Romanticism and Contemporary Culture

What is Romanticism and did it come to an end on or around 1832? Or is Romanticism not merely a discrete historical period in literary and cultural history but a set of motifs or themes or ideas that remain as vital to certain strains of contemporary culture as they were in early nineteenth-century Britain? In this seminar, we will address these questions and the various literary and cultural issues that arise from them. We will have two principal objectives: a careful examination of some defining texts of British Romanticism and a critical reflection on the ways in which some important strains of contemporary culture are continuations or reVisitations of what we call Romanticism.

Assignments and Policies Students will write three brief (2-page max) close readings of an assigned text (10% each), a take-home final essay-exam (30%), and a final critical project that includes a five-minute preliminary presentation (30% project, 10% presentation). Attendance in this seminar is mandatory. Students are expected to arrive on time having read or viewed all assigned texts. Students who miss five classes for any reason will lose one full letter from the final course grade. This is a wireless seminar: please refrain from using any electronic devices during seminar sessions.

Texts Norton Critical Editions of Frankenstein and Wuthering Heights are available at the UO bookstore. Otherwise, assigned literary and critical texts will be uploaded to the seminar’s Blackboard site. Students will be expected to view films and access songs on their own prior to the class meeting.
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Schedule of Readings and Assignments


1. Romantic Artists, Dead or Dying

27 Sept: “drunk the milk of Paradise”

2 Oct: Bigmouth Strikes Again

4 Oct: All Apologies: The Aura of Painful Regret

9 Oct: The Agency of Dead Men
Jarmusch, Dead Man, Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Nirvana, “Frances Farmer Will Have Her Revenge on Seattle,” “Heart-Shaped Box”
first two-page paper due

2. Lyricizing Ballads: Experimentation and the Popular

11 Oct: Strange, those fits of passion

16 Oct: Rhymes and Ballads
3. Aesthetic Experience: Beauty and the Sublime

18 Oct: “A Sight to Behold”
Devendra Banhart, “A Sight to Behold,” Cat Power, “Nude as the News”

23 Oct: The Truth of Beauty
Radiohead, “Reckoner,” second two-page paper due

25 Oct: The Might of the Sublime

4. The Constellations of a Clandestine History

30 Oct: Tower of Song

1 Nov: Unacknowledged Legislators
Shelley, “A Defense of Poetry,” “England in 1819,” “Ode to the West Wind”


5. Romanticism’s Critique of Romanticism

8 Nov: Love Will Tear Us Apart Again (Part One)
Mary Shelley, Frankenstein

13 Nov: Frankenstein, Ridley Scott, Blade Runner

15 Nov: Love Will Tear Us Apart Again (Part Two)
Emily Bronte, Wuthering Heights

20 Nov: Wuthering Heights final essay-exam due
22 Nov: Thanksgiving Holiday

27 Nov: Project Presentations
29 Nov: Project Presentations

7 Dec: Final Project due