

The background of the slide is a Romantic-style landscape painting. It depicts a dense forest with tall, slender trees and a path that leads into the distance. The lighting is soft and atmospheric, with a hazy, golden glow in the upper center, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. The overall mood is one of natural beauty and mystery.

## 6. Nature as Spectacle

### British Romanticism

ENGL133 Imagining Nature

# Course Stuff

Midterm \*this week\*: Friday 3/7

- see 2 documents (rubric and study guide) on Canvas under 'Modules'> 'Assignments'> 'Midterm'

- Writing Assignment: due Friday 3/14 by 5 pm

  - on Canvas under 'Assignments'>'Writing Assignment #1'

- On that Friday 3/14: No meeting of Friday discussion sections

  - TAs will instead have more office hours should you wish to discuss your papers



# British Romanticism: Romantic how?

Caspar David Friedrich,  
*Wanderer above a Sea of Mist*  
(1818)





# Revolutionary Romanticism (1780s to the 1830s)

- Romanticism stretched across a period of historical revolutions: in US (1776) and France (1789) as well as the so-called Industrial Revolution (1750-1850 in Europe first and then in the US)

  - values: political reforms (anti-monarchical), expanded suffrage, abolitionism, atheism

- British Romantic poets (like Coleridge, Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley) saw themselves as making a revolution in art

- What are artists revolting against? Previous 18<sup>th</sup> c. poets believed that poetry should reflect nature as it is (neoclassicism); the Romantics instead believed that poetry could show nature as it could and should be, filtered by their own subjective experience



Eugène Delacroix, *Liberty Leading the People* (1830)

# Romanticism and Nature

## Humboldt, *Views of Nature, or, Contemplations on the sublime phenomena of creation*

### The Sublime: The Scientific Model

“Descriptions of Nature more strongly or weakly affect us depending upon the greater or lesser extent to which they correspond to the needs of our feelings. For in the innermost receptive mind, the physical world is reflected, living and true. That which designates the character of a landscape—the profile of the mountains that border the horizon in the hazy distance, the darkness of the fir forests, the roaring forest river that plummets between overhanging cliffs—all of it stands in an ancient and mysterious association with the disposition of human temperament. Upon this association rests the nobler part of the enjoyment that Nature provides.”

-“Concerning the Waterfalls of the Orinoco near Atures and Maypures”  
from Humboldt’s *Views of Nature*, 117-118

# **Edmund Burke on the Sublime**

## **(from *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* 1757)**

“Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling” (11).

-Beauty vs. the Sublime:

“For sublime objects are vast in their dimensions, beautiful ones comparatively small: beauty should be smooth and polished; the great [i.e. the sublime], rugged and negligent; beauty should shun the right line, yet deviate from it insensibly; the great in many cases loves the right line, and when it deviates it often makes a strong deviation: beauty should not be obscure; the great ought to be dark and gloomy: beauty should be light and delicate; the great ought to be solid, and even massive. They are indeed ideas of a very different nature, one being founded on pain, the other on pleasure” (12).



# Characteristics of British Romanticism

- Dissolution of self
- Awe at nature's powers
- admiration for the unpredictability of nature with its potential for disastrous extremes; stands as an alternative to the ordered world of Enlightenment science
- this emphasis on subjective and individual feeling opposes the Enlightenment assertion of rationality and universally applied laws
- for example, in Constable's *Hadleigh Castle* the dramatic sky and architectural ruins evoke a sense of melancholic reverie; the insignificance of the human in relation to the vastness of nature; the inevitable passage of time and brevity of human life



John Constable, *Hadleigh Castle: The Mouth of the Thames--Morning after a Stormy Night* (1829)



**Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834)**



**William Wordsworth (1770-1850)**



*Lyrical Ballads* (1798) published anonymously by Coleridge and Wordsworth together



## Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “To Nature”

It may indeed be fantasy when I  
Essay to draw from all created things  
Deep, heartfelt, inward joy that closely clings;  
And trace in leaves and flowers that round me lie  
5 Lessons of love and earnest piety.  
So let it be; and if the wide world rings  
In mock of this belief, it brings  
Nor fear, nor grief, nor vain perplexity.  
So will I build my altar in the fields,  
10 And the blue sky my fretted dome shall be,  
And the sweet fragrance that the wild flower yields  
Shall be the incense I will yield to Thee,  
Thee only God! and thou shalt not despise  
Even me, the priest of this poor sacrifice.

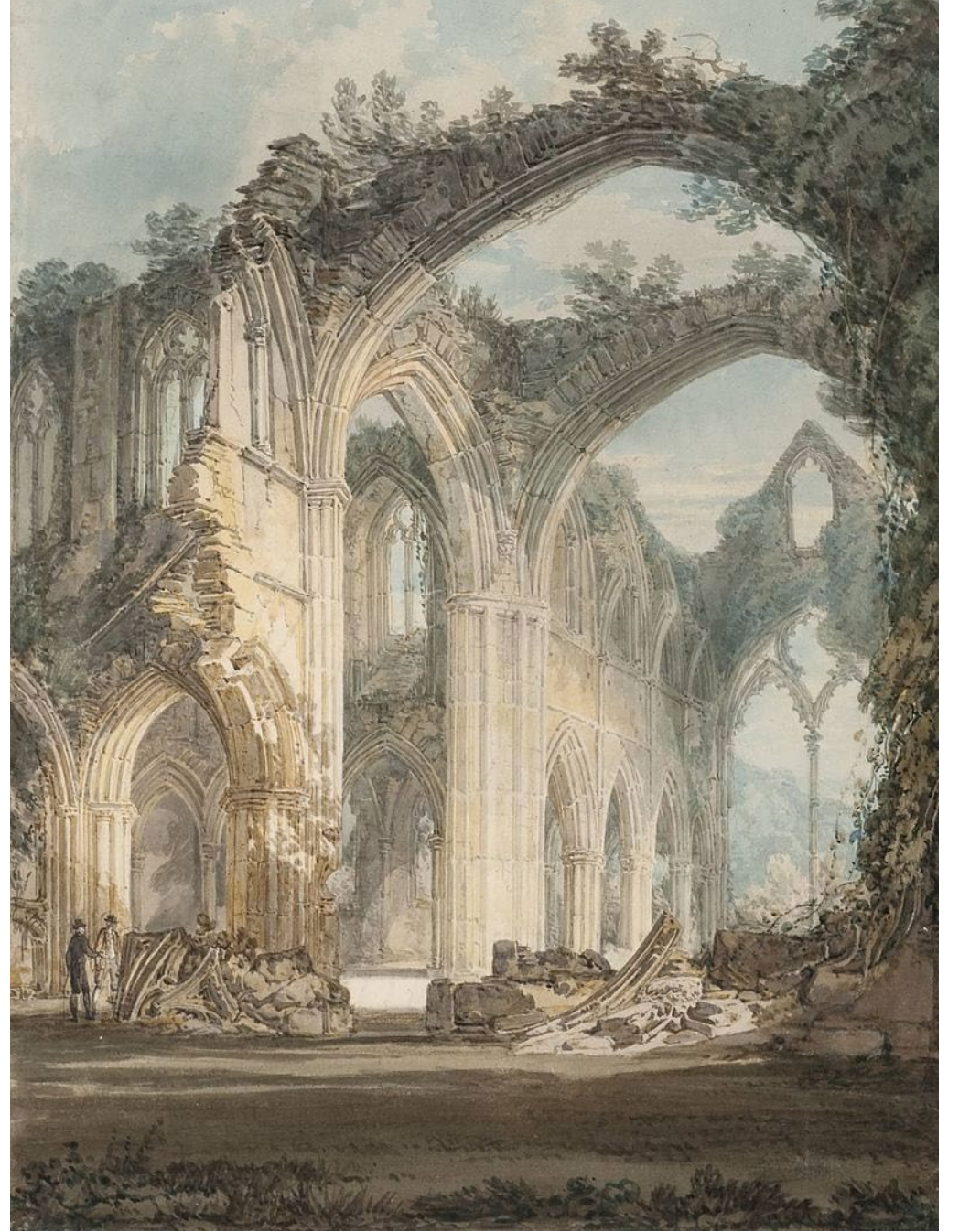
What is the relationship  
between the poet and nature?

What is the relationship  
between the poet and the rest  
of the “wide world”?

What happens at the end?

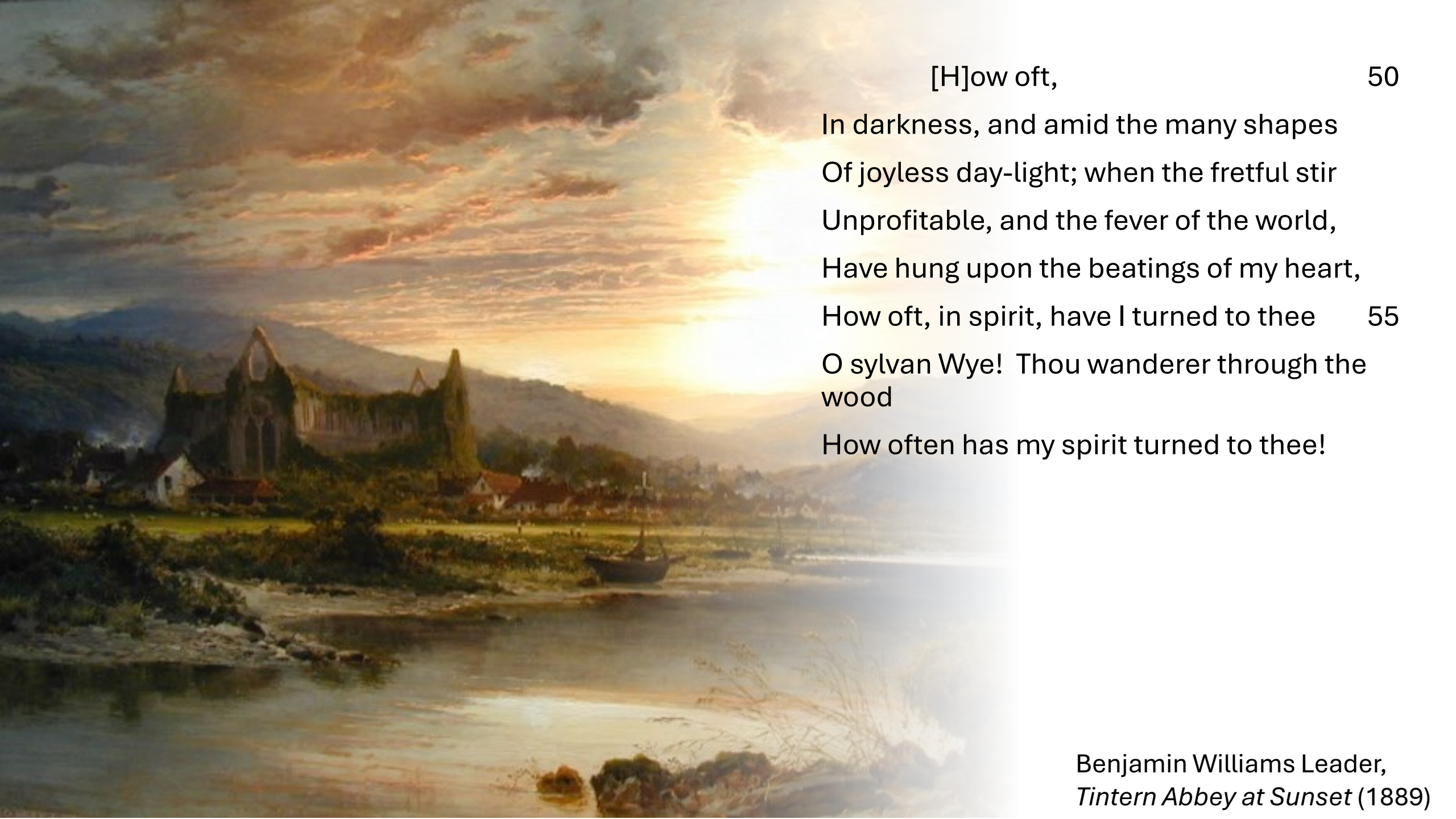
How would you describe the  
tone of this poem?

**William Wordsworth, “Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour, July 13, 1798”**



J.M.W. Turner, *Tintern Abbey* (1794)





[H]ow oft,

50

In darkness, and amid the many shapes  
Of joyless day-light; when the fretful stir  
Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,  
Have hung upon the beatings of my heart,

How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee 55

O sylvan Wye! Thou wanderer through the  
wood

How often has my spirit turned to thee!

Benjamin Williams Leader,  
*Tintern Abbey at Sunset* (1889)

And so I dare to hope 65  
Though changed, no doubt, from what I was, when  
first  
I came among these hills; when like a roe  
I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides  
Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,  
Wherever nature led; ...  
For nature then  
(The coarser pleasures of my boyish days,  
And their glad animal movements all gone by,)  
To me was all in all. — I cannot paint 75  
What then I was. The sounding cataract  
Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,  
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,  
  
Their colours and their forms, were then to me  
An appetite: a feeling and a love, 80  
That had no need of a remoter charm,  
By thought supplied, or any interest  
Unborrowed from the eye. — That time is past ...

What is the poet like as a youth?



And so I dare to hope 65

Though changed, no doubt, from what I was, when  
first

I came among these hills; when like a roe  
I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides  
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What was his relationship to nature like  
when he was younger?

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That had no need of a remoter charm,  
By thought supplied, or any interest  
Unborrowed from the eye. — That time is past ...

What is the mature poet's relation to his  
younger self?



— That time is past,  
And all its aching joys are now no more,  
And all its dizzy raptures. ...  
For I have learned  
To look on nature, not as in the hour  
Of thoughtless youth, but hearing oftentimes  
The still, sad music of humanity,  
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power  
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt  
A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean, and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,  
A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things.

90

95

100

What do you think the “still, sad music of humanity” means?

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And all its aching joys are now no more,  
And all its dizzy raptures. ...  
For I have learned  
To look on nature, not as in the hour  
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What is the contrast that the poet draws between how he understood nature in his youth and in the present day?

What is the “sense sublime”?

Therefore am I still  
A lover of the meadows and the woods,  
And mountains; and of all that we behold  
From this green earth; of all the mighty world 105  
Of eye and ear, both what they half-create,  
And what perceive; well pleased to recognize  
In nature and the language of the sense,  
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,  
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul 110  
Of all my moral being.

What is the relationship of  
nature and the human senses?

What is nature's role for the  
mature poet?