

LT370 WHAT WAS ROMANTICISM?

Seminar Leader: Dr. Christian A. Wollin
Course Times: Monday and Wednesday, 15:45-17:15
Room: t.b.a
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Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description

Romanticism is rarely mentioned in intellectual or cultural discourse today except when it is a direct object of study. Yet as a European movement stretching from the 1790s to the mid-1850s, it had a decisive and far-reaching influence on aesthetic forms, ideas about art and the artist, and even on modes of thought and feeling. The tropes of Romanticism permeate our assumptions about creativity and taste, even when we are not aware of their influence. Equally, the kinds of narrative, image or concept generated by Romantic poetry, theory, or experiments in the novel often resurface in contemporary popular entertainment. By exploring central texts and dialogues of Romanticism, this course seeks to recapture the deep sense of rupture that originally marked the emergence of this complex and wide-ranging movement. We will examine and compare works across the genres of poetry, narrative prose, epistolary writing, and non-fiction by British, German, French, and Russian authors: Anna Barbaud, William Blake, George Gordon Byron, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Keats, Thomas De Quincey, Letitia Elizabeth Landon, Mary and Percy Bysshe Shelley, Dorothy and William Wordsworth, Bettina and Achim von Arnim, Clemens Brentano, Friedrich Hölderlin, Heinrich von Kleist, Rahel Levin Varnhagen, Novalis, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Friedrich Schlegel, Ludwig Tieck, Heinrich Wackenroder, François-René de Chateaubriand, Louise Colet, Olympe de Gouges, Victor Hugo, Gérard de Nerval, Germaine de Staël, Mikhail Lermontov, and Alexander Pushkin. We will also consider paradigms of Romantic classical music and visual art. Lastly, we address critiques of Romanticism – in philosophy (Hegel, Nietzsche), and in the aesthetics and poetics of Modernism (Charles Baudelaire, T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf).

Requirements

Students are required to carefully read the assigned texts, bring the assigned readings and writing materials to class, and contribute productively to seminar discussions in a respectful manner. Moreover, students are required to take part in off-campus excursions, which may require allowing extra time for travel to and from the BCB campus.

Reading materials will be made available on Google Classroom prior to classes dedicated to the texts and subjects.

Lack of preparation will affect the final grade, as will repeated and/or significant lateness.

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Accommodations

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, (accommodations@berlin.bard.edu) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement.

If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the [Bard College Berlin Accessibility page](#). Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker (j.harker@berlin.bard.edu) or Maria Anderson-Long (m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu).

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

Bard College Berlin may not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Assessment and Assignments

Class presentations: Students will sign up to present one of the seminar's assigned readings. In your 15-minute presentation, you will introduce the chosen text to the seminar group by examining a key section of it and/or by situating the text within the historical and sociocultural moment to which it responded.

You are encouraged to write your midterm or final essays on the text that you present on. In this way, your essay can further explore the insights and questions that emerged from your presentation and the seminar discussion that follows it.

Writing Assignments: Students will write two essays. The midterm essay, counting 2000 words, will be focused on one text studied in the seminar. The final essay, counting 3000 words, will consist of a comparative analysis of two texts studied in the seminar.

The midterm essay is due on **October 19, 23:59**. For graduating students, the final essay is due on **November 27, 23:59**. For non-graduating students, the final essay is due on **December 16, 23:59**. All essays must be submitted to the seminar leader via Google Classroom.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students will receive feedback for their course work during and at the end of the semester. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Grade Breakdown

Participation 30% (15% for weeks 1-7 and 15% for weeks 8-14)
One In-Class Presentation (Text Introduction): 15%
Midterm Essay (ca. 2000 words): 25%
Final Essay (ca. 3000 words): 30%

Schedule

The schedule and syllabus are subject to change. Once the semester has started, please consult Google Classroom for the current schedule as the syllabus on the website may be outdated.

Week 1 – Introduction: Romantic Manifestoes

August 31

Novalis, Fragment 105 from "Prolegomena 1798"

Friedrich Schlegel, Fragment 116 from "Athenaeum" (1798)

September 2

William Wordsworth, "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" (1800/1802 – excerpts)

Germaine de Staël, "On Germany" (excerpt – 1810/1813)

Week 2 – Romantic Temporalities

September 7

Friedrich Hölderlin, letter to Carl Gock, September 1793, and to Johann Gottfried Ebel, January 10, 1797 (excerpts)

Friedrich Schlegel, *Fragments* (1790s)

September 9

François-René de Chateaubriand, "The Genius of Christianity" (excerpts – 1795-1799)

Victor Hugo, "Notre Dame de Paris" (1831 – excerpt)

Week 3 – The Authority of the Romantic Poet I: "The Egotistical Sublime" and the Power of Imagination

September 14

Novalis, *Fragments* (1790s-1800s)

Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry" (excerpts – 1821)

September 16

Rahel Levin Varnhagen, letter to Friedrich von Gentz, December 27-28, 1827 (excerpts)

Mikhail Lermontov, "No, I am not Byron" (1832)

Alexander Pushkin, "I have raised a monument not made by hands" (1836)

Week 4 – The Authority of the Romantic Poet II: The Vagaries of Finitude

September 21

Percy Bysshe Shelley, "To Wordsworth" (1815) and "Ode to the West Wind" (1819)

September 23

John Keats, letters to George and Tom Keats, 21 December 1817, and to Richard Woodhouse, 27 October 1818 (excerpts)

Letitia Elizabeth Landon, "Sappho's Song" (1824)

Mikhail Lermontov, "The Poet's Death" (1837)

Week 5 – Romantic Gender

September 28

Olympe de Gouges, "Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen" (excerpts – 1791)

Anna Barbauld, "The Rights of Woman" (1795)

September 30

Rahel Levin Varnhagen, "Rahel. A Book of Remembrance for her Friends" (1834 – excerpts)

Louise Colet, "Woman. Second Narrative: The Servants" (1856 – excerpt)

Week 6 – Romantic Politics

October 5

William Blake, "Songs of Innocence and Experience" (excerpts – 1789-1793)

Bettina von Arnim, "This Book Belongs to the King" (excerpts – 1843)

October 7

Alexander Pushkin, "The Bronze Horseman" (excerpts – 1833)

Week 7 – Romantic Arts, Genres, and Media between Language, Text, Image, and Music

October 12

Ludwig Tieck and Heinrich Wackenroder, "Innermost Outpourings of an Art-Loving Monk" (excerpt – 1797)

Achim von Arnim, Clemens Brentano, and Heinrich von Kleist, "Different Sensations before a Seascape by Friedrich, on which a Capucine Monk [is depicted]" (1810)

October 14

E. T. A. Hoffmann, "Kreisleriana" (excerpt – 1814/1815)

Charles Baudelaire, "The Salon of 1846" (excerpts – 1846)

MIDTERM ESSAY DUE ON OCTOBER 19, 23:59

FALL BREAK (no classes from October 19-25)

Week 8 – Romantic Sympoiesis

October 26

Guest Seminar Contribution

Benjamin Hochman (Bard College Berlin): "The Inner Voice"

October 28

A Romantic Salon (Of Sorts)

Week 9 – Romantic Orientalism

November 2

George Gordon Byron, "The Giaour. A Fragment of a Turkish Tale" (1813 – excerpt)

Thomas De Quincey, "Confessions of an English Opium-Eater" (1821 – excerpt)

November 4

Alexander Pushkin, "The Moor of Peter the Great" (1827/1828 – excerpts)

Week 10 – Romantic Nature

November 9

Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Mont Blanc. Lines written in the Vale of Chamouni" (1816)

Bettina von Arnim, "Günderode" (excerpt – 1840)

November 11

Dorothy Wordsworth, The Grasmere Journals (1800s – excerpts) and "A Sketch" (1826)

John Clare, "The Badger" (1835-1837)

Week 11 – Excursion: Romantic Visual Art at Berlin's Alte Nationalgalerie

November 18 (no class on November 16)

Week 12 – The Romantic Unconscious

November 23

Novalis, "Hymns to Night" (1800 – excerpts)

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "The Pains of Sleep" (1803)

November 25

Gérard de Nerval, "Aurelia or the Dream and Life" (excerpts – 1855)

FINAL ESSAY DUE ON NOVEMBER 27, 23:59, FOR GRADUATING STUDENTS

Week 13 – The Critical Self-Reflection of Romanticism

November 30

Mary Shelley, "Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus" (excerpts – 1818)

December 2

Thomas De Quincey, "Confessions of an English Opium Eater" (excerpts – 1821)

Week 14 – Critical Legacies of Romanticism

December 7

Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel, "Lectures on Aesthetics" (excerpts – 1835-1842)

Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Gay Science" (1882), § 370, and "Nietzsche contra Wagner" (excerpt – 1888)

December 9

T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919 – excerpts)

Virginia Woolf, "Dorothy Wordsworth" (1935)

FINAL ESSAY DUE ON DECEMBER 16, 23:59, FOR ALL NON-GRADUATING STUDENTS

The Fall semester runs from Monday, August 31 and runs until Friday, December 18, with the Fall break planned from Monday, October 19, - Sunday, October 25, 2026.

- Normal course sessions end on Friday, December 11.
- Completion week is from Monday, December 14 through Friday, December 18.
- Make-up classes can take place in completion week.
- Students are required to be on campus during completion week.

Scheduled class times will be available online under the relevant course heading:

[BCB Fall Semester 2026 Course Search Page](#)

Essay Deadlines

The midterm essay is due on October 19, 23:59. For graduating students, the final essay is due on November 27, 23:59. For non-graduating students, the final essay is due on December 16, 23:59. All essays must be submitted to the seminar leader via Google Classroom.

Grades Submission

Final grades for graduating students will be submitted to the BCB Registrar on December 11, 2026 by noon.

Final grades for all students will be submitted to the BCB Registrar on Jan 1, 2027.

Library and Book Purchase Policies

All reading materials will be made available via Google Classroom.