

## ROMANTIC LIVES, ROMANTIC ARCHIVES

The following materials are drawn from a Romantic literature course I recently designed for English majors. This course had several practical and pedagogical goals: first, it needed to provide a broad introduction to Romanticism for students who may have had no previous introduction to the period; second, as a non-required elective (subject to cancellation for under-enrollment), it had to appeal to students and engage even those who believed they had little interest in historically-focused classes. I chose to approach both of these goals by structuring the class around the idea of Romantic relationships; that is, the interlocking web of connections—between friends and lovers, writers and publishers, artists and scientists; authors and readers—that so much recent scholarship has illuminated but which, in my experience, is less commonly explored in the undergraduate classroom.

In order to bring my own sense of a richly interconnected Romantic period to my students, I made two major changes from past versions of Romantic survey courses I've taught: 1) In addition to the major primary texts, I added substantial readings from two group biographies, Hays' *Young Romantics* and Holmes' *Age of Wonder*, to the syllabus, carefully selecting the timing and content of the excerpts to illustrate or problematize key ideas from the readings and/or lecture. We also reflected explicitly on the genre of biography and considered how (and whether) biographical information should affect our understanding of literary works through discussion and written assignments. 2) I added a substantial archival research project, which allowed students to learn more about the research process, encounter Romantic print culture in a more direct way, and have the experience of making their own discoveries about the way that key events were discussed in the period.

I found both parts of this experiment to be highly successful: students loved the biographies, and while I had some concerns that their preoccupation with topics like the love lives of the poets might distract them from actually reading these authors' works, this did not prove to be the case. They were extremely engaged with all of the readings and, over the course of the semester, became strong critical readers of biography as well as poetry, debating questions like, "what kinds of sources would the biographer have used to uncover this anecdote?" and "should this change the way we think about the poetry the author wrote around this time?" The excerpts from *The Age of Wonder*, in addition, allowed them to think about Romantic writing not as literary work in isolation, but as part of a broader project of knowledge production and exploration in the period. In a lecture pairing Blake's "Chimney Sweeper" poems with a chapter on Humphry Davy's groundbreaking invention of a non-flammable mining lamp, for instance, we considered the different ways that Romantic culture discussed workers' rights; and students were easily able to perceive the connections between Romantic writings against the British slave trade and the rhetoric of empire used to justify Mungo Park's African explorations. The Byronic hero made sense to them within the context of periodical celebrity gossip, but also as a figure—the solitary, brooding adventurer—relating to English Romantic interest in travel and the celebrity status of explorers like Joseph Banks. Students interested in human and civil rights were fascinated by the way these discourses were developing in the Romantic period; having the additional biographical and print cultural background seemed to allow them to draw more connections between nineteenth-century poems and their own experiences than I've observed in the past.

By the time we arrived at the "Romanticism In the News" assignment, students were well-accustomed to lectures featuring images from first editions of texts, Romantic magazine

articles, and similar sources, and they had a solid historical grounding in the major events of the period. As they began their research and carried out the assignment [see assignment sheet appended below] they quickly gained a whole new perspective on dealing with historical sources (this in turn vastly increased their appreciation for the accomplishments of the biographers) and felt the thrill of making their own discoveries, as well as the inevitable frustration of digging through sources without success. They produced an array of fascinating and largely very successful papers, on topics ranging from the critical reception of *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* to discussions of medical issues such as smallpox inoculation and opium addiction, to English news coverage of the execution of Marie Antoinette.

While I will continue to make adjustments to future iterations of the course, both the biographical and archival focus will remain: they were successful in engaging my students, but also in giving them a more compelling and nuanced view of the Romantic period, its literature, and the original sources from which we learn about the lives and works of influential historical figures. In other words, these approaches helped the class to read Romantic literature as deeply imbedded in a fascinating cultural context, and to become more critical readers, ones who constantly question not just *what* we know about the past, but *how* we know it, and what we might do with that knowledge.

## **ENG 344: ENGLISH ROMANTIC LITERATURE**

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### **[abbreviated syllabus]**

#### **Textbooks/Course Materials**

*Romanticism: An Anthology*, ed. Duncan Wu (Wiley-Blackwell)

James Hogg, *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, Oxford World's Classics

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Oxford World's Classics

*The Young Romantics*, Daisy Hay (FSG)

*The Age of Wonder*, Richard Holmes (Vintage)

Other secondary readings will be distributed in class and/or posted to Blackboard.

#### **Course Requirements**

Students will be evaluated in the following areas:

Reading quizzes 10%

Romantic Periodicals Paper 15%

Guided Close Reading Presentation 5%

Romantic Biography Paper 15%

Active and Engaged Participation 20%

Final 20%

Poetic Imagery Paper 15%

#### **Course Assignments and Schedule of Readings and Lectures**

**I: Poetic Imagery Paper:** A short (3-4 page) paper which asks students to identify a theme, symbol or idea (e.g. an emotion, a repeating word, a vivid image or metaphor) deployed in one poem from the syllabus, and to analyze the poem in order to make an argument about how the characteristic you've identified affects your understanding of the poem.

**II: Romanticism in the News:** For this assignment, you'll need to choose an event that we've discussed in class (for instance, a political event, a scientific breakthrough, or the

publication of a major work) and find at least three Romantic-era news sources (available digitally or in archival sources) that describe it. In a 4-5 page paper, compare and contrast the different articles, considering how they characterize the event and what purpose and effects these differences may have.

**III. Romantic Biography:** This assignment asks you to reflect critically on one of the biographical works we've read for class. You will choose a selection from one work, and draw on it to craft an argument about *how* the biographer is encouraging you to view his/her subject. You may consider issues such as word choice; use of direct quotation from letters, the subject's poetry, or other sources; authorial speculation or fictionalizing; and inclusion (or omission) of relevant historical background information to help make your case.

**Exam:** This class has a final exam, which will be a combination of identifications, short answer/multiple choice questions, and short essays. It will require you to be able to identify and discuss major authors, works and literary movements we've discussed, using key terms and appropriate language.

**Guided Close Reading Presentation:** Each student will lead the class in a brief (5-7 minute) close reading of a passage from a primary text from the syllabus that day. Presentations should call attention to one or two literary aspects of the text of particular interest—metaphors, imagery, allusions, sound effects, paradoxes, etc.—and explain how noting these components influences your reading of the work.

### Schedule of Readings and Classes

**W Sep 6** Welcome and Introduction to the Romantic Period

#### I: Romantic Revolutions

**M Sep 11** Thomas Paine, from *Common Sense* and *The Rights of Man*, pp. 24-28; Mary Wollstonecraft, from *Vindication of the Rights of Man & V. of the Rights of Woman* pp. 281-9.

**W Sep 13** William Godwin, from *Political Justice*, 155-159, A.L. Barbauld, *The Rights of Woman*, pp. 44-5.

**M Sep 18** Ann Yearsley, "A Poem on the Insensibility of the Slave Trade," pp. 165-74; A.L. Barbauld, "Epistle to William Wilberforce, Esq." pp. 41-44. Olaudah Equiano, from *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (BB, 5 pp.);

**W Sep 20** Holmes, "Mungo Park in Africa," *Age of Wonder* (AOW) pp. 211-34.

**M Sep 25** William Wordsworth & S.T. Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) pp. 333-415

**W Sep 27** Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), pp. 506-518.

#### II: Romantic Print Culture

**M Oct 2** Blake, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, pp. 186-212

**W Oct 4** Holmes, "Davy and the Lamp" AOW pp. 351-375

**PAPER 1 DUE FRIDAY, OCT 7 at 5 pm**

**M Oct 9** John Thelwall, pp. 322-326, Leigh Hunt, "to Percy Shelley" p. 826., Hay, *Young Romantics* (YR), "Husbands" and "Wives and Mistresses" pp. 3-68.

**W Oct 11** --Byron, *Don Juan*, Canto 1, pp. 959-1015; excerpts from *Childe Harold* (BB)

**M Oct 16** Mary Robinson, from “The Wild Wreath” 261-5.

**W Oct 18** Holmes, “Joseph Banks in Paradise” pp. 1-59

**M Oct 23** Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* Vols. 1 & 2

**W Oct 25** *Frankenstein* Vol. 3

**M Oct 30** Holmes, AOW, “Dr Frankenstein and the Soul” 305-336.

**W Nov 1 Digital Database Workshop – No reading, bring your topics and sources**

### **III: Romantic Imagination**

**M Nov 6** S.T. Coleridge, “The Eolian Harp” 621-625 + Charlotte Smith, Sonnet I, p. 88.

**W Nov 8** Shelley, Mont Blanc, pp. 1104-1107 + Edmund Burke, from *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (BB)

**PAPER 2 DUE at 5 pm**

**M Nov 13** Keats, Odes, pp. 1462-1490 & Charlotte Smith, Sonnet III, p. 89.

**W Nov 15** Hay, YR, “Counts and Cockneys” and “Exiles” pp. 141-194

**M Nov 20** Hogg, Confessions of a Justified Sinner, “The Editor’s Narrative” pp. 5-72

**W Nov 22** – HOLIDAY, UNIVERSITY CLOSED: Watch *Bright Star* on your own and bring completed film reflection sheet to class on the 27<sup>th</sup>.

**M Nov 27** Hogg, Confessions of a Justified Sinner “Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Sinner Written by Himself” pp. 73-177

**W Nov 29** Hogg, Confessions of a Justified Sinner “The Editor’s Narrative” pp. 178-end.

**PAPER 3 DUE FRIDAY, DEC 1 at 5 pm**

**M Dec 4** Thomas De Quincey, from *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, 835-844

**W Dec 6** Romantic Generations (no reading)

**M Dec 11** Course Wrap-Up and Celebration

**Thursday, December 14: Final Exam**

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## **ROMANTICISM IN THE NEWS**

[abbreviated assignment sheet]

Papers should be between 4 and 5 pages, double-spaced, using normal margins and 12-point font. Don’t forget to include a creative title and number your pages! Please cite line numbers parenthetically (MLA style) and include a Works Cited for **all sources**. Remember, if you need to consult sources such as encyclopedias or history books to learn more about your topic, these should be cited as well. Please also upload PDFs or image files of your three articles.

**The assignment:** For this essay, you'll need to **choose a Romantic event or topic relevant to our class discussions** (for instance, a political event, a scientific breakthrough, or the publication of a major work) and **find at least three contemporary news sources** (available digitally or in hard copy in the rare book library) **that describe or discuss it.** These articles should be published no more than three years before/after the relevant event. In a 4-5 page paper, compare and contrast the different articles, considering how they characterize the event and **what purpose and effects these differences may have.** Depending on your sources, you may also wish to consider issues such as accompanying illustrations, length (or lack thereof), juxtaposition with nearby articles, and/or timing of publication. Pay attention to the magazine or newspaper as *a historical object*, not just a collection of words.

Finding these articles is an important part of the assignment, as is figuring out how to cite them correctly. You may begin with a search of Google Books if that is a comfortable interface for you, but in most cases you will be more successful with specialized databases, especially *British Periodicals* and *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online*. If you don't find any sources, you may be having a keyword/search issue, *or* you may be learning that your topic simply was not widely discussed (or not discussed in the words you're using to search for it) in the Romantic period.

**Your research process should unfold as follows:**

TODAY: we will have an introduction to online databases, OCR and keyword searching, and do some sample searches together.

BY MONDAY: You should have at least two potential ideas for topics, and have conducted preliminary searches for both. If you find appropriate articles, please bring them in; if you don't, bring a list of the different keyword combinations and databases you have tried. In class we will share topics, brainstorm effective searching techniques, and troubleshoot issues for those who are not finding enough sources.

NEXT FRIDAY: We will visit a nearby rare book library to learn more about Romantic periodicals, examine copies of widely-read magazines from the period, and get hands-on experience in finding additional sources for your essays.

As you acquire each new source, you should save it as a PDF or image (if photographed in the archive) read it closely, take notes on the aspects that seem most significant to you, and begin organizing your draft. Your essay should have **a clear thesis statement in the first paragraph**, which synthesizes your sources and explains your specific interpretive angle on them. You should use **direct textual evidence** from all of your articles; make sure you aren't simply summarizing (though some summary will certainly be appropriate) but also analyzing *how* the different articles approach the topic and how these differences are significant. Make sure to avoid broad generalizations and vague statements of opinion; be specific and accurate when characterizing the views expressed in your articles.