

English 9145B: Romanticism and the Idea of Literature

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Course Description

This course will focus on ideas of the aesthetic in the Romantic period. Whether because the New Critics traced their notions of organic form back to Coleridge, or because later critics such as Clifford Siskin have absorbed the Romantic period into a “Nineteenth Century” that professionalized the category of literature, criticism has often attributed ideologically or philosophically conservative conceptions of literature and/or the aesthetic to the period. In contrast, I will suggest that new conceptions of history and the life sciences, including medicine had a deeply deconstructive impact on the Romantic practice and (in Germany) theory of art. In the light of a new sense of what constitutes life and organized bodies, as well as new conceptions of history as a working out of an unprocessed “idea,” the period witnessed a profound revolution in its sense of what counts as literature and the intertextual relationships between the parts of an author’s corpus. Topics to be taken up will obviously be oriented by the literary texts we discuss and the aesthetic dilemmas that they thematize, but will also include what Romantic writers saw as the role of “poetry” in a world increasingly dominated by prose, and what they saw as the role of prose fiction in relation to the emergent social discipline of the Novel.

Readings

Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Zastrozzi* and *St.Irvyne*, ed. Stephen Behrendt (Broadview Literary Texts)
Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (Norton)
William Blake, *Blake’s Poetry and Designs*, ed. Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant (Norton).
Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley, *Mary, Maria, Matilda*. (Penguin) [we will only do *Matilda*].
Mary Hays, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*. (Broadview)
Keats, *Complete Poems and Selected Letters of John Keats*, ed. Edward Hirsh.

There will also be some brief theoretical readings and background readings. These will be made available via Dropbox. background readings.

Course Schedule

Due to the MLA, this class will not begin till Jan. 13th. The missed class will be made up some time in March in the form of a class exclusively devoted to seminars, which will be held in the time slot (Tues. 12-3) when the class was originally scheduled, before being moved to Friday for lack of a room in which to hold it. We will necessarily have to use a small room for this one class.

Assignments.

Seminar: (25%). Each student will give a seminar which can unfortunately be *no more* than 20 minutes, given the absurdity of the university’s assumption that they can cut courses to 12 instead of 25 weeks, increase class size, and still expect the course to function as both a seminar and a course in which things are not covered piece-meal. Since your seminar will have a respondent, please ensure that a close to final version of the seminar reaches your respondent (and myself) by the Wednesday before class. The seminar must be written up as a paper (roughly 10pp. + Works Cited), and should be handed in *in hard copy* one week after being delivered. The written version should take into account class discussion, and should *not* be identical to the oral version.

Short essay (15%). A short essay which takes up a theoretical or critical reading and indicates how it can be used to open up a text of your choice. If using a critical reading your essay must be on a text other than that covered in the reading. The essay will be 5-6 pages, so economy is of the essence. A list of suggested

readings will be provided, but you can substitute something else after consultation with me. This essay is intended as a first outline or trial balloon, which may form the basis for your final paper. The essay must be submitted in hard copy, and will be due at the end of February.

Response and Participation: 10%- Each student will serve as respondent to a seminar. The response is expected to be about 5 minutes but should not simply consist of a couple of questions. It may offer another point of view, or take up an aspect of the topic not covered in the seminar, but must offer something substantive as well as raise discussion points. Attendance in class is a minimum condition of participation. Assessment of participation will include quality of class participation, and the effort and thought put into the course, which may not always be obvious from direct verbal participation. However, anyone who misses more than two classes without a significant reason or persistently comes late may forfeit a significant portion of this grade.

Research paper: 50% - due April 27th

A final paper of 18-20 pages. The paper should involve original research and show significant evidence of engagement with secondary and theoretical sources. It can develop from and absorb either the seminar or the short paper, but should be significantly wider in scope and should go into more depth. Given the restricted range of texts we can cover in a half course, it can also be on text(s) not covered in the course but relevant to the topic of the course. Papers must not duplicate or significantly overlap with those submitted in other graduate English courses, either this year or previously. By the beginning of April, you must give me an indication of the topic on which you are writing. The paper should contain a bibliography, and should follow either the MLA or Chicago Style format for references.

All essays **must** be submitted in **hard** copy, and either left for me at the English Department (AHB, ground floor), or dropped off at my house (870 Wellington Street, SE corner of Wellington and Grosvenor). All essays should also be e mailed to me in MS Word so that I can be sure of when they were submitted.

Late Penalties and Incompletes

Except in cases of documented illness or other problems, there will be the following penalties:

- Failure to give a seminar on the assigned date: 10% deduction from grade, and the seminar must be handed in in writing within a week.
- Late submission of papers: 2% will be deducted per day.

Other Policies

Computers, i-pads and other devices are not allowed in class.

Academic Offences

Scholastic offences, including but not limited to plagiarism (whether of direct wording or arguments), are taken seriously. Students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Website:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf

In addition, please note (with apologies for saying this if it is unnecessary) that a graduate course that draws on the professor's published and unpublished research is not like an on-line undergraduate course which organises existing information that is "in the public domain." Any arguments that you take from this course, which are not common knowledge, and which you use outside this class (e.g. in a thesis, conference paper or article) must be duly acknowledged.