

English 354: British Romanticism  
Fall, 2009  
Professor Spencer Hall  
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Office Hours: T: 10-11; Th: 4-5; F: 2-3

### **ABOUT THE COURSE**

The Romantic Period (roughly the half century between 1780 and 1830) is one of the most fascinating periods in Western literature and Western culture, both for itself and for the ways in which it has been interpreted by modern critics and theorists. Encompassing two of the defining events of Western history, the French and the Industrial Revolutions, the period witnessed major cultural, intellectual, philosophical, and aesthetic movements that have ushered in the “modern” and “postmodern” worlds and have strongly influenced the ways in which we think about literature, art, nature, society, and the self.

The course introduces students to a variety of literary and cultural voices in British Romanticism and to some of the contemporary critical approaches to studying them. Although the amount of required reading, in terms of pages, is not overwhelming, the fact that much of the reading is poetry means that you need to give yourself time to read closely. One of the objectives of the course is to help develop students’ ability to read (and to write about) literature, especially poetry, critically and responsively.

Although we may not cover all the assigned readings in class, you are still responsible for them. Assignments should be completed before class, and you should come to class prepared to discuss them.

I have zero tolerance for plagiarism. Any plagiarism, large or small, will result in a failing grade and, possibly, your name being sent to the Vice President for Academic Affairs for further action. If you have any question about what is or is not plagiarism, check with me before turning in your papers.

**REQUIRED TEXTS** (available in paperback at Off-Campus Bookstore, across from La Salle Academy on Smith Street)  
Stillinger, Jack, and Deidra Shauna Lynch. Eds. The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Romantic Period. Vol. D. 8<sup>th</sup> Ed.

Purchase of the 8<sup>th</sup> edition of the anthology also provides you with access to the Norton Online Website at [www.wwnorton.com/nael](http://www.wwnorton.com/nael). There is a lot of useful information on the website, and I will assign specific pages (signified in the syllabus as **Online Topic**). Click on the **Romantic Period** tab at the top of the website and then on the menu on the left-hand side to access the assigned pages. You might want to print out the assigned pages for class use.

I assume that all English majors will have the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers from English 201-202. Formal papers must be written according to MLA guidelines.

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

Five 2-3 page analytical papers chosen from nine possible topics (see the separate sheet for topics) **or** two 2-3 page papers and a 7-10 page term paper to be written in consultation with me.  
Short in-class and out-of-class writings, both announced and unannounced.  
Final examination

Class attendance and discussion (Class participation will be considered in your grade. More than three absences during the semester could significantly lower your grade or cause you to fail the class. Repeated tardiness could also lower your grade.)

**COURSE READINGS:** Page numbers and titles refer to the Norton Anthology, 8e unless otherwise noted. **Always be sure to read the introductions in Norton both to individual authors and to individual works. If there are footnotes, read the footnotes.**

9/1: Norton, General Introduction, pp. 1-22. (There is a self-evaluative Online quiz on this introduction that you should take on your own at some point in the course. You will be responsible for this material on the final exam.)

William Wordsworth, "I wandered lonely as a cloud"

Dorothy Wordsworth, Grasmere Journal

Felicia Ackerman, "Who Needs Daffodils?"

McNuts, "The Wordsworth Rap" (on YouTube)

9/3: William Wordsworth, "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey"

9/8: **Online Topic:** "'Tintern Abbey,' Tourism, and Romantic Landscape": Overview; William Gilpin, "Observations"; Edmund Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry; Illustrations

9/10: Immanuel Kant, from The Critique of Judgment (duplicated)

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, Ch. 13, 14; "Kubla Khan"

Mary Robinson, "To the Poet Coleridge"

9/15: "The Revolution Controversy": pp. 148-67

**Online Topic:** "The French Revolution—Apocalyptic Expectations": Overview

Wordsworth, Prospectus to The Recluse (duplicated)

**Paper #1 due** (see paper topics sheet)

9/17: Wordsworth, The Prelude, Books 6, 11, 14

**Paper #2 due** (see paper topics sheet)

9/22: William Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell; "Song of Liberty"; A Vision of the Last Judgment

9/24: Blake, Songs of Innocence and of Experience

9/29: Blake, Songs of Experience and of Experience

**Paper #3 due** (see paper topics sheet)

10/1: Mary Wollstonecraft: A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: "Introduction"

Anna Barbauld, "The Rights of Woman"

Richard Polwhele, "The Unsex'd Females" (duplicated)

Felicia Hemans, "Corinne at the Capitol" (duplicated)

**Paper #4 due** (see paper topics sheet)

10/6: "The Gothic and the Development of a Mass Readership": 577-607

**Online Topic:** "The Gothic": Jane Austen, Northanger Abbey; Illustrations

10/8: Mary Robinson, "The Haunted Beach"  
Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"  
**Paper #5 due** (see paper topics sheet)

10/13: No Class: Monday Schedule

10/15: Coleridge, "The Rime"; "Christabel"

10/20: John Keats, "The Eve of St. Agnes"; "La Belle Dame sans Merci"

10/22: Keats, cont.

10/27: William Wordsworth, Preface to Lyrical Ballads; Poems (pp. 245-58);  
"Goody Blake and Harry Gill" (duplicated)  
Mary Robinson, "The Poor Singing Dame"; "All Alone" (duplicated)  
**Paper #6 due** (see paper topics sheet)

10/29: Wordsworth, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality"; "Elegiac Stanzas"

11/3: **Online Topic:** "The Satanic and Byronic Hero"  
George Gordon, Lord Byron: Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto 3  
**Paper #7 due** (see paper topics sheet)

11/5: Byron, Manfred

11/10: Byron, cont.

11/12: Percy Bysshe Shelley: "Alastor"; Preface to Prometheus Unbound

11/17: "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty"; "Mont Blanc"; "Ode to the West Wind"  
**Paper #8 due** (see paper topics sheet)

11/19: "A Song: 'Men of England'"; "England in 1819"; A Defence of Poetry

11/24: Adonais

11/26: No Class: Thanksgiving

12/1: Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale"; "Ode on a Grecian Urn"; "Ode on Melancholy"; "To Autumn"  
Selected Letters  
**Paper #9 due** (see paper topics sheet)

12/3: Keats, "Bright Star"; The Fall of Hyperion

12/8: Wrap Up

12/10: Wrap Up

**7-10 page term paper due**

## Writing Assignments

All critical papers should be grammatically and clearly written in standard English; should make a coherent argument or interpretation; and should use specific references to and quotations from the text in order to support that argument or interpretation. If secondary sources are consulted, they must be appropriately listed in a Works Cited or Works Consulted page. Failure to do so could constitute plagiarism and failure of the course. **Even if you look at something like Sparknotes without quoting from or citing it in your paper, you must list it in a Works Consulted page.** (Check the [MLA Handbook](#) for proper form and punctuation when using quotations, formatting papers, and citing sources.)

**I. Due: December 10 (if you choose to do the term paper):** A 7-10 page critical paper on a topic of your choice. The topic must be cleared with me in advance, and you must consult with me in the process of writing the paper. Although not a research paper *per se*, the paper should make use of some secondary sources and should be written in accordance with MLA style, including parenthetical citations and a Works Cited (and, if applicable, a Works Consulted) page. **You must complete two of the 2-3 page papers and meet with me before I give you permission to do the term paper.**

**II. Five 2-3 page close readings/analyses/discussions chosen from the following.** These short papers do not require the use of secondary sources, but if you do use them, they must be cited in accordance with MLA style.

The due dates for the short papers are staggered during the semester, as indicated below. **Every student must do either #1 (due Sept. 15) or #2 (due Sept. 17).**

**1. Due: Sept. 15:** Wordsworth's Prospectus to The Recluse reflects how the apocalyptic expectations created by the French Revolution shifted for some Romantic poets from the external world of politics and history to the subjective world of the human mind and its relation to nature. Discuss Wordsworth's presentation of this shift in the Prospectus. Pay attention to the role of poetry and the poet in Wordsworth's argument.

**2. Due: Sept. 17:** What your anthology calls "The Vision on Mount Snowdon" in Book 14 of The Prelude is an example of what Wordsworth termed "spots of time" (see The Prelude, Book 12, lines 208-225; pp. 378-79 in the anthology). Characteristically, Wordsworth remembers an actual event from his past experiences in nature but does so in such a way as to give to the literal description a symbolic quality from which he then draws philosophical meaning. Analyze this process and the meaning that Wordsworth reads in (and into) the landscape.

**3. Due: Sept. 29:** William Blake originally engraved Songs of Innocence in 1789 and then added Songs of Experience in 1794 when he combined the two as Songs of Innocence and Experience: Showing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul. The final volume contains several sets of paired poems, one poem in Innocence and one in Experience. Choose **one** of the following pairs: "Introduction," "The Chimney Sweeper," "Holy Thursday," or "The Lamb" and "The Tyger." Compare and contrast the two poems. To what extent and in what ways do they or do they not seem to reflect "Contrary States" of being, different tones or voices, different perspectives and attitudes, etc.?

**4. Due: Oct. 1:** Responses to Mary Wollstonecraft's positions in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman—and to Wollstonecraft personally—by other women (not to mention men) were strong and varied. Anna Laetitia Barbauld's "The Rights of Woman" and Richard Polwhele's "The

Unsex'd Females" were direct responses to Wollstonecraft, and Felicia Hemans' "Corinne at the Capitol" can be seen as implicitly responding to the "woman question" that Wollstonecraft had raised, if not to Wollstonecraft herself. Discuss Wollstonecraft's position and the responses of Barbauld and/or Hemans and/or Polwhele.

5. **Due: Oct. 8:** Transgression, guilt, and punishment, set in the context of the supernatural, are common themes in Gothic literature. Compare/contrast the notions of transgression, punishment, and redemption in Mary Robinson's "The Haunted Beach" and Samuel Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

6. **Due: Oct. 27:** Other poets both anticipated and copied Wordsworth's practice in Lyrical Ballads. Mary Robinson, for example, came out with her own volume of Lyrical Tales in 1800 in which she emulated some of Wordsworth's poems of 1798. Compare and contrast Wordsworth's "We Are Seven" and Robinson's "All Alone" or Wordsworth's "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" and Robinson's "The Poor Singing Dame." What major differences and similarities do you find in purpose, effect, tone, etc?

7. **Due: Nov. 3:** As the footnote on p. 629 says, Byron was influenced in 1816, through Shelley, by Wordsworth's pantheistic views of nature, but he filters those views through the perspective of Childe Harold. Discuss the presentation of nature and the protagonist's relation to nature in the "Switzerland" segment of Childe Harold, Canto 3 (stanzas 68-78). What differences do you see between Byron's representations and Wordsworth's?

8. **Due: Nov. 17:** Choose **one** of the following two topics.

Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Mont Blanc" can be read as a reply to Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" in which Shelley presents a starker, more frightening vision of the relation between the human mind and nature than that presented by the older poet. Analyze Shelley's representations of the human and the natural and the relationship between them in "Mont Blanc."

**or**

Shelley famously called himself an atheist, but the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" can be read as a kind of religious mythmaking in which the poet offers an alternative vision to that of Christianity. Discuss the poem as a secular and skeptical alternative to traditional Christian dogma, symbolism and imagery, etc.

9. **Dec. 1:** In a letter to his brothers George and Thomas of December 21 or 27, 1817, John Keats coins the now famous phrase Negative Capability to describe his ideal for poetry. Critics have long debated the extent to which and the ways in which Keats's actual poetry demonstrates the poetic theories expressed in his letters. Choose one of the following poems: "Ode on a Grecian Urn," "Ode to a Nightingale," or "To Autumn." Discuss in what ways the poem does or does not seem to conform to the notion of Negative Capability as defined in Keats's letter.