Syllabus


Course Description: The second half of a two-part survey required for all English majors, English 202 surveys major British writers from the seventeenth century to the Victorian Era, seeking always to contextualize each reading, as much as possible, in the historical and cultural currents of its time. We will emphasize a variety of genres and critical approaches to the readings. Required for English majors, the course is nevertheless open to others as a liberal arts elective (NOT as a PII or Core course).

Note well: English 202 is NOT a lecture course, but rather a modified seminar. Thus, students are required to engage fully and conscientiously with the course readings, and to come to class prepared to offer critical questions and insights. You should consider yourself under contract to each of your classmates. Your presentations, journal responses, critical reactions, and questions are crucial to your and their success in the course.

Course Objectives:

1) to critically engage (in speech and in writing) and interpret, formally and informally, major canonical British literature from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century;
2) to analyze a given text within its cultural context;
3) to formulate and articulate critical theses on given textual issues;
4) to synthesize and apply secondary scholarship to your interpretation of course texts;
5) to identify, articulate, and interpret recurrent genres, themes, motifs, and theoretical issues with regard to any course text(s);
6) to synthesize, formally and informally, the major developments in British literature from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century.
7) to introduce representative British authors and texts in their cultural and historical contexts;
8) to sharpen your critical reading, writing, and thinking skills through discussion, analysis, and argumentation of issues in the readings;
9) to prompt you to reexamine your assumptions about the British literary tradition.

Required Texts:

ISBN 0-393-96150-8

Course Requirements:

As opposed to a lecture, our class will be a hybrid of lecture and seminar, with students responsible to attend, contribute, and react to the readings and to each other’s formal and informal arguments. To this end, you will need to record your responses to each of the readings, and to come to class prepared to comment and question. Because of this seminar approach, your regular attendance and conscientious preparations are crucial.

Grade Guidelines:

Each student will write two presentation papers, each one single-spaced page on given issues in the readings (30%), a midterm (30%) a final examination (30%), and each will keep a journal of informal but critically astute weekly responses to journal prompts (10%).

Presentation Papers:

Each of you will be assigned to a presentation “group” (A, B, C, or D), meaning only that the members of each group independently prepare formal papers for the same class date. These very short papers (one page, single-spaced) are to be written, presented, and then submitted for a grade, on the dates designated. Every student will write two, each addressing an audience of fellow scholars who are familiar with the readings. The brevity of the assignment dictates a bare-bones argument. In most cases, you will begin by setting forth a sharp critical position on the given issue, and follow with selected textual evidence in support of your position, and a brief conclusion. The thesis should be as pointed and controversial as your conviction allows. I will evaluate these papers for their aptness for oral presentation, as well as for the incisiveness of the analysis. Of course, all formal criteria for essays also apply.

Response Journals:

Journal entries, always due on Mondays beginning in week #2, must respond critically and thoughtfully to the journal prompt for the week, but these entries will not be graded for their formal correctness. Entries should be approximately one double-spaced, word-processed page of writing in which you engage with the given prompt critically and substantively. Be sure to bring journal responses to class; you will be asked to share them. Toward the end of term, I will assign grades, based on your apparent level of critical engagement and conscientiousness in responding to prompts.

Characterizations:

All students will be asked to volunteer to characterize assigned readings; that is, you will be responsible to 1) very briefly distill the thesis or key points of the day’s reading; 2) assert your own critical response to that thesis; 3) relate the reading to our class discussion. Be responsible to volunteer at least twice during the term. These are to
be informal and very brief synopses, intended only to provide the class with a quick point of departure for the class, along with your critical reaction.

- Please be sure to keep all drafts, peer comments, and returned work in a safe place; also, keep copies/back-up files of all formal writing and journal entries.
- By the second week of class, formally designate one of your classmates as your contact person—i.e. the person who will be responsible to supply you with any missed notes, announcements, assignments, or handouts.
- Please notify me as soon as possible about any special accommodations you require,
- Feel free to contact me with questions; take advantage of my office hours (see above).
- Ours is a Blackboard-linked course; you will need to read your Naz e-mail to keep up on course communications.

Reading / Writing Schedule

T 1/17 Introduction

R 1/19 Syllabus; John Milton (Introduction), 691-94; “On Shakespeare”; “How Soon Hath Time”; “When I Consider how My Light Is Spent”; “Methought I Saw My Late Espoused Saint” (720-22)

T 1/24 Milton, from Paradise Lost (PL), Intro. and Book I (722-742)

R 1/26 PL 2 and from Book 3 (742-777); Leonard, “Language and Knowledge in PL”*

T 1/31 PL from Books 4, 5 (777-800); Presentation A: Politics and government in heaven, hell, and Eden

R 2/2 PL 6 [summary], from Books 7, 8 (800-811); Carey, “Milton’s Satan”*

T 2/7 PL 9 (811-836)

R 2/9 PL from Book 10, 11 [summary], 12 (836-853); Presentation B: Dissent and descent in PL; Ulreich, “Argument Not Less But More Heroic: Eve as the Hero of Paradise Lost”*

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R 2/16  Swift, Intro (966-67); “A Description of a City Shower” (967-69); from Gulliver’s Travels, “A Letter from Captain Gulliver to His Cousin Sympson”; Part 1: A “A Voyage to Lilliput,” Chapter I (966-980); film TBA
T 2/21  From Gulliver’s Travels, “Part 2: A “Voyage to Brobdingnag,” Chapters 1, 2 (1012-23); “A Modest Proposal,” 1113-1119); presentation C: The grotesque body in Swift

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T 2/28  Montague, introduction and “The Lover: A Ballad”; “Epistle from Mrs. Yonge to Her Husband” (1184-87);

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R 3/2  Thomas Gray, “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” (1283); presentation D: Order, reason, and gender in Swift, Pope, and their contemporaries
T 3/7  Midterm Examination

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T 3/14  Spring Break
R 3/16

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T 3/28  Wollstonecraft, introduction; from “A Vindication of the Rights of Woman” (1403-24); Dawson, “Poetry in an Age of Revolution”*

R 3/30  Wm. Wordsworth, introduction; “Lines” “Preface to Lyrical Ballads”; “Strange fits of passion have I known” (1424-49)

T 4/4  Wm. Wordsworth, “She dwelt among the untrodden ways”; “A slumber did my spirit seal”; “Ode: Intimations of Immortality”(1449-85); presentation B: The exaltation of childhood in early Romanticism

R 4/6  Dorothy Wordsworth, introduction and from The Alfoxden Journal; from The Grasmere Journals (1556-1569) [CEA Conference]

T 4/11  Coleridge, introduction and “The Eolian Harp”; The Rime of the Ancient Mariner (1573-95) “Kubla Khan” (1596); “Frost at Midnight” (1613-14)

R 4/13  Byron, introduction (1636) and “She walks in beauty”; So, we’ll go no more a-roving”; Shelley, introduction and “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty”; “Ozymandias”; (1615); England in 1819”; “Ode to the West Wind”; “Darkness” (1640-45)

T 4/18  Keats, introduction and “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer”; from “Sleep and Poetry”; “Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art”; “Sonnet to Sleep”; “Ode to a Nightingale”; Ode on a Grecian Um” (1793-1822); presentation C: Keats’ nightingale and the limits of imagination

R 4/20  The Victorian Age, Introduction; E. B. Browning, “The Cry of the Children”; from Sonnets from the Portuguese (all) (1893-98); Tennyson, “The Lotos-Eaters”; Ulysses” (1924-1930)

T 4/25  Presentation D: Industrialization and imperialism in early Victorian poetry; Slinn, “Poetry.”*

R 4/27  Last Day of Class
Journal Prompts

Week:

2. From what you know of Milton’s life and politics, do you think it’s legitimate to read Book 1 of *PL* through our knowledge of Milton’s life and politics? Explain.

3. What constitutes the ideal marriage in *PL*? Do you see any problems or contradictions in Paradise?

4. How do you see the related issues of divine foreknowledge and free will being worked out in *PL*? How does the text distribute the blame for the Fall?

5. In moving from Milton to Swift, how would you characterize the difference in cultural sensibilities? Are Milton and Swift interested in different aspects of human experience? Explain.

6. To what extent does *GT* represent eighteenth-century English notions about the unexplored world? What sorts of cultural biases and fears can you discern?

7. Given the occasion of the work, how does mock epic suit Pope’s purposes? What epic qualities does the poem feature?

8. Based on your reading of the Norton Introduction to “The Romantic Period”; precisely how would you expect “Romantic” writing to differ from Restoration and 18th-Century literature?

9. For many readers, Blake’s poetry is idiosyncratic and anomalous in the tradition. Which issues or ideas would you identify as Blake’s central concerns? What features make his poetry distinctive?


11. What is the role of reason in Wordsworth’s and other Romantics’ work?

12. How does the female voice influence or alter the Romantic aesthetic?

13. If you were to choose, would you characterize Keats’ poetry as escapist or courageous? Explain.