

English 433 (W)

Studies in 19th Century Literature: Shelley, Byron, Italy, and Romanticism

This will be a course on European Romanticism that uses as its focus the travels and residence in Italy of two major English Romantic poets, Percy Bysshe Shelley and George Gordon, Lord Byron. The writings of Byron and Shelley will comprise approximately half of the course reading. The rest will include major works by two Italian contemporaries, Alessandro Manzoni and Giacomo Leopardi, as well as an anthology of travel writing by English visitors to Italy and a highly popular English novel of the period set in an exotic, extravagant, quite imaginary version of Italy.

Both Shelley and Byron were forced into exile from England by social scandal (the suicide of Shelley's first wife, and rumors of incest exacerbating Byron's already notorious reputation for sexual misconduct) in the years just after the end of the Napoleonic wars. They became friends in Switzerland (forming what a contemporary reviewer called the "Satanic school" of poetics). Both eventually settled in Italy, and both produced their most important work there. Both left behind striking documents of their intellectual friendship, as well as of their vigorous disagreement about many matters poetic, political, religious, and philosophic. Finally, both responded profoundly, and in profoundly different ways, to Italy's culture, landscape, and history. Studying the writings produced by Shelley and Byron in and about Italy brings one into contact with a great many of the major literary, political, and philosophical problems that surround the study of English and European Romanticism.

We will supplement the dialogue between Byron and Shelley by exploring some of its English context in other writers' responses to Italy, both as an imaginary site, in Anne Radcliffe's *The Italian*, and as a real one, in other travelers' descriptions of and responses to Italy during this period. We will also place Shelley and Byron's dialogue into its European context by comparing their Romanticism to what we find in the writing of two major Italian contemporaries, Alessandro Manzoni and Giacomo Leopardi. Thus the diversity and complexity of the course material is

- generic: including lyric poetry, satire, tragedy, the historical novel, romance, "closet drama," travel writing, and personal correspondence;
- historical: important contexts include the grand tour and tourism; nationalism and cosmopolitanism; enlightenment philosophy and democratic politics;
- biographical: issues include sexuality, exile, and political commitment;
- cultural: including the Gothic revival; the aesthetics of the sublime and the picturesque; the debate between classicism and modernity;
- and thematic: pessimism and optimism, freedom and determinism, transgression and transcendence.

Course goals, contact hours, and prerequisites: The substance of the course is intended to give students a broad-ranging understanding of the complex historical and literary topics involved in an advanced study of European Romanticism, as well as a more focused exposure to the real and symbolic significance of Italy in that context.

Skill-oriented course goals include learning to make analytical and critical connections among the various texts the course puts into play; to conduct literary and cultural analysis in dialogue with theoretical and historical materials; and to write clear, coherent, and complex analytical and argumentative prose. Three credits, three contact hours per week. Prerequisite: Two English DL courses or consent. Eng 433 has a W designation and also fulfills a DL requirement in the UHM Gen Ed core.

Syllabus. The syllabus is organized in four parts.

1) The Gothic and the Sublime:

- 1: introduction to the course: Shelley, "Mont Blanc"; Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto 3
- 2: Byron, *Manfred*; Radcliffe, *The Italian*; FGB (*The Fatal Gift of Beauty*, an anthology of English writers' accounts of travels in Italy), selections on the Alps
- 3: Radcliffe, *The Italian*; FGB selections on the perils of travel
- 4: Shelley, *The Cenci*; Radcliffe, *The Italian*; FGB selections on Rome

The course begins with the poetry Shelley and Byron wrote when they toured in the Alps together in 1816, both of them invoking the aesthetics of the sublime in their response to the mountains, but drawing markedly different philosophical conclusions from the experience. The readings in the next three weeks explore the connection between the aesthetics of the sublime and the Gothic fascination with transgression, a topic heavily associated with Italy, and more specifically with Italian Catholicism, in the narratives of Radcliffe, Byron, and Shelley.

2) Urbanity, Aristocracy, and Satire:

- 5: Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto 4; Shelley, *Julian and Maddalo*
- 6: Byron, *Beppo*, FGB selections on Venice
- 7-8: Byron, *Don Juan*, Cantos 1-2; letters from Venice and Ravenna; Shelley, "Letter to Maria Gisborne"

The second section of the course begins with Byron's account of his journey into Italy and Venice, which we read alongside Shelley's poetic narrative of a philosophical debate between himself and Byron on a horseback ride outside Venice. The next three weeks concentrate mostly on Byron's two great satirical works written in Venice.

3) Revolutionary Nationalism:

- 9-12: Manzoni, *The Betrothed*; readings on nationalism, Romantic Hellenism, Byron and the Greek revolution; selections from *Don Juan*, 3-4; Shelley, "Ode to Liberty," *Hellas*

The first order of business in this section of the course is the reading of Manzoni's historical novel; second, we will be reading selections from Byron and Shelley so that we can relate and compare their understanding of Italian politics and of nationalism to Manzoni's; third, we will read some short accounts of and responses to Byron's death in the fight for Greek national independence. I will be supplementing the literary texts with some historical and critical reading, for instance the relevant chapters from the *Cambridge Companion to English Romanticism*.

4) Romantic Nature:

13: Shelley, "Ode to the West Wind," "Lines Written among the Euganean Hills," the late lyrics

14-15: Leopardi, *Poems* (in facing translation by Arturo Vivante), especially "L'infinito" ("The infinite"), "La quieta dopo la tempesta" ("The quiet after the storm"), "Il sabato del villaggio" ("The village Saturday"), and "La ginestra o il fiore del deserto" ("The broom or the flower of the desert").

The last section of the course will concentrate entirely on lyric poetry written in meditative response to landscape, a type of poem sometimes said to be the major poetic mode of European Romanticism as a whole.

Assignments and Grades: Students will write two short papers and one longer one for a total of at least sixteen pages of formal writing. The longer paper will require some research and some integration of critical or historical materials with analysis of the course texts. Short reaction papers, responses to the reading, position statements, and oral presentations on historical topics will be a regular part of the weekly class discussions. Grades will be based on the papers and class participation (including oral presentations, etc.) in these proportions: short papers, 12.5 % each; long paper 37.5%; class participation 37.5%.