MA in Romantic and Sentimental Literature, 2016-17
Core Course: Romantic Texts and Contexts
Convenor: Dr Mary Fairclough

‘Few Engines can be more powerful, and at the same time more salutary in their tendency, than literature’, observed the philosopher William Godwin in 1793; and his Tory opponent, T.J. Mathias, agreed with him on this point, arguing in 1797 that ‘LITERATURE, well or ill conducted, IS THE GREAT ENGINE by which, I am fully persuaded, ALL CIVILIZED STATES must ultimately be supported or overthrown.’ In the period 1776-1832 literature was seen as the site for these new imagined world orders; it was the realm in which imagination, politics, and philosophy could converge.

This module aims to introduce you to some key voices and themes from the Romantic period. It is team-taught by scholars who specialise in the period: through our seminars we will explore some of the literary conversations, debates, hopes and disappointments which were produced by this age of revolution and innovation. Key critical reading is recommended each week to help you gain a sense of current critical thinking on core writers and themes. Students will be encouraged to read closely and think reflectively, developing their own critique of individual texts and gaining an awareness of the politics of language and genre. The module will provide an essential methodological background to the Romantic and Sentimental Literature MA course, enabling students to interrogate terms such as ‘Romantic’ and ‘sentimental’, but also offer an intellectually exciting and diverse encounter with a range of writers across many genres.

Seminars will take place from weeks 2-10 at King’s Manor room KG/07.

Seminar Programme

Week 1: various introductory meetings and events for all postgraduates

Week 2: Nature, Liberty, Slavery (Mary Fairclough)
This seminar introduces some key themes of the period. We’ll be using the Wu Romanticism anthology to look at poems by William Cowper, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Anne Yearsley, and Robert Southey and discussing nature, liberty, slavery, and genre in poetry from the 1770s to the 1790s.

Suggestions for secondary reading:
Brycchan Carey, et al., Discourses of Slavery and Abolition: Britain and its Colonies, 1760-1838 (Palgrave, 2004) This has an excellent bibliography for further primary and secondary reading.
William McCarthy, Anna Laetitia Barbauld (Johns Hopkins UP, 2009), and McCarthy and Kraft, introduction to Selected Poetry and Prose (Broadview Press, 2002)
**Week 3: Politics in the 1790s (Mary Fairclough)**

This session will look at extracts from some of the key works that defined the debate about the French Revolution. It will consider the importance of the 1790s as the time of ‘perhaps the last real discussion of the fundamentals of politics in this country’ (in Alfred Cobban’s words), and it will also think about the ways in which the literature of the Romantic period insistently returned to the language and ideas of this decade.


Suggested secondary reading:

**Week 4: Jane Austen, Sense and Sensibility (Alison O’Byrne)**

*Sense and Sensibility* was first written in the 1790s and later reworked and published in 1811. Please choose a passage for discussion in the seminar. You might like to think about: family and social status; houses; the country and the city; heroes and heroines; letters; illness; and sense and sensibility.


Secondary reading:
- Claudia Johnson, *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender, and Sensibility in the 1790s* (Chicago UP, 1995)
Week 5: Wordsworth’s Wanderers (Jim Watt)
This session will consider the prominence of marginalized, dispossessed figures in Wordsworth’s Lyrical Ballads of the late 1790s, and it will consider in particular both the nature of Wordsworth’s innovation in that collection and his representation of human suffering. Poems to be discussed include: ‘The Female Vagrant’, ‘The Thorn’, ‘The Last of the Flock’, ‘Old Man Travelling’, ‘Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman’, ‘The Brothers’, and ‘The Old Cumberland Beggar’. (Wu anthology.)

Suggestions for secondary reading:
Toby Benis, Romanticism on the Road (St Martin’s Press, 2000)
Alan Bewell, Wordsworth and the Enlightenment (Yale UP, 1989)
Mary Jacobus, Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth’s Lyrical Ballads (Clarendon, 1978)
Robin Jarvis, ‘Wordsworth and the Uses of Charity’, in Beyond Romanticism, ed Copley and Whale (Routledge, 1992)
Quentin Bailey, Wordsworth’s Vagrants: Police, Prisons and Poetry in the 1790s (Ashgate, 2011)
David Simpson, Wordsworth’s Historical Imagination (Methuen, 1987)
---- Wordsworth, Commodification, and Social Concern: The Poetics of Modernity (CUP, 2009)

Week 6: Reading week (no seminar)

Week 7: Romantic London (Alison O’Byrne)
This week’s reading will explore representations of London in Romantic period writing. London provoked many and varied responses from writers in the period: Wordsworth found himself ‘lost amid the moving pageant’ while Lamb presented himself as the quintessential Londoner, with ‘unutterable sympathies with the multitudinous moving picture.’ In the selection of poetry and periodical essays discussed in this seminar, we will consider questions about how different writers imagined and presented the relationship between the self and the city, and with it the relationship between the self and society, and consider the tensions between belonging and alienation, community and isolation presented in these accounts.

Primary reading to include:

Suggested secondary reading:
James Chandler and Kevin Gilmartin, eds., Romantic Metropolis (2005) – see especially John
Klancher’s essay
Robin Jarvis, Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel (2000)
Raymond Williams, The Country and the City (1973)
Julian Wolfreys, Writing London: The Trace of the Urban Text from Blake to Dickens (1998)

Week 8: Keats (Chloe Wigston Smith)
This session will focus in particular (although not exclusively) on Keats’s major odes and his final romances (‘Lamia’, ‘Isabella’, and ‘The Eve of St Agnes’), thinking about the distinctiveness of Keatsian poetics while also situating the poetry in its contemporary §historical and cultural contexts. (Wu anthology.)

Suggested secondary reading:
Marjorie Levinson, Keats’s Life of Allegory: The Origins of a Style (Blackwell, 1988)
Nicholas Roe, John Keats and the Culture of Dissent (Oxford UP, 1997)
---- ed., Keats and History (Cambridge UP, 1994)
Susan Wolfson, Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism (Stanford UP, 1997)

Week 9: Byron and Shelley (Jim Watt)
This session brings together many of the themes explored in the core module – liberty and slavery, revolution and disappointment, the sublime, travel and the self, satire – looking at them in relation to ideas of the role of the poet. Byron and Shelley’s friendship was important to them both, yet their poetic styles and ideas of what a poet should be were very different. Taking Shelley’s ‘Julian and Maddalo’ as a starting-point, we’ll discuss the two poets and poetry with reference to a range of their poetry, including, amongst others, Don Juan Dedication and Cantos I and II. (Wu anthology and photocopies.)

Secondary reading:
Angela Leighton, Shelley and the sublime (CUP, 1984)
Timothy Morton, Shelley and the revolution in taste (CUP, 1995)
Nigel Leask, British Romantic Writers and the East (CUP, 1992), and his essay on Shelley in Stephen Copley and John Whale, eds, Beyond Romanticism (Routledge, 1992)
Andrea Henderson, Romantic Identities (Cambridge UP, 1996)
Robert F. Gleckner, ‘From Selfish Spleen to Equanimity’: Byron’s Satires’, *Studies in Romanticism* 18 (Summer 1979), 173-205.
Jerome McGann, *Don Juan in Context* (John Murray, 1976)
-------- *Byron and Romanticism* (Cambridge UP, 2002)
Claude Rawson, *Satire and Sentiment 1660-1830* (1994), chapter 4

**Week 10: Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (Mary Fairclough)**
In this section we will use the 1818 edition of *Frankenstein* (OUP, Penguin Classics, or Broadview Press edition) in order to look back over the key themes and preoccupations of the module. We will think about the Shelley’s use of the discourses of gothic, scientific and travel writing, and the lyric, political and even satiric effects of the novel’s multiple narrative voices.

Suggested secondary reading:
Anna E. Clark, ‘Frankenstein; or, the Modern Protagonist’ *ELH* 81(1) 2014: 245-268.
Christa Knellwolf and Jane Goodall eds., *Frankenstein's Science: Experimentation and Discovery in Romantic Culture, 1780–1830* (Ashgate, 2008).