ENG 444B/644B: The Romantic Book

Spring 2010

Monday/Wednesday 11:30-12:45 pm, BHS 208
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Office Hours: 2:00-3:30 pm Wednesday/Thursday or by appointment
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Course description:
This course will look at British Romanticism through the lens of the history of the book. Rather than using an anthology, we will look at texts of the years 1789 to 1830 in their original publication formats and discuss some of the most important developments in the print culture of these years, such as the circulating library, periodical publications, and pamphlets. Our readings will be a mixture of modern editions and facsimile reproductions available through electronic sources. Though the emphasis will be on Romantic poetry, we will also read works of fiction and nonfiction prose.

Course Goals: In this course, you will
- read a range of texts by major figures in British literature.
- survey some of the genres that were central to this period of literary history, such as political treatises, lyric poetry, and the novel.
- study literary texts from both a “formalist” and a “historicist” perspective; that is, we will study these texts both as carefully constructed works of art and as products of a particular historical context.
- study the Romantic era through the perspective of the history of the book.
- work with electronic resources for literary study and with facsimile reproductions of Romantic-era texts in order to get a sense of these texts in their original publication contexts.
- write about literary texts both informally and formally, responding to the day’s reading in a more informal manner and constructing longer papers that present arguments with clear thesis statements.

Required Texts: (available at bookstore)
- William Blake, Songs of Innocence and Experience
- William Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell
- Olaudah Equiano, The Interesting Narrative
- Wordsworth and Coleridge, Lyrical Ballads
- Jane Austen, Persuasion
- Mary Shelley, Frankenstein

The other course readings will be accessed through electronic sources, especially Eighteenth-Century Collections Online and Early American Imprints, both available through the library website. We will go over these resources in class.
Course requirements:
Response papers: There are fifteen weeks in the semester. You are required to turn in fifteen response papers, or one a week. Response papers are brief but thoughtful reactions to the day’s reading. You shouldn’t summarize the reading or provide background information; rather, you should focus in on a particular passage you found interesting, a question that the reading raised, a way to connect one or more of the readings, or some other narrowly focused question or problem that you think will help to generate class discussion. These should be a paragraph or so in length and can be either typed or neatly handwritten. I will comment on these papers but will not assign them a letter grade. Response papers must be turned in during class time: no email submissions.

Longer papers: You must do three longer papers of 5-7 pages each, choosing three different options listed below. You cannot write on the same author for more than one paper. Graduate students will either do three 6-8 page papers or one longer project due at the end of the semester. Graduate students will also be required to do some additional primary or secondary reading based on their specific interests. Deadlines for each paper are given below, but which type of paper you choose to do for each assignment is up to you. Regardless of the topic, your paper should have a clear and debatable thesis statement, paragraphs that begin with topic sentences that relate back to your thesis, clear transitions from one topic to the next, and an emphasis on critical analysis rather than summary. Below are your options:

1. Review project: Using the collection The Romantics Reviewed (located in the reference section of Lied, call number PR590.R43), look at contemporary reviews for one of the texts we’ve studied (such as Lyrical Ballads, Don Juan, etc.). Write an essay that analyzes the critical discourse surrounding a particular work. What do the critics say? What sort of criteria of judgment do they employ? What can these reviews tell us about aesthetic standards of the Romantic era? How do these standards differ from today?
2. Political project: Using Eighteenth-Century Collections Online, look at contemporary responses to one of the prose works we read (such as The Rights of Man or Political Justice). Write an essay that draws some conclusion about larger Romantic-era political debates based on these responses. What sorts of issues are writers responding to? What are the key areas of debate?
3. Circulating library project: Search Eighteenth-Century Collections Online for works with “circulating library” in the title. You should come up with a dozen or so catalogs of these libraries. Look at the catalogs: their rules and regulations, the types of publications carried, and the organizational schemes. What kinds of things can these library catalogs tell us about Romantic-era reading practices?
4. Textual project: Look at a text that exists in multiple forms: the 1798 “Rime of the Ancient Marinere” versus later editions, the various prefaces to Lyrical Ballads, the 1818 versus the 1831 Frankenstein. Write an essay where you look closely at some of the changes involved in one of these works. Don’t just list the changes but make an argument about their significance.
5. Poetic volume project: Make an argument about a volume of poetry as a volume (Songs of Innocence and Experience, Lyrical Ballads, the Keats volume). What meaning
can be found in the ordering of the poems within the volume? What sorts of
overarching themes can you find in the volume as a whole? What do you gain by
looking at individual poems within the context of the volume?

6. “Romanticism” project: Romanticism is usually defined through the features of the
“big six” poets: Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Keats. First, find some
general definitions of Romanticism using a dictionary of literary terms, literary
encyclopedia, or other resource. This will work particularly well if you find an older
reference book. Then talk about one of the other poets on the syllabus such as
Barbauld, Darwin, or Scott. How do these writers fit into or confound conventional
understandings of the meaning of “Romanticism”?

7. Close reading project: Look closely at some portion of one of the texts we’ve read and
make an argument about the language of that text (whether prose, poetry, or fiction).

8. Open topic: One of your papers can be on any topic of your choosing. This is your
opportunity to write about whatever inspires you in whatever fashion you choose.

Grading: Grading will be weighted as follows: class participation 10%, response papers 15%,
three longer papers 25% each. Please note that to succeed in this class you must be self-
motivated and keep up with the reading.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism includes any unacknowledged borrowing from a written source,
website, or fellow student. Any student who plagiarizes a written assignment will fail the
course and be reported to the Office of Student Conduct.

Disabilities: If you have a documented disability that may require assistance, you will need to
contact the Disability Resource Center. They are located in the Student Services Complex,
room A-143. The telephone number is 895-0866 / TDD 895-0652. For more information see
http://studentlife.unlv.edu/disability/

Academic Assistance: Students needing additional help with written assignments are
encouraged to make use of the Writing Center. You can find information on their policies and
location at http://writingcenter.unlv.edu. Tutoring is available through the Academic Success
Center: http://academicsuccess.unlv.edu/tutoring.
Schedule of readings

Jan. 11: Introduction to course, go over syllabus and use of electronic resources

Unit one: Political prose


January 25: Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, chaps. 1-4

January 27: Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, chaps. 5-8

February 1: Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, chaps. 9-12

Unit two: Poetry


February 8: William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

February 10: William Blake, *Songs of Innocence*

February 17: William Blake, *Songs of Experience*

February 22: William Blake, *Songs of Innocence and Experience*; paper one due on or before this date


March 1: Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, pp. 36-80


March 17, 22, 24: John Keats, *Lamia, Isabella, the Eve of St. Agnes, and Other Poems*; format of text and breakdown of reading TBA.

Paper two due on or before March 24.
Unit three: The novel

April 5: Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, vol. 1
April 7: Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, vol. 2
April 12: Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, vol. 3
April 14: Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, vol. 1
April 19: Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, vol. 2
April 21: Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, vol. 2 continued
April 26, 28: Study week. Course conclusion and catch-up if necessary

**Wednesday, May 5:** paper three due on or before this date