

Lecture:

The Romantic Period

(= Survey British Literature and Culture, part 3)

TUE 10-12 // Philosophiegebäude, H 4



Henry Fuseli, *The Nightmare* (c. 1782).¹

Focussing on the British Isles, the lecture will offer an *advanced introduction* to the literature, culture and intellectual history of the Romantic period. We will thus investigate the crucial decades around 1800, during which an older aristocratic and agrarian order finally gave way to the onslaughts of the bourgeoisie, of industrialization, and of new ideas about the place of humankind in the world.

Giving due attention to *cultural, social and economic contexts*, we will be particularly interested in the question of how *literary texts* contributed or responded to these dramatic developments.

The lecture is part of the lecture series “Survey British Literature and Culture” and will pick up from Prof. Bettinger’s last contribution to the series, “The Long 18th Century” (winter term 22/23). (However, it is not necessary to have attended the former lecture in order to participate in the current one.)

Preparatory reading:

In their general preparation for the lecture (i.e. *before the first meeting*), all participants are expected to read at least the following sections from Peter J. Kitson’s chapter on “The Romantic Period” in *English Literature in Context*, ed. Paul Poplawski, 2nd ed. (Cambridge UP, 2017): “Historical Overview”

¹ Cf. Kitson 298: “One of the most influential paintings of the Romantic period, Henry Fuseli’s *The Nightmare* caused a sensation on its first showing at the Royal Academy of Arts in 1782. Fuseli’s powerfully disturbing canvas explores such Gothic themes as the supernatural, sexual repression, dreaming and the use of narcotics.”

(279-293) and “Literary Overview” (293-313). These texts are available on WueCampus. It is recommended that participants also read at least some of the literary texts mentioned by Kitson or listed below (see ‘PROGRAMME’ and ‘READING SUGGESTIONS’) even before the first meeting of the course.

Accompanying reading and discussion course (Übung: Begleitveranstaltung zur Vorlesung)

The lecture is accompanied by a separate reading and discussion course (Übung: Begleitveranstaltung zur Vorlesung). This course offers opportunities for coming to grips with as well as for delving deeper into the topic. It takes place after the lecture (i.e., TUE 12-14, in room Ü 10). Participation in the additional course is recommended but not mandatory.

PROGRAMME:

Please read the literary and scholarly texts listed in the programme in preparation for the respective meetings. These texts are also required reading for the final test.

25/04 **Introduction**

- Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Kubla Khan" (1797/1816). → I suggest using the free online version provided on the *Poetry Foundation* website [\[LINK\]](#).

02/05 “Among these dark Satanic Mills”:

Blake and the world of the Industrial Revolution

- From William Blake’s *Songs of Experience* (1794): “The Chimney Sweeper” [\[LINK\]](#) and “London” [\[LINK\]](#).
- From William Blake’s *Milton* (1804-10): “And did those feet in ancient time (Jerusalem)” [\[LINK\]](#).
- Peter J. Kitson, “The Romantic Period,” *English Literature in Context* (see above) – reread especially the first section (= pp. 279-284).

09/05 “The master-theme of the epoch”:

Political reactions and literary responses to the French Revolution

- William Blake, “The Tyger” (1790-92) [\[LINK\]](#).
- David Duff, “From Revolution to Romanticism: The Historical Context to 1800,” *A Companion to Romanticism*, ed. Duncan Wu (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999) 25-37. [Accessible online through WUB.] – Note the various primary texts mentioned by Duff.

16/05 “Rule Britannia”:

‘Britishness,’ imperialism, and slavery

- Phillis Wheatley, “On Being Brought from Africa to America” (1773) [\[LINK\]](#).
- Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Or Gustavus Vassa, The African* (1789). → The text of the book can be retrieved from *Literature Online* and various other sources. Please browse the book and read extracts of your own choice.

23/05 “The spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”:

Romantic conceptions of literature and poetry

- William Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800/1802) [\[LINK\]](#).

[30/05 No lecture (‘Pentecost Tuesday’)]

06/06 Ruralism, social critique and supernaturalism:

Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*

→ From *Lyrical Ballads* (1798/1800):

- William Wordsworth, “Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour; July 13, 1798” [\[LINK\]](#).
- Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” [\[LINK\]](#).

13/06 Critiquing the “modern Prometheus”:

Female perspectives and the Gothic

- Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818). → Please browse the novel and read as much of it as you are able to manage; basically any reliable print or online version will do.

20/06 “I want a hero”:

Byron, Orientalism, and the Greek Revolution

- Byron, *Don Juan* (1819-24). → Please read at least Byron’s Dedication of the poem [\[LINK\]](#).

27/06 “Beauty is truth”:

Shelley and Keats

- Percy Bysshe Shelley, “Mont Blanc” (1816/17) [\[LINK\]](#).
- John Keats, “Ode on a Grecian Urn” (1819/20) [\[LINK\]](#).

04/07 “Can it be that such raptures meet decay?”

Britain and British poetry in the 1820s & 1830s

- Felicia Dorothea Hemans, “The Homes of England” (1828) [\[LINK\]](#).
- John Clare, “Remembrances” (1832/1908) [file on WueCampus].

11/07 **Conclusion**

18/07, 14-16: **Final test** (Please note the different time slot! Room TBA.)

READING SUGGESTIONS:

Apart from preparing the literary and scholarly texts listed in the lecture programme, it is suggested that participants also do as much self-directed reading as possible. Here are some suggestions:

a) Romantic texts ('primary' texts):

A good open-access resource for finding and reading poetry is always the **Poetry Foundation website** [\[LINK\]](#).

A more scholarly aid for locating literary texts and respective criticism online is the vast **Literature Online database**. It can be accessed online through the university's intranet [\[LINK\]](#). Whenever this is feasible, participants are asked to bring printouts of poems and other literary texts to be discussed.

b) Texts on Romanticism (basic 'secondary' texts):

Peter J. Kitson's section on "The Romantic Period" in *English Literature in Context* – ed. Paul Poplawski, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2017) 274-363 – offers a highly readable and useful basic introduction to both Romantic literature and its historical contexts. In preparation for the lecture (i.e. before the first meeting), all participants should have read at least the following two sections from Kitson's text: **"Historical Overview" (279-293) and "Literary Overview" (293-313)**. These texts are available on the WueCampus site for the lecture.

A particularly useful and exhaustive handbook of Romanticism is **Duncan Wu, ed., *A Companion to Romanticism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999)**. The entire book is accessible online through the website and catalogue of the university library. As an introduction to the lecture, the following two entries in this handbook are particularly recommended:

- Seamus Perry, "Romanticism: The Brief History of a Concept" (3-11);
- David Duff, "From Revolution to Romanticism: The Historical Context to 1800" (25-37).

Michael Ferber's *Romanticism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010), provides a concise and student-oriented general introduction to 'Romanticism' from a *transnational* perspective.

For a good guide to 'reading' or 'dealing with' individual Romantic poems, see **Fiona Stafford's *Reading Romantic Poetry* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012)**, which is accessible online through the website and catalogue of the university library.

Also accessible online is the more research-oriented ***Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, ed. Stuart Curran**, 2nd ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

A good introduction in German is **Rolf Breuer's *Englische Romantik: Literatur und Kultur 1760-1830* (München: Fink / UTB, 2012)**.

For an introduction to the social history of the period, please see **James Vernon, *Modern Britain: 1750 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2017)**, which constitutes vol. 4 of *The Cambridge History of Britain*. The relevant section is part I: "1750-1819: The Ends of the Ancien Regime" (1-109).