EUROPEAN ROMANTICISM AND THE IDEA OF ITALY

Percy Bysshe Shelley once called Italy the “paradise of exiles,” and British Romantic-era writers such as John Keats, Mary and P.B. Shelley, Lord Byron, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge all lived in Italy as self-imposed exiles for a significant period in their lives. William Wordsworth’s reflections upon his visit to Italy during a walking tour in 1790 resulted in some of the most famous lines he ever wrote — the “crossing the Alps” lines that have become paradigmatic of the Wordsworthian sublime; Wordsworth, following Charlotte Smith, wrote hundreds of sonnets on the Petrarchan model; and both Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy studied the Italian language as adults. But what was these romantic-era writers’ investment in Italy, a culture stereotyped in Britain by the period around 1800 as violent, passionate, sexual, and typically feminine or effeminate? How has that investment been shaped by their understanding of Italian revolutionary politics, ranging from the secret rights of the Carbonari to the beginnings of the Risorgimento? To what extent was the idealization of Italy shaped by the complex issues of Catholic civil rights in Britain? How can we better understand British and Continental Romanticism — generically, culturally, ideologically — by studying the relationship of the major writers to the idea of Italy?

Course texts will include poetry, drama, novels, prose, and critical selections.

Required Texts

Course Packet. Available at: ICopy


Course Requirements

Participation – 15%

Participation and attendance at class meetings. This class requires active participation. Within the classroom, active participation involves both listening and engagement with what your classmates or I am saying as well as contributing to the conversation yourself. Because your presence is significant to a productive and valuable group dynamic, you are, of course, encouraged to attend all class meetings. Please keep in mind that more than two absences are unacceptable and will reflect negatively upon your overall course grade; more than five absences will result in automatic failure of the course.

Reading and responding to assigned texts. You are responsible for coming to class prepared to discuss all of the assigned texts listed for each class meeting. Please keep in mind that many texts, particularly (though not exclusively) poems, may often require you to read them two and even three times before you reach a working grasp of their arguments and formal complexities. I will, from time to time, assign informal homework assignments to help you interact with a text or set of texts effectively or give pop quizzes during class time. There will be times when I will randomly choose to ask you about a given text, and though there is no “right” answer in such a situation, you must be prepared to answer as best you can. If it is obvious that you have not read the text, you may be asked to leave. Also please keep in mind that part of your work, part of the discipline, of reading historical literature is to be mindful of the English language itself. Please have a pocket dictionary with you at all times during your study for this class (including both reading and writing) so that you can expand your command of English, should you encounter words you do not recognize or cannot readily define, and please familiarize yourself with the Oxford English Dictionary, which is available online to all URI students.

Active email account and access to web browser. I will communicate with you via email throughout the term and encourage open discussion in that forum. I encourage you not only to respond to me but to voice your own questions, responses, and concerns about texts via email postings, as well as to respond to one another. On the practical level, such participation will add to your in-class participation grades; on a critical level, it will enable us to enlarge the scope of our engagement with one another and the texts we will study. In order to use the Oxford English Dictionary, to access readings offered in an online format (of which there are several), and to perform research for this course, you must have access to, and be comfortable with, a web browser, so please be sure that you are or else ask for help during the first week of the semester. If you have any questions either about the technology or about library resources (both on and off line), please visit the library and ask for help immediately.

Essay Writing – 75%

*Note: All formal essays must be submitted in order to pass this class.

Essay 1: 15%  Essay 2: 15%  Essay 3: 20%  Essay 4: 25%

Please submit your formal essays on the date they are due. If you do not submit your essays on time there will be three repercussions, which include the following: a.) you will receive an F on the given essay after one week has passed proceeding a deadline; b.) you will not receive commentary back from me (only a letter grade); and c.) you will lose the privilege of revision, should that privilege be extended to the class at any time.

If you do not receive an A on either (or both) of the first two essays, then you will be required to schedule at least one session (one for each paper) with our writing consultant, Astrid Drew. Of course you are welcome to make an appointment even if you do receive A’s on these assignments; it is simply not required of you. Every student of the English language and of the discipline of English literature stands to benefit from pushing forward to further sophistication in
writing as regards argumentation & analysis, grammar/style, and format. Once the first two essays are completed, you are welcome and in fact encouraged to continue working with Astrid as you write and revise over the course of the semester. Please remember that you are always also welcome to visit me during office hours or by appointment to talk over your writing, your ideas, and your general progress in the course.

Note: I will only accept essays that are properly formatted according to MLA standards. If you fail to submit an essay that is properly formatted, I will return it to you ungraded. Up front you will then have forfeited my commentary on your essay, and after one week, the essay will receive an automatic F.

**Formal Oral Participation – 10%**

On three occasions during the semester, you will be required to come to class prepared to offer the following:

- Two study questions to help foster group discussion
- At least one passages from the text(s) in questions useful for directing discussion about each of the questions you formulated
- A close reading of each of the passages you chose that serves as a possible answer for the questions you formulated

**Disabilities in the English Classroom.** If you have a documented disability, please contact me within the first week of the semester so that we may work out reasonable accommodations to support your success in this course. You will need to follow up your request for accommodation with an official letter from Disability Services, which can also offer you resources to help ensure your success in the college environment. Contact: Disability Services for Students, Office of Student Life, 330 Memorial Union, 874-2098.

**Plagiarism.** All submitted written work must be your own; if you consult other sources (such as class readings, articles or books from the library, articles on internet databases or web sites, etc.) these sources MUST be properly documented, or you will be charged with plagiarism and receive an F on the assignment and possibly in the course as well. The required books of this course provide you with all the resources necessary to avoid plagiarism, including a text that properly explains plagiarism to you AND two texts that will ensure that you learn how to cite sources properly via MLA format. Use these resources. They will keep you safe from all charges of plagiarism and will help you to be/come the responsible, honorable student whom URI – and the world at large – expects you to be.

**Class Schedule**

**September 6:** Class introduction – What is Romanticism? What is the significance of geographical place to Romanticism?

**September 11:** Keats, “Ode to a Nightingale” [handout]; also, see Jennifer Grotz’s reading and text at [http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/poets/toc.html](http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/poets/toc.html)

**Essay 1 DUE** – Assignment: What role does the concept of place play in Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale”? (2 pp max; MLA format; no outside sources)
September 13: Keats’s *Isabella; or, the Pot of Basil* [handout] and Boccaccio’s *Decameron* (Keats’s 1620 John Florio edition, day 4, novel 5, at [http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/dweb/florio/day04.shtml](http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/dweb/florio/day04.shtml)


**October 2:** Essay 2 DUE — readings of first paragraphs in class and general discussion about writing and literary criticism

Essay 2 Assignment: What is the relation between gender and nationality in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*? (2 pp max; MLA format; no outside sources)

October 4: Class Cancelled


October 16: Madame de Stael, *Corinne, or Italy*, first half

October 18: Madame de Stael, *Corinne, or Italy*, complete novel

October 23: (mid-semester) William Wordsworth’s “On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic” [Course Packet]

Charlotte Smith sonnets:

- - - Sonnet XIII From Petrarch: “Oh! Place me where the burning noon”
- - - Sonnet XIV From Petrarch: “Loose to the wind her golden tresses stream’d”
- - - Sonnet XV From Petrarch: “Where the green leaves exclude the summer beam”
- - - Sonnet XVI From Petrarch: “Ye vales and woods! fair scenes of happier hours”
- - - Sonnet XXXIX: “To Night’
- - - Sonnet XLIV: “Written in the church-yard at Middleton in Sussex”
- - - Sonnet LVII: “To Dependence”
- - - Sonnet LXX: “On being cautioned against walking on an headland overlooking the sea, because it was frequented by a lunatic” [All in Course Packet]

October 25: Continue to study sonnets listed under October 23

October 30: Lord Byron, *Beppo* [Course Packet]
November 1: Lord Byron, *Beppo*; Daryl S. Ogden’s “Byron, Italy, and the Poetics of Liberal Imperialism”; Gioia Angeletti’s “Byron, Improvisation, and Romantic Poetics”; Celeste Langan on Venice?

November 6: **Essay 3 DUE** — readings of first paragraphs in class and general discussion about writing and literary criticism

Essay 3 Assignment (Option 1): Make an argument about the significance of the relationship between *Corinne; or Italy* and another text of your choice that we have previously read during this semester. (3 pp max; MLA format; no outside sources)

Essay 3 Assignment (Option 2): Make an argument about the significance of the relationship between Byron’s *Beppo* and another text of your choice that we have previously read during this semester. (3 pp max; MLA format; no outside sources)

November 8: Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley, “Ferdinando Eboli”

November 13: Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Cenci* [Course Packet]

November 15: Continued from November 13

November 20: Percy Bysshe Shelley, “Ode to the West Wind” [Course Packet]; “Lines Written among the Euganean Hills” [Course Packet]

November 22: Cancelled for Thanksgiving Holiday

November 27: Byron’s *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, canto the fourth, st. i-xxiv [Course Packet]

November 29: Byron’s *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, canto the fourth, st. i-xxiv, continued; Richard Lansdown’s “Byron and the Carbonari”; Giorgio Melchiori’s “The Influence of Byron’s Death on Italy”; Joseph Luzzi’s “Italy without Italians: Literary Origins of a Romantic Myth”

December 4: Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*

December 6: Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*

December 13: **Final Essay DUE**

Final Essay Assignment (Option 1): Research Paper: Topic of your choice (5-8 pp; MLA format; annotated bibliography and 2 outside sources required)

Final Essay Assignment (Option 2): Close Reading Analysis: Topic of your choice (5-8 pp; MLA format)

Please see expanded Essay 4 Paper Prompt for more information. [handout]