Summer 6-15-2009

ENG 5005-031: British Romanticism

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SYLLABUS

COURSE DESCRIPTION: Somewhat in defiance of our “Studies in” rubric, this will be a sprawling survey of English literature during the Romantic Period, that tumultuous era spanning the French Revolution, the Napoleonic Wars, and a decade or so of the ensuing uneasy peace, when revolutions in art and literature kept pace with those in politics. Readings will include works by Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, the Shelleys, Keats, and Byron. Most of this will be poetry, but we’ll also find time for The Cenci (Percy Shelley’s hair-raising drama about incest and murder), Austen’s surefire classic (and recent bestseller) Pride and Prejudice, and Mary Shelley’s ever-interesting Frankenstein. Along the way we will read (or perhaps more properly, re-read) many lyrics that are among the most famous and enduring in the language, and will learn how their authors’ ideas about art, imagination, identity, depression, love, and politics have had a profound influence on modern thought. Two take-home exams, final, class presentation, and a term project. The pace will be demanding but not inhumanly so. If the material and the period are absolutely new to you, you would be well advised to read the two novels in advance of the summer’s starting gun.

INSTRUCTOR: John Kilgore. Office: 3331 Coleman Hall. Hours: MW 4-5, TR 1-2:30. Phone: (217) 581-6313 (office); (217) 345-7395 (home). E-mail cfjdk@eiu.edu. Give date and time of call when leaving a voice mail message at my office, and do not use voice mail for urgent business: call my home instead.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: regular attendance, two take-home exams, class presentation, term paper (see below), final exam. The final grade will be computed approximately as follows:

- Participation: 10%
- Take-home #1: 20%
- Take-home #2: 20%
- Term Paper: 35% [Includes required proposal and presentation.]
- Final Exam: 15%

I reserve the option of departing slightly from these percentages. The participation grade will be based primarily on your record of attendance, on the following scale: 0-2 absences -- A; 3 -- B; 4 -- C; 5 -- D; 6 -- F; more than 6 -- continuing, proportional damage to your overall course average. Be sure to find and sign the sign-up sheet at each meeting. Note that you have two “free” absences. Save these for emergencies, as no make-up credit will be available for missed days.

TAKE-HOME EXAMS. Will be distributed at one meeting, collected the next. Strict format and length limits will be in force to keep you from writing (and feeling pressured to write) much more than could reasonably be produced in that time. Answers must be typed, of course, and should no doubt be composed at the keyboard. The chief key to success: do all the reading carefully and on time.

PAPER. Should be a typed “sort of research” paper of 10 pages or so with Works Cited and notes in MLA format. The basic requirement is that the essay press its thesis vigorously AND (what makes it sort of a research paper) that it present SOME information that could not be obtained from the
required course readings alone. For most projects, 75 pages or so of “extra” reading should be plenty. The key is to focus your topic ahead of time, so that whatever reading you do is clearly directed, useful, and relevant. Try not to waste time drilling dry holes. Avoid reading that is overly specialized, clearly too long, or not obviously relevant to the questions with which you began.

Paper topics must be approved in advance, and a one-page proposal is due by June 24. A list of suggested topics will be distributed, but I encourage you to define and develop your own topic if you prefer. Only one student will be allowed to do each of the suggested topics, so they must be reserved, ASAP.

Please note that the papers are to be presented in class on the due date, July 29. That is, you will read us as much of the paper as your time permits -- probably about half -- and summarize the rest. With luck, keeping us in mind as your specific audience will help you make many key decisions about content, organization, and language.

**FINAL EXAM.** Will consist of identifications, short answers, quotations, and mini-essays, designed to establish your overall grasp and retention of course readings.

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

- Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (Signet)
- Mellor and Matlak, eds., *British Literature, 1780-1830* [M]

**Overview of course:**

- Introduction - 1 meeting
- Jane Austen - 1 meeting
- William Blake - 2 meetings
- William Wordsworth - 3 meetings
- Samuel Taylor Coleridge - 1 meeting
- George Gordon, Lord Byron - 2 meetings
- Percy Shelley - 1 meeting
- Mary Shelley - 1 meeting
- Keats - 2 meetings
- Class presentations -- 1 meeting
- Final Exam - last meeting

**SCHEDULE**

**DEADLINES:**

- June 15-22: Reserve Paper Topics
- Wednesday, June 24: Paper Proposal Due. Provide copies for all class members.
- July 6-8: First Take-Home Exam
- July 27: Term Papers Due. Present papers in class.
- July 29-August 3: Second Take-Home Exam
Wednesday, August 5: Final Exam [75 minutes]

READINGS:

NOTE: PLEASE HAVE ALL READINGS DONE BY THE BEGINNING OF THE SESSION FOR WHICH THEY ARE ASSIGNED. PLEASE MAKE AN EARLY START ON THE LONGER WORKS, i.e., FRANKENSTEIN, DON JUAN, AND THE CENCI.

Pay attention to page numbers in the schedule, as in some cases, only brief excerpts of much longer works have been assigned. Most poems should be read at least twice.

Please read the biographical notes in D for all assigned authors.

I. Introduction: Backgrounds and Historical Context

M 6/15 Course Introduction

Wollstonecraft, Letter to Joseph Johnston, D 121.
Paine, The Rights of Man, D 121-128.
Austen, Pride and Prejudice.

II. Blake: Inner and Outer Revolutions


To Dr. John Trusler, D 204-205.
To Thomas Butts, D 206-208.
Paper Proposal Due.

III. Wordsworth: Nature, Loss, and Self

M 6/29 from The Prelude, 1850, excerpts [handout will be supplied]:
“Spots of Time” passage, Book XII.
Simplon Pass episode, Book VI.
Ascent of Snowdon, Book XIV.

“We are Seven,” D 391; “Expostulation and Reply,” and “The Tables Turned,” D 401-403; “Old Man Travelling,” D 403; “Tintern Abbey,” 404-408.
Excerpts from Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, D 408-420.
“The Old Cumberland Beggar,” D 428.

W 7/1 Bring M text.
From the Excursion ("The Ruined Cottage") lines 469-1006, M 615-621.

M 7/6 Ode ("Intimations Of Immortality"), D 528; "I wandered lonely as a cloud," D 526; "The Solitary Reaper," D 533; "Elegiac Stanzas," D 534.
FIRST TAKE-HOME HANDED OUT.

IV. Coleridge: Dejection and Imagination

W 7/8 FIRST TAKE-HOME DUE.
Excerpts from Biographia Literaria, Chapters 13 & 14, D 631-37.
Kubla Khan, D 614.

V. Byron and The Shelleys: Dark Romanticism and Beyond


W 7/15 Don Juan, Canto I, concluded.

M 7/20 Bring M text.

W 7/22 Mary Shelley, Frankenstein.

VI. Keats: Doubt and 'Negative Capability'

M 7/27 Papers Due
Presentation of papers.

W 7/29 Letters: To Bailey, D 992; To George and Tom Keats, D 993; To Reynolds, D 994; To Woodhouse, D 999; To Charles Brown, D 1007. "When I have Fears," D 935; "Bright Star," D 991; "This Living Hand," D 991. "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," D 948-49. The Eve Of Saint Agnes D 935-946.
SECOND TAKE-HOME HANDED OUT.

M 8/3 SECOND TAKE-HOME DUE
The Great Odes, D 950-961, especially Ode On A Grecian Urn and Ode To A Nightingale. To Autumn, D 961.

W 8/5 Final Examination

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POLICY ON LATE WORK & C: Unfortunately, the accelerated summer session leaves us very little
leeway here. If you feel you are in danger of missing a deadline, get in touch with me ASAP. I MAY be able to grant short extensions in exceptional circumstances, and will try to be fair in any case. But the default grade penalty for late work will be one full letter grade for each calendar day of lateness, weekends included. Use phone or e-mail to spare yourself this deplorable and probably unnecessary fate. 581-6313 or 345-7395, or e-mail jdkilgore@eiu.edu.

I trust deliberate plagiarism will not be an issue in a graduate course. But regulations require a statement, so the penalty (be it noted) is automatic failure of the course, combined with a report of the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.

I will be more than happy to make reasonable accommodations for any student with a documented disability. Contact me or the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) if you will be needing such an accommodation.

Feel free to e-mail me at jdkilgore@eiu.edu if you have questions about any of these policies.
Guidelines for Course Paper, Due Tuesday, July 29

This will be a sort-of-research paper in which you combine the insights gained from a modest piece of “outside” reading with your individual reflections and observations on material included in the course syllabus. You will present the paper to the class on July 27, reading as much as time permits, summarizing the rest. Keep this in mind. The experience of presenting your work to your peers can be surprisingly gratifying to you and profitable to them (assuming you have done a good job), and knowing that you will do so will help focus your energies as you work on the paper.

In most cases, the chief key to success will be to define a clear and reasonably-sized project which links some genuine interpretive question to factual, informational issues. The chief danger that menaces you at this point is that of defining your thesis and associated research in a way that commits you to learning and reading more than is possible within the tight framework of this course, this summer, your mortal lifetime. Accordingly, you will be required to propose your topic very soon — by June 24, in one or two pages.

The proposal should be more or less a shot in the dark, a statement not of what you know but of what you are interested in, what you incline to think so far, and what you would like to find out. Start by defining a question, e.g., “How much help did Mary Shelley get in writing Frankenstein from her husband, Percy?” (A great question, I modestly think, which is why it is one of the suggested topics below.) Of course you don’t know the answer right now, but that’s the point of the proposal: it documents your present cluelessness so that six weeks from now, when you know appreciably more, you and I and the class will be able to see what you have learned. Not that you will have a final answer, by any means; but you will be far enough along to speak usefully, informatively, and with confidence to the rest of us, who have not been working on this particular question.

In addition to the general question you will be investigating, the proposal should discuss the kind of information you will seek and where you hope to find it. Try to do as much as you can, at this early stage, to nail down your reading plans into a workable plan of research. Don’t bother telling me, “I will log on to the Internet and see what’s there.” This goes without saying and I don’t need to hear it. DO tell me, “I plan to read those parts of Leslie Marchand’s three-volume biography of Byron that deal with his marriage.” Of course you can’t always be so definite; but push in that direction.

Once you have defined a good general question, particular research objectives should begin to spill out of it like peas from a pod. To judge Percy’s influence on Mary’s novel, it would be useful to know something about their relationship, so right off you will be interested in biographical articles and relevant chapters from full-length biographies. You will be interested in comments that one or the other or both wrote in letters and journals. You will be very interested in the differences between editions published in 1819 and 1831. You will wonder if any manuscripts of the novel are extant. You will wonder what other critics and biographers have said about this same issue. You will have dozens of thoughts about how these primarily informational issues do or should affect one’s interpretation and appreciation of a novel that is enormously complex and suggestive in the first place.

At this point, quite likely, you will find yourself in a place I call Research Paper Hell. Suddenly,
bewilderingly, your tidy project seems to have gotten completely out of hand. There are dozens of sources you want to consult. Even if you could get your hands on half of them (you can't), you don't have time to read them. You have three times as many of your "own" ideas (whatever that really means) as when you started, and aren't sure which ones to pursue, which to leave out. The due-date is headed for you like an inbound asteroid. What do you do?

What you should do is, take a breath. Remember that you are not supposed to be an expert, that no one wants you to write in that voice of anonymous omniscience that makes textbooks so dull. Your audience is this class, not the professional scholars whose works you have been sampling. It's the very nature of research to generate two new questions for every one that gets answered; but if you concentrate on what you do know rather than what you don't (and now might be a great time to take another look at your proposal), you should find that it's plenty. Remember, too, that this is also an interpretive paper, and may be primarily so if you so choose. "Research" and "interpretation" are the two poles of this project, and different papers will naturally gravitate more toward one or the other. That's just fine. Even if the results of your research really are meager in themselves, an energetic and thorough critical argument can take up the slack.

Finally, then, there is just one way out of Research Paper Hell. Choose an evening well in advance of the due date. Sit down. Write the damned paper.

Some other guidelines, quickly:

- Have a clear thesis with an "argumentative edge," just as in any other kind of essay.
- Remember your audience — your classmates and, to a lesser extent, me — and don't try to sound like a textbook. On the other hand, don't carry informality so far that it becomes distracting.
- Be lively, thoughtful, provocative, personal, energetic, rigorous, and daring.
- Constantly ask yourself about relevance: what you are arguing and how the information you have relates to the question. One of the ways in which research papers typically fail is by turning into "data dumps" of information not clearly related to anything. Don't ever "stick in" information just because you happen to have it.
- Spend a reasonable amount of time working up a preliminary bibliography, getting some sense of "what's out there," before you settle down to read. Ask yourself constantly, "what use can I make of this?" and be ruthless about putting aside material that may be interesting, but won't help the cause.
- If you find an article that deals with exactly the question you have proposed, and does it learnedly and brilliantly, don't panic, celebrate. You've found many of the answers you were looking for. The first part of your paper should be a careful appreciation and review of the wonderful article (and it better really be wonderful) you have found. Your problem then is to find some place for "you" in the paper, but chances are this won't be all that difficult. By the time you're done expounding Professor Ziggurat's ideas, you'll find you have all sorts of cavils and addenda that seem well worth elaborating.
- Give full credit to your sources. Talk about them directly, praise them, critique them, oppose them as appropriate. Let the reader see you finding the interesting extra information and weaving it all together.
- Without being overly timid (or wordy), make judicious use of such phrases as "It seems," "apparently," "I believe," "my own conclusion," "in my reading to this point" — and, of course, the indispensable "I don't know."
- On your "Works Cited" page, include every source you have consulted in the writing of this
paper, including those not directly cited. The point is to show all your research and get proper credit even for leads that haven’t panned out. (But be honest: no sticking in works you haven’t actually taken a look at.) Footnotes are probably unnecessary, since you will be using MLA internal citation format; if you have any notes, they will be discursive, not just bibliographical. Internet sources must have full URLs with date found included. Otherwise I won’t be too much of a stickler for format; just be clear and consistent in presenting your sources.

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Sample Topics

The following are examples only. I welcome ideas of your own not included in this list. Feel free to call at 581-6313 to brainstorm if you like, or to come by CH3331, or (probably best of all) to e-mail jdkilgore@eiu.edu.

1) Write a paper titled with some particular date from the period, e.g., “January 1, 1798.” Then offer a descriptive panorama of that particular moment in literary history, telling, as nearly as you can discover, what key figures were doing and why it was important, what the political climate was in England and Europe, what major developments were underway, etc. Though you will be positioned in this one frozen moment, the format should give you plenty of leeway to talk about what lies behind and ahead, linking it back to the “now” of your chosen date. You might begin your research simply by compiling a number of historical time-lines from textbooks.

2) The Romantic reinvention of the lyric. Try to find out what the authorities consider the Romantics’ major technical and stylistic innovations in lyric poetry. How do diction, voice, persona, metaphor, meter, and other aspects of the short poem seem to change in the writing of this era? The question is potentially vast (all questions are), but you should be able to get a good handle on it by reading selectively in biographical articles on the major figures, then by consulting a few well chosen articles, e.g. Meyer Abrams’s “Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric.”

3) The poor in English Romantic poetry. Choose a number of lyrics — preferably including some from our syllabus — which feature poor people (e.g. Wordsworth’s leech gatherer, Blake’s chimney sweep). Then try to provide an appropriate historical context for each case, exploring both particular questions and general ones. When Blake’s chimney sweep says “My father sold me,” is he speaking figuratively, or could such a thing really happen? When we learn from Wordsworth’s journal (not the poem itself) that the leech gatherer has lost eight children, should we think of this fate as incredibly strange, or not so unusual for the times? Are women abandoned by their husbands, as in The Ruined Cottage, typically unable to work, and is this part of what we should read into Margaret’s story?

4) Romantic Dream Girls. Among works we read, “The Crystal Cabinet,” the Lucy Poems, and “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” all feature mysterious dream maidens who love and thrill their men, then leave them desolate. Try to do the following: a) Using secondary sources as a guide, track down other instances of the motif, then describe them to a reader who has not read these additional works; b) give a sense of what the critical literature has to say about the significance of this motif; c) add your own commentary and interpretation.
5) Free love in Blake. A devoted and loyal spouse for most of his life, with no record of extramarital liaisons that anyone knows about, Blake nevertheless celebrates sexual freedom, condemns jealousy and possessive love, and seems as committed to the idea of multiple partners as D.H. Lawrence or Brigham Young. Try to make sense this situation, with respect to Visions of the Daughters of Albion especially. In addition to that poem and two or three commentaries, your research should take you to various relevant entries in Damon’s A Blake Dictionary, e.g. “love,” “sex,” and “jealousy.”

6) “A’s View of B.” Fill in A and B according to your preference, and consider substituting terms like “concept,” “theory,” “vision,” etc. for “view,” thus obtaining your customized version of this topic. E.g., “Shelley’s Theory of Violence,” “Byron’s Vision of Democracy,” “Blake’s Opinion of Mrs. Blake.” Start your research with the concordance(s) for the author(s) you have chosen, finding out where and how your B term is mentioned, tracking down those references, then returning to the concordance to check on parallel terms. For example, if you are researching “democracy,” you may also want to check on “human rights,” “voting,” “revolution,” and so on. Don’t be limited to this one technique, though; check out critical articles as well.

7) The impact on Wordsworth’s poetry of the early deaths of his parents. Familiarize yourself with the circumstances of Wordsworth’s early bereavement, then ask what relevance, if any, this seems to have for poems we have read in class, perhaps especially The Prelude and the “Lucy Poems.” Other critics will have had much to say about this, so do look energetically for relevant articles (the more recent the better) before you write.

8) “Psychoanalyzing Kubla.” Track down as many Freudian readings of Kubla Khan as you can, then summarize, compare and evaluate them. If you can still bear to look at the poem when you’re done, go on to offer your own reading.

9) Keats’s sexuality. Writer of some of the most sensuous verse of the period, Keats nevertheless is sexually the least experienced of our authors. Does this inexperience show up in the poetry, for good or for ill or both? Start out by getting as clear as you can about the particulars of his love life up to the time of his major poems in 1818-19. Then take a close look at images of women and love in “Bright Star,” “Ode on Indolence,” The Eve of St. Agnes, etc. Try hard to respect the poems as poems even as you pursue relevant biographical connections. NB: In connection with the Eve, Keats is on record, distressingly to modern feminist critics, to the effect that had Porphyro not taken advantage of Madeline, he would be a “eunuch” whom one ought to “despise.” Look into this and decide what you think.

10) Myth and literary tradition in Eve of Saint Agnes. Learn everything you can about the literary sources of this poem – Burton’s Melancholy, Ovid, Macbeth, etc. – then explain how they resonate in the poem. For example, when Madeleine is compared to a “tongueless nightingale” in line 206, the image recalls a well-known story from classical mythology. Your job will be to identify the story, read some version of it (ideally the version Keats himself may have read) and then talk about how the allusion impacts our perception of this part of the poem – and then to do likewise with other sources you unearth. You should probably begin your research simply by comparing the notes to 4-6 published versions of the poem, seeing who has caught what.
11) Existentialism in Shelley's *The Cenci*. To what extent does Shelley seem to anticipate the ideas of such twentieth-century writers as Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre? Support your ideas with examples from the text. You will also want to look at the critical literature, to see if someone has written on just this subject, as seems likely.

12) Percy Shelley’s role in the writing of *Frankenstein*. This topic is already discussed above, to some extent. With particular attention to *Alastor*, try to assess the extent and nature of Percy’s influence on Mary’s famous novel, both directly as editor and indirectly as a mentor and immediate literary model. Are there elements of the novel that should be thought of as his rather than hers, and accordingly discounted in our interpretation?

13) “Why does Victor delay?” Transfer Coleridge’s famous question about Hamlet to Victor Frankenstein, and see what kind of answer you can propose. Your research may consist of a focused search through critical readings of the novel, looking for answers others have proposed to this question. But don’t get so busy expounding *their* ideas that you forget to decide for yourself.

14) Byron’s marriage and the image of woman in *Don Juan, Canto I*. Acquaint yourself with the poet’s career as one of the great cads, perverts, and playboys of all time, and more specifically with the history of his stormy marriage. Then turn to *Don Juan* and appraise the view of women that seems to be presented there, drawing tactful, careful connections to the biography where these seem appropriate. Is the view of women here misogynistic or merely skeptical? How do we reconcile the romantic lyricism of poems like “Fare Thee Well” and “She Walks in Beauty” — and to some extent the ending of *Canto I* — with the grittier and more satirical glimpses of female behavior furnished by the poem?