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## ENGL 260-01, British Literature Since 1800, Spring 2003

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English 261, Spring 2003  
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### **British Literature Since 1800**

This is a course in the literary history of the last two centuries. However, when I say this, I am using the term “literary history” in a double way. First and most simply, the course is a “literary history” in that it provides a brief chronicle of what people in Britain wrote over the course of the last two hundred years. It’s a history of the literature. But in a more broad and far-reaching way, the course also gives us a look at the entire history of the last two hundred years – the changing cultures of England, Scotland, and Ireland, their economics, philosophy, politics, and daily life-- through the lens of their books and magazines. In this way, the course presents history *through* literature.

What I’m suggesting here is that our work in this class will not be confined to analyzing the literary techniques of each generation of writers back to the year 1800. We will certainly look at the question of technique or style and how it has evolved. But we will also be looking at the evolving interests and concerns of the societies that read these works, talked about them, and took them to heart.

#### **Course Materials**

David Damrosch, ed. – *The Longman Anthology of British Literature, Vols. 2A, 2B, & 2C*  
Charlotte Bronte – *Jane Eyre* (Bedford Edition, ed. Beth Newman)  
Patrick McCabe – *The Butcher Boy*

#### **Course Requirements**

**Readings:** Readings are due to be read by the day they are listed on the syllabus. You may work ahead, and I will suggest you do so on days when I've had to schedule a longer assignment on a Thursday--something I have generally tried to avoid.

To prepare the reading for this class, think of yourself as an active participant in and respondent to the material you're looking at. Don't simply try to absorb the information on the page in front of you, as if you were a mechanical scanner loading data. Indulge your reactions. Get angry. Talk back. Agree or disagree enthusiastically. Raise questions. Make some note of these reactions and come to class prepared to say something about them.

**Discussions in Class:** My goal in class discussion is always to avoid the situation where the same 2 or 3 people talk all the time and everyone else is silent. This is quite intolerable. If you get in the habit of reading *actively*, as I've urged you to do above, then we'll be assured of interesting and diverse conversations. My expectation is that every member of the class will speak or ask a question every day. If you're not talking regularly, do expect to be (gently and without a huge amount of pressure) called on in class for your reactions to a reading.

**In-Class Workshops:** On occasion we will spend time discussing papers written by members of the class. These will be photocopied, and the name of the author will be removed. For these sessions to be useful, you have to be willing to say what you really think about a paper. This does not mean “slamming” it for the sake of making yourself feel superior, but in an honest

way pointing out what you think is interesting or successful in a paper, and what needs more attention, and why. We'll discuss guidelines for these sessions.

**Presentations:** I'll be asking each of you to choose one assigned reading and make a short presentation on it in class. The goal of your presentation should be to focus us on what, in your reading of the text, are its most important features and ideas, and to make connections--if you see any--to other texts we've read. You can do this by raising questions, or by asking the rest of us to react or respond to your sense of a given quotation. I do ask that you focus our attention on specific passages from the text, but you should think of yourself as opening a conversation, rather than delivering a lecture. The most effective presentations can often start with something like, "I'm really confused about this thing, but here's my reaction to it right now . . . what did everyone else think?"

**Writing Assignments:** All writing needs to be non-fiction, computer-printed or typed, double-spaced, grammatically correct, and carefully proofread.

When grading your essays, I will be looking for two things, both of which are of equal importance. First, I will be concerned with your ability to provide detailed close readings of quoted passages from the poetry or prose texts you're working with. A "close reading" is the building-block skill of all literary analysis, and it involves a detailed examination of the *form* of the language in a given passage in order to arrive at that passage's meaning. In other words, you derive your interpretation of a given text from your observations about how the writer has crafted it.

Second, I will be looking at the way you discuss the ideas in a given text. Most simply, do you agree or disagree with the themes or arguments you see this author proposing? Is, for example, Tennyson's view of technological progress in "Locksley Hall" good or bad in your estimation? But even more important, is Tennyson's view typical? Has it influenced the way later generations--including our own--have understood or thought about the meaning of technology? The best essays of literary criticism combine discussion of broad questions like this with close and detailed examination of quotations.

I will provide a handout on the standards for excellent essays in literature classes, but if you have questions about grading standards I urge you to raise them in class or in office hours.

**Grades:**

|                                |     |
|--------------------------------|-----|
| Essay I                        | 10% |
| Essay II                       | 30% |
| Essay III                      | 15% |
| Essay IV                       | 35% |
| Presentation and Work in class | 10% |

**Late work:**

Late papers will lose one third of a grade for each day late. (E.G. an "A" paper turned in 1 day late becomes an A-.) If I need to return a paper to you for proofreading, I'll consider it late until it's corrected and turned in again.

Ungraded drafts turned in late will not receive comments.

**One Final Note:** I have not scheduled a final exam for this course, but I do reserve the right to add one if it seems like people aren't doing the reading.

**Schedule of Readings and Papers \***

1/21 **Godwin:** from *Political Justice*; **Blake:** All *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, esp. Both "Chimney Sweeper" poems (pp 122 & 130), "London"  
 1/23 "The Romantics" pp 2-15  
**W. Wordsworth:** "Simon Lee," "The Thorn" and "Note to 'The Thorn,'" "Expostulation and Reply," "Tables Turned"  
**Friday 1/24: Draft of Essay I (1-2 pages, ungraded). Due at Palmer 305 by Noon**

1/28 **W. Wordsworth:** "Tintern Abbey" and Preface to *LB*  
 1/30 **P. Shelley:** "To a Skylark" and "Defense of Poetry"

2/4 Workshop of Selected Drafts. Reading TBA  
 2/6 **Byron:** *Don Juan* Canto I, Letter to Murray, Aug 12 1819; Letter to Kinnaird, Oct 26 1818 [1819]  
**Friday 2/7: Final Revision of Essay I. Due at Palmer 305 by noon.**

2/11 **Keats:** "The Eve of St. Agnes"  
 2/13 **Perspectives: Industrial Landscape** - Kemble, Parliamentary Papers, Engels, Mayhew (begins p 1047); **Dickens:** "Walk in the Workhouse" (p 1405); **Ruskin:** "The Nature of Gothic"

2/18 "The Victorian Age" pp 108-118; **Tennyson:** "Lady of Shallot," "Locksley Hall"  
 2/20 **Perspectives: Victorian Ladies and Gentlemen.** Ellis, Bronte, Bronte, Newman, Norton, Victoria. **Elizabeth Barrett Browning:** "A Year's Spinning"  
**Friday 2/21: Essay II (6 pages). Due at Palmer 305 by noon.**

2/25 **Bronte:** *Jane Eyre*  
 2/27 **Bronte:** *Jane Eyre*

3/4 **Bronte:** *Jane Eyre*  
 3/6 Critical Approaches to Bronte (TBA)

3/11 & 3/13 Spring Break

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\* Expect some changes and substitutions.

3/18 **Christina Rossetti:** "In an Artist's Studio," "Goblin Market," "An Apple-Gathering"

3/20 **No Class: Bigelow speaking out of town.**

**Monday 3/24: Draft of Essay III (1-2 pages, ungraded). Due at Palmer 305 by Noon**

3/25 "The Twentieth Century" pp 1991-1999; **Tennyson:** "Higher Pantheism";

**Swinburne:** "Higher Pantheism in a Nutshell"; **Wilde:** "Decay of Lying"

3/27 **Speeches on Irish Independence:** Intro and Parnell; **Yeats:** "Hosting of the Sidhe" and "Stolen Child" (handout); "Lake Isle of Innisfree," "Who Goes with Fergus"

4/1 Workshop of Selected Drafts; **Joyce:** "Clay"

4/3 **Joyce:** "The Dead"

**Friday 4/4: Final Revision of Essay III. Due at 305 Palmer by noon.**

4/8 **Yeats:** "Irish Airman...", "Easter 1916," "Sailing to Byzantium," "Byzantium"

4/10 **Eliot:** "The Wasteland"

4/15 **Waugh:** "Cruise"; **Larkin:** all poems

4/17 **Perspectives: Whose Language? - Introduction, Muldoon:** "Meeting the British"; **Rushdie:** "Chekov and Zulu" (handout)

4/22 **McCabe:** Begin *Butcher Boy*

4/24 **McCabe:** continue *Butcher Boy*

4/29 **No Class: Research Symposium & Awards Convocation**

5/1 **McCabe:** Finish *Butcher Boy*. Conclusion.

**Monday 5/5: Essay IV (8 pages). Due at Palmer 305 by Noon.**