

E 329K, Early British Romantic Literature

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(Spring 2010)

Description

This course will focus on roughly a forty-year period, from the French Revolution in 1789 to the great Whig electoral victory of 1830, a period that acts as a kind of "fertile crescent" in which modernity was spawned. It was a time of dramatic cultural and economic upheaval, of great expectations for the improvement of society, and of equally great disappointment and political retrenchment. Deliberately, at times even programmatically, the writers we now call the Romantics set out not only to interpret the history of their times but also to change it. They wanted to imagine an aesthetic philosophy that would account for man as a totality--as a being who endures psychological growth along with fixation and repression, who is both an individual and a social animal, and who lives in history but can imagine other histories that are possible, including transcendent ones. Ironically, this search for a totalizing vision of "man" occurred simultaneously with a new self-consciousness that this term could be, and indeed had to be, separated into gendered categories.

We shall engage in close readings of some writers who comprise the first generation of Romantics, people for whom the French Revolution and its astonishing aftershocks coincided with their own early adulthood. These writers will include principally William Blake, William and Dorothy Wordsworth, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, among others, but our aim will not be to appreciate their texts solely for their aesthetic appeal; rather, we shall try to develop ways of applying these texts to the larger texture of material life of which they are a part. We will attempt to construe these first "modern" works by asking ourselves to become conscious of and responsible for the way we go about construing literature as a subject of study.

This is not a course, then, in literary criticism nor in the literary history of the early nineteenth century (although we will practice the former and take the latter as our nominal subject). It is, instead, a course in the sociology of literary practice, using the actual practices of these Romantic writers as what landscape artists of the period called "the ground." Let us think of this course as subtitled "The Possibilities for Creativity." What materials are available? What strategies of artistic representation? What anxieties of failure? What burden of the past? What chances of success? The pertinence of these questions for us, living in the late twentieth century, almost exactly two hundred years after our starting year of 1789, may not be immediately self-evident. But we don't read historical texts merely to discover their relevance to us. We also read them to find out exactly what has been lost, what is now impertinent,

and why. In studying the "possibilities for creativity," we will be returned by these literary works to the task of learning to analyze the limits of our own creativity.

Text

Longman Anthology of British Literature: The Romantics and Their Contemporaries, ed. Damrosch, Manning, and Wolfson—**Fourth Edition**

Attendance:

The reading for the class happens outside class. But all the work of the class happens in class. Therefore, class attendance is mandatory. To receive a grade of C or higher, you may not have more than two unexcused absences.

Requirements:

There will be approximately 4 quizzes and 1 final exam over the course of the term = 80%

Class participation and preparation = 20%

Prerequisite: Nine semester hours of coursework in English or rhetoric and writing.

English Major Area: *II. Period or Survey*

E. 329K (34760), British Romantic Poetry, Prof. Kurt Heinzelman, Spring 2010
Class meets Monday and Wednesday, 3:30-5:00 in Calhoun 323

SYLLABUS

The important class dates are Feb. 10, March 3 and 29, April 14, and May 5: these are the days when most of the class time will be given over to quiz/exam.

January

W (20): Introduction (Read in anthology pp. 3-33)

M (25), W (27): How to turn a neo-Classical poem into a Romantic piece of art
—Thomas Gray and William Blake handout

February

M (1): Blake (pp. 150-206)

W (3): Blake

M (8): Blake

W (10): Quiz I

M (15): Wordsworth's literary ballads (pp. 368-385)

W (17): Wordsworth

M (22): Dorothy Wordsworth (pp. 551-569)

W (24): Wordsworth: Prelude

March

M (1): Prelude

W (3): Quiz II

M (8): Prelude

W (10): Coleridge (pp. 578-613)

MW (15, 17): Spring Vacation

M (22): Coleridge

W (24): Coleridge

M (29): Finish Wordsworth ("Ode") and STC's "River Otter"

Quiz III as handout to be turned in on W (31)

W (31): STC: "Rime of Ancient Mariner"

April

M (5) Coleridge: "Lime Tree Bower," "Kubla Khan"

W (7): No class day

M (12) Coleridge: "Christabel"

W (14) In-Class Quiz IV: Intro to Keats (pp. 920-1007)

M (19) Keats

W (21) Keats

M (26) Keats

W (28) Keats

May

M (3) Shelley on Wordsworth, "Defence of Poesy"

W (5): In-Class Final Exam