Romantic Poetry and the Sense of History

Course Description:

What does history feel like? What does it mean to imagine that your present moment is part of a larger historical trajectory? Or, that you are making history in that moment? The period of Romanticism, roughly 1780 to 1830, is charged with ideas about revolution, progress, and the power of the imagination. Yet it is also a period deeply obsessed with its relationship to the past in a manner unlike any era before it, as writers and thinkers explored the feel of history in radical new ways. This course will survey the major Romantic poets (Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Keats) with special attention to the sense and meaning of history in their writing. We will read Romantic narratives of personal development, chants of eternal revolution, satires on modern life and government, and excavations and fantasies of a medieval past. We’ll consider how Romantic writers spun both art and argument on the axis of history and found themselves reflected there, and we’ll examine in turn our own relationship to the literature of the past as 21st century readers.

Texts:

- Course Packet

Requirements:

- **Written Assignments:** Over the course of the semester you will produce several written assignments, from writing that pays close attention to the mechanics of individual poems, to assignments designed to flesh out your research skills for your chosen topic: an *etymology exercise* (1-2 pages) on a single word or phrase in one poem; a *close-reading essay* (3-4 pages) in which you analyze the; and an *annotated bibliography* (3-4 pages) in which you assess several pieces of scholarship on a specific aspect of the course. Other short writing assignments (brief responses, etc.) may be assigned throughout the semester as part of your participation. All of these assignments are designed to put in place the groundwork for your final essay, a 20+ page *research essay* on a topic of your choice that you will plan in consultation with me.

Every student has one no-questions-asked two day extension. Otherwise, every day late results
in the loss of half a grade (A to A-, etc.).

- **Presentations:** Every student will give **two in-class presentations**. The first will be a ten-minute response to one of the texts on the syllabus; for those ten minutes, you will be teaching the class about some aspect of the text. We'll sign up for presentation dates in the second week. The second will be a **research presentation** at the end of the semester in which you share some aspect of your research project with the class.

- **Participation:** As a seminar, this class requires good participation, and by extension, attendance. Everyone is allowed two free, no-questions-asked absences over the courses of the semester. Use them wisely.

In addition to regular participation in the classroom conversation, each student will be expected to **memorize** one poem of their choice and of at least 14 lines to recite in class.

**Grading:**

- Etymology Essay (1-2 pages): 10%
- Close-reading Essay (3-4 pages): 10%
- Annotated Bibliography (3-4 pages): 10%
- Presentations: 15%
- Research Project (20+ pages): 35%
- Participation: 20%

**Schedule:**

January 23: Introduction
Coleridge, “Kubla Khan”
Shelley, “Song of Pan”

**Unit 1: History as Experience**

Tuesday, January 28 World Is Too Much With Us”
Wordsworth, “Lines Written above Tintern Abbey”
Coleridge, “Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement,” “Frost at Midnight”
Keats, “When I Have Fears,” “Ode to Melancholy”
Hemans, “Properzia Rossi”
Clare, “I am”

Thursday, January 30
Wordworth, “Ode: Intimations”
Byron, “Prometheus,” “On this day I complete my thirty sixth year”
Hazlitt, “On Personal Identity”
Tuesday, February 4

Thursday, February 6
Shelley, “The Triumph of Life”
Paul de Man, “Shelley Disfigured”

❖ **Etymology Exercise is due.**

Tuesday, February 11
Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (Books 1-3)

Thursday, February 13
Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (Books 4-6)

*Unit 2: The Historical Present*

Tuesday, February 18
Barbauld, “The Uses of History”; “The Backwardness of the Spring 1771,” *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*

Thursday, February 20
Hazlitt, “The Spirit of the Age”
Wordsworth, “Lines Written a Short Distance from my House”
Smith, “Beachy Head”
Clare, “The Fallen Elm,” “The Mores”

Tuesday, February 25
Coleridge, “Fears in Solitude,” “France: An Ode”
Wordsworth, “To Toussaint Louverture”
Burke, excerpt from *Reflections on the Revolution in France*

Thursday, February 27
Shelley, “England in 1819,” “The Mask of Anarchy,” “Lines Written during the Castlereagh Administration”
Keats, “To Autumn”

❖ **Close-Reading Essay is due.**
Tuesday, March 4  
Byron, *Childe Harold* (Cantos 1-2)

Thursday, March 6  
Byron, *Childe Harold* (Cantos 3-4)

**Spring Recess (March 7-24)**

*Unit 3: History as Revolution*

Tuesday, March 25  
William Godwin, “Of History and Romance”  

Thursday, March 27  
Wordsworth, *Prelude* (Books 9-11)

Tuesday, April 1  
Peacock, “The Four Ages of Poetry”

Thursday, April 3  
Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, excerpt from *Laon and Cythna*

Tuesday, April 8  
Keats, *Hyperion*, “Ode to Psyche”

Thursday, April 10  
Keats, *Hyperion*, “The Fall of Hyperion”

❖ **Annotated Bibliography is due.**

*Unit 4: History as Artifact*

Tuesday, April 15  
Wordsworth, “Hart-Leap Well,” “Michael, A Pastoral Poem”  
Charles Lamb, “The Tombs in the Abbey”

Thursday, April 17  
Shelley, “Ozymandias”  
Keats, “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” “On Seeing the Elgin Marbles”  
Rossetti, “The Vase of Life”  
William Hazlitt, “On the Elgin Marbles”
Tuesday, April 22
    Scott, _The Lay of the Last Minstrel_
    Thomas Gray, “The Bard”

Thursday, April 24
    Scott, _The Lay of the Last Minstrel_

Tuesday, April 29
    Chatterton, “An Excelente Balade of Charitie”
    Coleridge, “Rime of the Ancient Mariner”
    Keats, “Calidore: A Fragment,” “La Belle Dame Sans Merci”
    L.E.L., “The Proud Ladye”
    Hazlitt, “Why the Arts Are Not Progressive?”

    ✤ Research Presentations

Thursday, May 1
    Coleridge, “Christabel”
    Keats, “The Eve of St. Agnes,” “Isabella; or The Pot of Basil,” “How Many Bards,” “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer”

    ✤ Research Presentations

Tuesday, May 6
    Keats, “To Autumn”
    Paul Fry, “History, Existence, and ‘To Autumn’”

    ✤ Research Presentations

Final Essay Due: May 15