This course will be a sustained examination of the question: “What is Romanticism? This is a question which has no single or ultimate answer given that there seem to be as many answers as there “askers.” There is, however, a rich and complex body of literature and critical commentary to which we assign the adjective “Romantic.” I’ve organized our readings of some of the principal writers of the period thematically rather than chronologically. I believe this offers us a better way to explore in a single term the conceptual issues posed by these texts and their resonance in subsequent periods. Our principal project will be the close reading and discussion of some of the most important and influential texts within that “tradition,” from William Blake through Emily Bronte. We will consider the various historical, biographical, philosophical, political, and aesthetic contexts of British Romantic literature, but our primary focus will be on the texts themselves and on the theoretical and cultural responses to Romanticism.

Assignments Students will complete three writing assignments and a final project: one two-page single-spaced assignment (15%), two three-page single spaced assignments (25% each), and a take-home final exam project due Thursday, March 23rd (30%). The final 5% will be assessed for class participation and, if necessary, periodic in-class quizzes.

Attendance Mandatory. On the sixth absence (for any reason), a student will without warning lose one full letter from the final course grade. Discussion is crucial to the course. I expect students to come to class having read the assigned reading and prepared to participate in discussion. Please refrain from using mobile devices during class.

Text The Ninth edition of the Norton devoted to English Romanticism (Volume D) and the Norton critical editions of Frankenstein and Wuthering Heights. A few “unanthologized” poems and the other relevant critical, theoretical, and cultural texts will be uploaded to our canvas site.
ENG 454: English Romantic Writers:
What is Romanticism?
Schedule of Readings and Assignments

I. The Innocence Project
Jan 10: Introduction. William Blake, from Songs of Innocence (112-125)
Jan 12: Blake, from Songs of Innocence (112-125)


II. The Art Project
Jan 19: Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (148-158) first writing assignment due

Jan 24: Wordsworth, Preface to Lyrical Ballads (292-304)

Jan 31: Wordsworth, from The Prelude, Books Sixth, Eleventh, Thirteenth (384-388, 395-402)


III. Life + Love = Loss


Feb 28: Emily Bronte, Wuthering Heights

IV. “Heaven Knows I’m Miserable Now”
Mar 7: Blake, from Songs of Experience (125-135) third writing assignment due
Mar 9: Byron, from Childe Harold’s Pilgrimmage (620-638). Mario Praz, from The Romantic Agony (canvas)

Mar 14: Mary Shelley, Frankenstein
Mar 23: Final Exam Project Due