature and, especially, the thinking and practice of the 18th century.**
- **The 18th century Age of Enlightenment: John Locke and Isaac Newton.**

John Locke (1632-1704)

- Political and moral philosopher.
- Empiricism.
- No room for feeling, intuition, or vision.

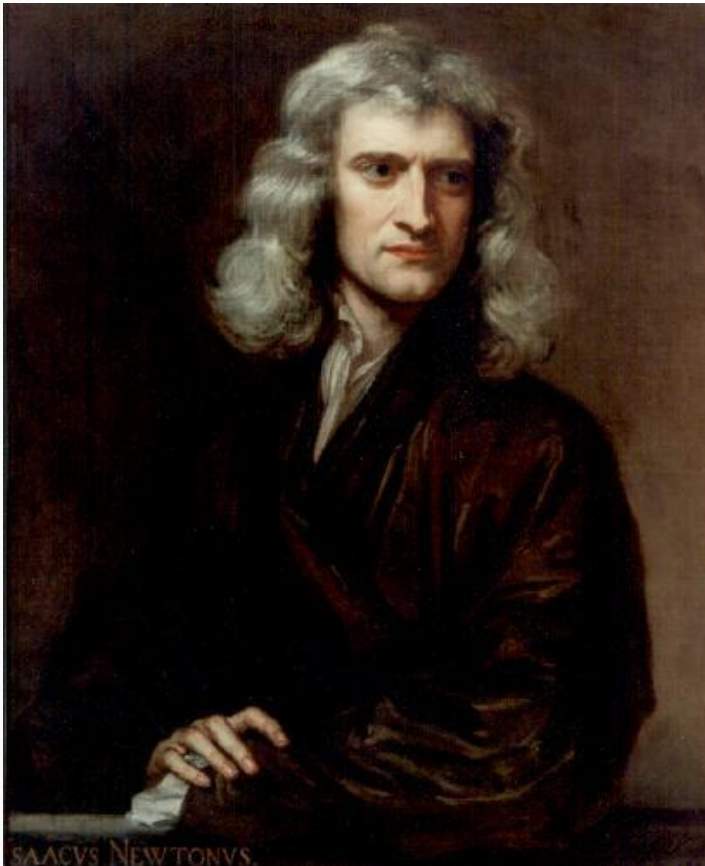




Isaac Newton

- **Newton discovered the laws of gravity, and generally, the laws of motion.**
- **Newtonian physics describe the non-living world, at least before the discoveries of quantum mechanics.**

Isaac Newton



- This is the earliest portrait of Sir Isaac Newton (1689). The artist was Godfrey Kneller, perhaps the greatest portrait painter of his day.



The Influence of Newton

- **Newtonian physics.**
- **Science will discover everything.**



The Secularization of the 18th C.

- God the Watchmaker.
- Science will discover all principles.
- No room for miracles, vision, or revelation.



Romanticism was a reaction to the Enlightenment

- **Rebellion against rules.**



Characteristics of Romantic Writing

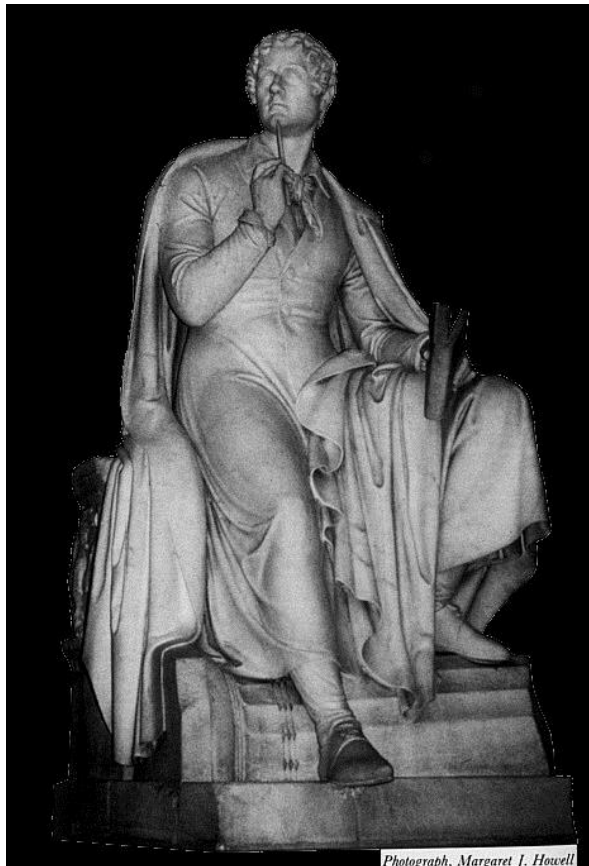
- Romantic belief in the individual and democracy.
- But emphasis more often on the outstanding individual.

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Romantic Heroes

- Alone, contemplating nature, working out their own destinies.

Statue of Lord Byron



Photograph, Margaret J. Hoscell

- **Byron, the most popular poet of the 19th century in England and the US. Known for his lonely, heroic protagonists.**



Romantic Poetry

- Great innovation.
- Sought poetic forms beyond the 18th century heroic couplet
- Romantic sonnet, ode, ballad, and others.
- Blake invents his own form.

Blake's "The Lamb"



Blake's "The Tyger"

