



↪ Start Here

📄 Syllabus

📅 Course Pacing Guide

Welcome to ENG 2320: British Literature since 1785

New to the course?

- Be sure to familiarize yourself with the **Syllabus** and *review the information carefully*.
- To succeed in this course, please fill out your **Course Pacing Guide** and take no more than **7 days** from when you enroll to turn it in via Modules.
- Click [Start Here](#) to begin your course.

Returning to the course? Click **Modules** to the left and resume where you left off.

Important reminders:

- This is a **6-month, online, correspondence self-paced course**.
- **All submissions, including exams, must be completed by the course expiration date.** When you registered for the course, you were sent an email to your Texas State account indicating registration and expiration dates.
- **You may not submit more than 2 modules per week.**
- This course requires a **research paper** and a **cumulative final exam**.

**At the end of the course, you will be asked
to complete a brief course evaluation.
Your input will help improve the course.**

English 2320: British Literature since 1785

Sophomore Literature Program

[Sophomore Literature Syllabus](#)

Meet Your Instructor

Instructor: **Chad Hammett**

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Chad Hammett received his B.A. (English, History) from The University of Texas at Austin and his MFA in Fiction from Texas State University. His thesis, a novel, was a semi-finalist for the William Faulkner—William Wisdom First Novel Award. He won the Brown Fellowship for Texas Artists and Writers from the Vermont Studio Center and was a 2009 finalist for the Artist Foundation of San Antonio Awards. In 2013, UT Press published his book *2 Prospectors: The Letters of Sam Shepard and Johnny Dark*. He has taught at Texas State since 2002.

Required Texts

- *Northanger Abbey* by Jane Austen
 - ISBN 978-0-14-143979-2 ([also available for free online](#))
- *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw
 - ISBN 978-1-4165-0040-7 (also available for free online)
- *Regeneration* by Pat Barker (available for purchase in print or electronic formats)

- ISBN 978-0-452-27007-7 (must be purchased)

In an effort to keep student costs down, and since many of the texts we'll be reading are in the public domain, much of the course reading I've chosen is available to you for free. Please note the following:

- You are welcome to get the print versions of each text listed above or find them on your own online, as long as you find the full text and not a shortened (abridged) version.
 - The first two, Northanger and Pygmalion, are available for free on computers and e-readers (search for Project Gutenberg versions). If you decide to read them on your computer, keep in mind that these selections are lengthy and may be more challenging to read on a computer screen.
 - In addition to the texts above, you will find links to numerous other readings throughout Modules.
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Learning Outcomes

The Department of English has adopted student learning outcomes for general education courses in writing and literature and for all degree programs in English. You will find these outcomes at <http://www.english.txstate.edu/about/learning.html>. Please review the outcomes for the course/program in which you are enrolled.

General Education Core Curriculum (Code 090)

Communication Foundational Component Outcomes

Students will examine ideas that foster aesthetic and intellectual creation in order to understand the human condition across cultures.

Core Objectives/Competencies Outcomes:

- **Critical Thinking**
 - Students will demonstrate creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, evaluation and synthesis of information.
- **Communication**
 - Students will effectively develop, interpret and express ideas through written, oral and visual communication.
- **Social Responsibility**
 - intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities
- **Personal Responsibility**
 - Students will relate choices, actions and consequences to ethical decision-making.

-Course Description-

In sophomore literature at Texas State University, you will read and analyze literary texts; develop an appreciation of literature as an art form; and gain an understanding of the role of literature in its historical, social and cultural contexts.

Sophomore literature at Texas State University-San Marcos consists of six three-hour courses, distinct by nationality/geography and time period:

English 2310: British Literature before 1785. Representative authors and works of British literature from the beginnings through the Neoclassical Period.

English 2320: British Literature since 1785. Representative authors and works of British literature from the Romantic period to the present.

English 2330: World Literature before 1600. Representative authors and works of literature from the ancient world to the early modern world. Readings may come exclusively from the Western tradition or from various literary traditions, such as those of Africa and Asia.

English 2340: World Literature since 1600. Representative authors and works of literature from the modern world. Readings may come exclusively from the Western tradition or from various literary traditions, such as those of Africa and Asia.

English 2359: American Literature before 1865. Representative authors and works of American literature from the beginnings through the Civil War.

English 2360: American Literature since 1865. Representative authors and works of American literature from the Civil War to the present.

All six sophomore literature courses share the following defining characteristics:

- They emphasize survey, rather than specialized, knowledge about literature.

This basic knowledge gives you the facility to ask increasingly sophisticated questions of literary texts.

- They equip you with basic tools of textual analysis, teaching you to read literature closely with attention to form, syntax, and language.

- They heighten your awareness of literature as art and its capacity to order experience in aesthetically pleasing and moving ways.

- They place literary works in context—historical, social, cultural—exploring particular works as a record of human experience and as part of a definable tradition.

Course Description

In sophomore literature at Texas State University, we will read and analyze literary texts, develop an appreciation of literature as an art form, and gain an understanding of the role of literature in its historical, social and cultural contexts. The course includes representative authors and works of British literature from the Romantic Period to the present. We'll try to arrive at a definition (if possible) of the term "Representative" as well as the word "British." In addition, we'll do our best to determine how British Literature—particularly its values and biases—helped shape the world in which we live today. We'll also practice some of the skills necessary for academic success in all disciplines.

Course Goal

In addition to the objectives listed in the Sophomore Literature Syllabus (see above), our goal will be to see how literature in general and British Literature (after 1785) in particular connects to our own lives as people living on this planet.

Writing Intensive Designation

Undergraduate courses for which at least 65 percent of the grade must be based on written exams or assignments, and at least one assignment must be 500 words or more in length. Writing intensive is a designation intended to address the writing policy for undergraduate degree programs."

Course Procedure

I've tried to make this course as straightforward as possible. The course is divided into ten lessons. For each lesson, you'll read the information I've provided as part of the lesson, including all linked material (unless I've noted that the material is optional) and the literary text(s) for that lesson. Once you've finished the reading, you will complete the assignment for that lesson. As set out in the course guidelines, I'll grade the assignments promptly. Submissions that do not meet the requirements as set out in the assignment will be returned with comments on how you may improve your lesson for resubmission.

Important Note: One big advantage we have in a course like this is the ability to work one on one. I have set the course up so that you have the ability to form opinions about the texts you read based on the guidance given in the lessons. If I provided summaries of the texts, then you wouldn't have to read the texts yourself in order to do the assignments. Similarly, if I gave my complete analysis of a text, then you wouldn't have the opportunity to judge it for yourself. **Your written assignment responses are what start our conversation. I'll comment upon your paper and we'll continue the dialogue as long as is necessary to clear up any questions regarding the reading, and in order to prepare for the research paper and the final.**

Grading

Your final grade will be based on my evaluation of the following:

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>%(100 total)</u>
Assignments 1-10	50% (5% each)
Research Paper	25%
Final Exam (cumulative)	25%

Grading scale:

90-100	A
80-89	B
70-79	C
60-69	D
Below 59	F

Assignments/Lessons

Assignments

At the end of each lesson, you are asked to write a short paper on a question(s) that allows you to formulate your response to the text and synthesize the lesson material with the text(s) you've read. Be thorough in your explanations with plenty of specific examples to help prove your point.

Please note the following:

- You are not allowed to submit more than two assignments per week.
- You may not resubmit an assignment after it has been graded.

Research Paper

You will write one out-of-class research paper (minimum 1000 words), which **MUST** meet the specifications discussed for the assignment. The paper can be turned in any time between receiving your grade on the Lesson 7 Assignment and taking your final exam.

Final Exam

We will have one cumulative final exam in this course. The exam has a multiple-choice section (40%), and a few short essays (60%). The multiple-choice questions come from both the readings and the lesson content. The short essay questions mainly address things I've asked you to consider as you read. As with the Lesson Assignments, it's important to be thorough in your explanation and to give as many specific details as you can.

The final exam will be a proctored exam, and you will have 2.5 hours to complete the final exam.

Lessons

The following lessons can be found in Modules:

- Lesson 1 Romanticism/Wordsworth
- Lesson 2 Byron *Don Juan*
- Lesson 3 Austen *Northanger Abbey*
- Lesson 4 Victorians/*A Christmas Carol*
- Lesson 5 Angel of the House/"Goblin Market"
- Lesson 6 The Victorian Gentlemen/*The Strange Case of Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde*
- Lesson 7 Research Paper Topic Assigned
- Lesson 8 Modernism/"The Love-Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"
- Lesson 9 *Pygmalion*
- Lesson 10 Sassoon & Owen/*Regeneration*

Communication Policy

According to "Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education," faculty-student contact is very important.

Accordingly, I encourage you to contact me at [ch34@txstate.edu \(mailto:ch34@txstate.edu\)](mailto:ch34@txstate.edu) if you have any concerns, questions, or problems. My policy is that during non-holiday breaks or announced away times, any email I receive between Monday morning and Friday at noon will receive a reply within 48 hours. Emails received between Friday at noon and Sunday night will receive a reply on the next business day.

As a tool for scholarly research, Wikipedia can be either a grade-killer or a valuable friend, depending on who you ask and what you hope to accomplish using it. What is fairly certain is that your professor won't let you cite it in a scholarly research paper.

Do Not Cite Wikipedia

There are a few common reasons why you can't cite Wikipedia:

- Wikipedia is a general encyclopedia. At the collegiate or university level, your professors are looking for more than general rudimentary material. General encyclopedias usually give baseline information, the type of common knowledge that isn't usually cited. Academic subject-specific encyclopedias will often provide more scholarly and citable information.
- There is often no way to know who is editing the entries in Wikipedia or what his or her level of expertise is.
- You cannot be sure that the content is “permanent” (although you can look at the revision history on the History page).
- You cannot be sure that the content meets standards of academic rigor. One of Wikipedia's main principles is that it strives for a neutral point of view (which it abbreviates to NPOV). This standard states that all articles should strive to “represent...all significant views on each topic fairly, proportionately, and without bias.” The problem is that in any knowledge endeavor, much less a collaborative and ad hoc venture like Wikipedia, deciding what's neutral and having something reviewed for NPOV can be controversial undertakings and too uncertain to meet standards of academic rigor. However, having such a debate take place publicly on Wikipedia makes for interesting talk-page reading and for a good pros-and-cons debate.

Two other Wikipedia policies relevant to academic rigor are its verifiability and “no original research” policies.

Tips for Using Wikipedia Effectively

Use Wikipedia to get a general overview, and follow the references it provides as far as they can take you.

Look at the Talk tab in Wikipedia to see if the article you're reading is part of a WikiProject, meaning that a group of people who care about the subject area are working in concert on its content. They may not be experts on the subject, but signing onto a WikiProject implies a writer has more than a casual interest in it.

If it is part of a WikiProject, see if it has been rated. Articles in WikiProjects go through a type of peer review. This is not the same type of peer review your professor talks about regarding scholarly research, but even such a limited review does at least imply that someone from the WikiProject has looked at the article at some point and assigned a quality rating to it. In any case, to be fairly sure

that a Wikipedia article expresses what laypeople might need to know to consider themselves reasonably informed, look for a rating of B/A or above.

Additional Resources

You may wish to consult any or all of the following for additional help in finding and evaluating sources:

- [Wikipedia assignments](#)
- Wikipedia's [Neutral Point of View guideline](#)
- Wikipedia on [verifiability](#)
- Wikipedia on [original research](#)
- Wikipedia: [Peer review](#)

[The Seven Steps of the Research Process](#)

A resource designed to answer questions about evaluating sources of information.

[Critically Analyzing Information Sources](#)

This resource lists some of the critical questions you should ask when you consider the appropriateness of a particular book, article, media resource, or Web site for your research.

Using Wikipedia. The Digital Literacy Project by Cornell Information Technologies. 19 May 2015.

Students Requiring Accommodation Through the Office of Disability Services

Online and Extended Programs is committed to helping students with disabilities achieve their educational goals.

A disability is not a barrier to correspondence study, and we provide reasonable accommodations to individuals in coursework and test taking.

Students who require special accommodations need to provide verification of their disability to the [Office of Disability Services](#), Suite 5-5.1 LBJ Student Center, 512.245.3451 (voice/TTY).

Students should then notify the [OXF](#) at corrstudy@txstate.edu (<mailto:corrstudy@txstate.edu>) of any disability-related accommodation needs as soon as possible to avoid a delay in accommodations.

The [Texas State Academic Honor Code](#) applies to all Texas State students, including correspondence students. The [Honor Code](#) serves as an affirmation that the University demands the highest standard of integrity in all actions related to the academic community. As stated in the [Texas State Student Handbook](#), [Violation of the Honor Code](#) includes, but is not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work, plagiarism, collusion, and the abuse of resource materials.

Academic work signifies outcomes and products such as essays, theses, reports, exams, tests, quizzes, problems, assignments, or other projects submitted for purposes of achieving learning outcomes.

Cheating in general means, but is not limited to, engaging or attempting to engage in any of the following activities:

- Copying from another student's test paper, laboratory report, other report, computer files, data listing, programs, or from any electronic device or equipment;
- Using, during a test, materials not authorized by the person giving the test;
- Collaborating, without authorization, with another person during an examination or in preparing academic work;
- Knowingly, and without authorization, using, buying, selling, stealing, transporting, soliciting, copying, or possessing, in whole or in part, the content of an unadministered test;
- Substituting for another student—or permitting another person to substitute for oneself—in taking an exam or preparing academic work;
- Bribing another person to obtain an unadministered test or information about an unadministered test;
- Purchasing, or otherwise acquiring and submitting as one's own work, any research paper or other writing assignment prepared by an individual or firm. This section does not apply to the typing of the rough or final versions of an assignment by a professional typist;
- Submitting the same essay, thesis, report, or another project, without substantial revision or expansion of the work, in an attempt to obtain credit for work submitted in a previous course;
- Falsifying data.

[Plagiarism](#) in general means, but is not limited to, the appropriation of another's work and the inadequately or inappropriately acknowledged incorporation of that work in one's own written, oral, visual or the performance of an original act or routine that is offered for credit.

[Collusion](#) in general means, but is not limited to, the unauthorized collaboration with another person in preparing any work offered for credit.

alteration of materials provided to assist students in the mastery of course content.

Please cite all unoriginal material through the use of [standard bibliographical practice](#) as explained on the [Alkek Library site](#).

Incidents of academic dishonesty as outlined by the University will be reported to the administration for disciplinary action. In addition, students will receive a 0 for the assignment or assignments without the opportunity to redo the work.

FREE TUTORING RESOURCES

A variety of free tutoring resources are available for students enrolled in correspondence courses. You may access tutoring through Tutor.com by clicking on Tutor.com: 24/7

Online Tutoring in the left menu of this course. Then just respond to the questions to start tutoring. If you need help with writing specifically, then choose Writing as your Topic.

Free online tutoring for writing-related assignments is also available from the University Writing Center.

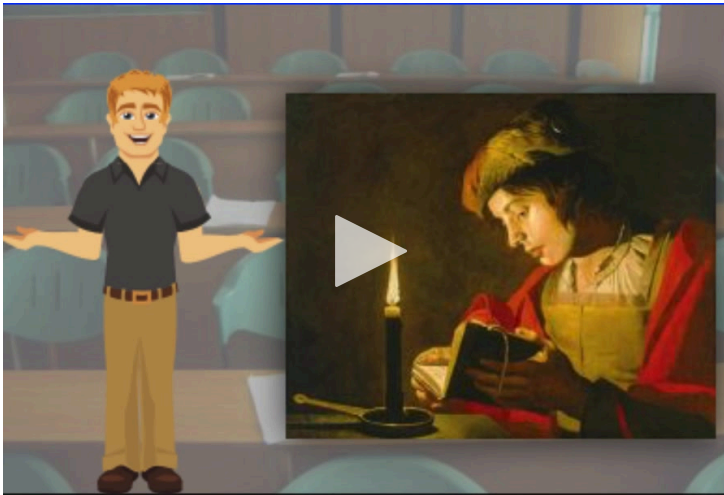
For information on accessing these resources, please visit Online and Extended Programs Free Tutoring page. Currently-enrolled, degree-seeking students able to

visit the Texas State campus are eligible for free in-person tutoring from the Student Learning Assistance Center (SLAC) on the fourth floor of Alkek Library.

PDF Version of Syllabus

Here is a [PDF version of the syllabus](#) for your convenience.

Introduction to English 2320



Welcome to 2320, a course covering British Literature since 1785. I know what you might be thinking, because I've had the opportunity to teach this course to a few thousand students at Texas State University and I survey them about what they expect when they hear the title and description of the class.

Here is one question I ask:

What comes to mind when you hear the words "British Literature?"

And here are the basic answers I usually get:

Shakespeare

Boring

Snooty/Snobbish/Well-to-do/Proper

And this one's my favorite

Dudes in powdered wigs writing by candlelight (with a feather)

Here's another question I ask:

Why do so many universities including this one require that students take a literature class?

And the answer I invariably get is:

To make us well-rounded

(directly) since he wrote almost two hundred years before our course starts. Here's what we will cover and what follows (from the course syllabus) is my answer to the questions above.

Click Next to proceed to Correspondence Course Information.

Submission 1: Course Pacing Guide

- Due No Due Date
- Points 0
- Submitting a file upload

Download and add target dates to this [Course Pacing Guide](#)

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Please consider the following as you complete the schedule in your Pacing Guide:

- You may submit no more than two assignments per week in this course.
- You must submit Assignments 1-10 before scheduling your final exam.

After completing your Pacing Guide, click Submit Assignment, then attach and submit your completed document.

After you upload your document, click Next to proceed with the course.

Lesson 1: Reading Assignment & Objectives

Reading Assignment

- Linked readings on the following pages
- William Wordsworth
 - Poem: ["Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood"](#) 

Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you should be able to:

- Describe the main features of Romanticism
 - Confirm the present-day influence of the Romantic movement
 - Analyze Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality"
 - Apply Romanticism's features to Wordsworth's poem.
-

Click Next to proceed to Romanticism.

Romanticism

Romanticism Defined

It's almost impossible to talk about a historical or literary movement without talking about the era that preceded it.

The Romantic Period, for our purposes, goes from the publication of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) to the coronation of Queen Victoria (1837). The American Revolution just precedes this period, and the French Revolution falls within it. It may be seen appropriately as a time of revolution but just what exactly were the Romantics revolting against?

Maybe we can find the answer in some "official" definition of Romanticism. How about this one?

"...a literary movement, and profound shift in sensibility, which took place in Britain and throughout Europe roughly between 1770 and 1848. Intellectually it marked a violent reaction to the Enlightenment. Politically it was inspired by the revolutions in America and France....Emotionally, it expressed an extreme assertion of the self and the value of individual experience...together with the sense of the infinite and the transcendental. Socially it championed progressive causes.... The stylistic keynote of Romanticism is intensity, and its watchword is 'Imagination.'"

- *The OXFORD COMPANION TO ENGLISH LITERATURE* (qtd. in Aidan Day's *Romanticism*)

Based on that definition, it seems pretty clear to me that we need to pause and talk about the Enlightenment—especially if Romanticism is a reaction against it!

Enlightenment

In basic terms, the Enlightenment was about a hundred-year period (roughly 1680-1780) in which Europe began a real break from its medieval past with a concerted focus on eliminating mysticism and blind allegiance to old systems in favor of empirical scientific study and individual rights. I find it interesting that coffee and tea become available in Europe for the first time during this period—so you could argue that caffeine fueled what historian Isaiah Berlin called "the greatest shift of consciousness of the West that has occurred." Many of these advances led to the industrial revolution and all of the societal changes that would result.

Romanticism Features

Here are some of the important components of Romantic belief that you'll be looking for in the texts you read in this section (hereafter referred to as **"The List"**)

- **The Long Ago and Far Away**

Many of the artists in the years that made up the Age of Enlightenment looked back almost two thousand years to Roman and Greek models as "perfect" examples of art that should be copied and repeated. This artistic school, known as neoclassicism or "new classical," dominated English art and writing in the years leading up to the start of this course. [Here's a link to a discussion of the neoclassical with a wonderful opening quote that shows imitation truly is the sincerest form of flattery](#) ➡

In contrast, romantics decided local folktales were worthy of literary study and of emulating with new versions of these tried-and-true stories. Tales about King Arthur and Robin Hood became popular again. The "Long Ago" of the Middle Ages (Medievalism) became the topic for the Gothic novels published during this time (which we'll discuss in more detail in the Jane Austen Lesson). Interestingly enough, it is the Romantics who lift Shakespeare to the pedestal on which he sits today, as the greatest of English writers. The Romantics chose him because he was local (and in their minds, despite his education, a "common man"). They also esteemed John Milton for many of the same reasons. (Plus, Milton's political views matched their own idealism.) We'll see lots of direct and indirect references to the work of these two men throughout the course and we'll have the romantics to blame. The Enlightenment focus on science made many Romantic writers long for simpler eras (the Long Ago). Once upon a time is never filled with smokestacks or machinery, right?

Many critics believe that these retellings of folk stories with fairies, witches and the like are the forebears of the fantasy novels of today. Most of these romantic works are set in or discuss the long ago and most take place in exotic locales. Spain and Italy were popular "far away" choices for setting.

- **Let the Emotions Flow**

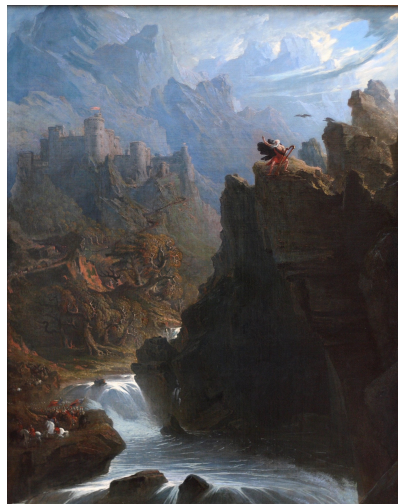
When you think about it, the natural reaction to any overemphasis of logic (as was preferred by the Enlightenment thinkers) is to see the benefits of strong emotions. Think of it as the Romantics' Captain Kirk championing emotion to the Enlightenment's logical Mr. Spock if you want. The writers we'll read in the first couple of lessons of the course are very big on expressing their "feelings." However, not all of these emotions were wholly positive. One of the favorites of romantic writers was horror and during this era, we began to see works that

The biggest contribution the Romantics made to the way we see emotions today was their emphasis on the importance of romantic love. We sometimes imagine that this concept is as old as humanity but our modern conception of romance is one they did much to cultivate. In fact, the word Romance has become synonymous with the word love in the two hundred years since the romantics celebrated it. The word “romance” originally meant a tale of adventure about knights but now it has a much different—(often life-defining) meaning in our culture. Again, you can blame the romantics.

- **All Hail The Individual**

If you think about it, for most of human history, people had few choices about what they would “become.” If you were born a shoemaker’s son, then in all likelihood you’d become a shoemaker. (If you were born a shoemaker’s daughter, then in all likelihood, you’d be married off to the tanner’s son, so Dad could get some cheaper leather.) The Romantics are the group that focused on the importance of the Individual. Any notion that each individual has a duty to find himself or invent herself comes out of this period. And the romantic era certainly had some of these larger than life figures who could be looked upon as True Individuals. Beethoven in music. Lord Byron in poetry, Napoleon, who rose from pretty humble origins to become the leader of France.

Take a look at the picture below. It’s called “The Bard” and it was painted by John Martin in 1817. The story behind the painting is that the man atop the mountain is the last Welsh poet (or bard) after the King has ordered that all poets should be put to death. I think the pose of the man is certainly individualistic. Despite the fact that this is the last bard, the man atop the craggy cliff appears to be shaking his fist in defiance at the army gathered below. That stance, the individual shaking a fist from the mountaintop is an image I’d like you to keep in mind as you do the first few lessons of the course.



- **Nature, Not so Big, Not so Bad**

For much of human history, Nature existed to be overcome or was something to be feared. Think of the Puritans with their fears of the “devil in the woods.” In the wake of the Industrial Revolution, the Romantics were the first group to promote that man and nature weren’t opposites but in tune in some way. Some historians see the Romantic focus on what we’d now call communing with Nature as the founding of the environmental movement.

So that’s romanticism in a nutshell. If you’d like to read more or go into more depth (which will certainly help your understanding of these readings and help with the lessons), I’d try [this optional reading about Romanticism](#). There are some great photos of paintings there that will certainly help if you’re a visual learner.

Click Next to proceed to Wordsworth.

Wordsworth

William Wordsworth



By National Portrait Gallery [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

Introduction to Wordsworth

In the preface to his *Lyrical Ballads*, William Wordsworth wrote that poetry is a “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings,” which “originates in emotion recollected in tranquility.” He also argued for a language in the poem that was actually spoken by the poet, not elevated. For him, the time to write was not during or immediately after an intense experience, but some time after, when the emotions again surfaced and flowed to overflowing. And the language to use was that actually used in everyday speech. The poet would be writing about his or her feelings as they had been worked over by time, rather than about the actual event that had taken place.

Please read [this short introduction to William Wordsworth](#) →

to learn more about him (and remember, I’m not making you buy a huge expensive textbook so accessing some of the supplementary material is your responsibility).

Ode: Intimations of Immortality

The first literary text you’ll be reading for this course is “Ode: Intimations of Immortality,” by William Wordsworth and the reason I’m going into such depth on this work is because it’s the first one. (And

you to be able to learn to “read” these texts on your own and relate the story, poem, or play to the concepts we’re discussing in the unit

This poem is one of the masterpieces of Romantic poetry. The plot is not complex, although the wording might take some unpacking in places. The poet is feeling old, and as he looks back to childhood (you will recall that memory is a key concept in Wordsworth’s poetic theory) he is overcome with feelings of loss (an overflowing of powerful emotion, in this case grief). He ponders his grief, offering one of the most magnificent images of life’s progress ever written, before finally settling wisely into a perspective that accepts aging.

The poem exists in eleven sections or stanzas, preceded by an epigram.

The epigram before part one is famous in itself: “The Child is Father of the Man.” How can the child be father of the man? Think about that. At some point on an exam you may be asked to discuss this opening epigram in light of the poem that follows (or talk about how it fits other texts we’ll read). How does the poem consider the idea that the child can be father of the man? Do our experiences as children factor into the adults we become?

In considering the poem, we’ll work through each section, and then offer some ideas about overall meaning.

In section one, Wordsworth remembers a feeling he had about nature, when “meadow, grove and stream” seemed “appareled in celestial light.” But now that childhood sense of wonder is lost, as if he has sadly awakened from a dream that seemed more vivid than this world. I think of my children when I read this section. Each sees the world in this wondrous way. While day-to-day life often frustrates me, as when I’m caught at the train crossing, my son and daughter not only don’t mind getting caught at the train crossing, it’s the highlight of their day!

In section two, he elaborates on the sense of loss. Even though nature continues pretty much as it used to, with seasons and beautiful flowers, rainbows and moonlight, it seems to him “there hath passed away a glory from the earth.” (Note the focus on the poet’s feelings; the earth is continuing in the same way it always has, but the meaning of the poem is located in the description of the poet’s feelings, tied to memory, rather than to the earth’s workings.)

In section three, the poet seems to be recovering from his sense of loss. There is so much joy around him as spring unfolds that he decides not to be gloomy, and he calls for the Child of Joy to shout around him. In your opinion, is the Child of Joy some child actually playing near Wordsworth, or is it an inner child, the child he once was, whom he is now trying to be close to again? Or could it

feel it all,” all of the power of spring itself. “I feel it all” could appear on any Romantic Poet’s bumper sticker (if they would have had bumpers in early the 19th century. Lines 36-50 carry the direct statement of the feeling of spring. However, line 51 is a turning point, and a plunge back into sadness. In his memory, there is a certain tree and a certain field that remind him of loss, and there is a pansy (which gets its name from the French word for “Thought”) at his feet that causes him to consider loss. He realizes that the “visionary gleam” and the “glory and the dream” are all lost. What do you think he saw in that tree, and field, and flower? I have thought that they were perhaps a dead tree, a field of wilted grass, a drooping flower. Perhaps he saw a loss, a movement toward death.

This next point is most important. It is not something you would know without the help of either footnotes or a note in this explanation. At this point Wordsworth stopped writing this poem, and did not resume for two years. So what follows from here on out has been worked on by time, and the unconscious, and falls right into Romantic theory. But why do you think he stopped writing here? Was the feeling of loss too strong for him to continue? Had he said what he wanted to say and then realized he had more to add?

Section five is one of the most famous sections of any poem in English, so you ought to consider it carefully. Remember, what Wordsworth writes here is, in a sense, a spontaneous overflow of powerful emotion that he is writing two years after the previous section of the poem. So it connects to what went before, and it is also something like a new beginning. Is it also in a sense a “solution” to a problem that kept him from writing on this poem for two years?

In section five, Wordsworth suggests that life is a dream between birth and death. Before we are born, we exist and are with God, and we will be with God again after we are dead, but life itself is a movement into dreamlike forgetfulness of God. Wordsworth elaborates. At birth, the baby arrives “trailing clouds of glory,” still wrapped in God’s direct presence, but as it grows to childhood and adulthood, it forgets God’s direct presence and enters deeper and deeper into what seems like a prison, until as a mature adult the glorious light of God has faded “into the light of common day.” Be able to identify the first eight lines of this stanza, lines 58-65, in case you are asked to identify the poem from which it came and the author who wrote it.

In section six, Wordsworth says that Earth attempts, like a good nurse, to offer the adult (the prisoner deep in the prison house of life) substitute pleasures, in place of God and the palace of Heaven.

In section seven, he elaborates on the pleasures offered by Earth to the adult. He depicts a six year old child kissed by his mom and admired by his dad, playing at being an adult, doing some child’s version of weddings, funerals, business enterprises, and loves, and Wordsworth says that before

In section eight, Wordsworth addresses the child described in the last stanza. In line 108, he begins with “Thou,” and he continues to modify the “thou” until line 121, when he tells us that the “thou” is, in fact, the little child of the previous stanza. He tells us that the child’s outer form belies the immensity of the soul within, that the child is the best philosopher, and that the child has a sense of God. He cautions the child not to be too ready to play adult games, not to rush into adulthood. This stanza contains some of the most powerful writing found in Wordsworth. Maybe you can feel his authority as you read it. Read it aloud a few times.

Section nine is another turning point, the beginning of Wordsworth’s understanding of his profound role as an adult. He says that the “embers” of childhood joy and closeness to God’s presence cannot be destroyed, even in the adult, and joy abounds in nature; and he adds that he has come to a sense of “perpetual benedictions,” not for childhood, but instead for the questioning of adulthood, the very sense of being an adult and seeking closeness to God. (In other words, why don’t we ask “why” as often as we did as children. Why did we stop?) This is extremely powerful writing. In line 161, Wordsworth says that although the adult can be deep inland (deep in prison, away from the shore of birth) in a moment of calm weather (in tranquility) he can “catch sight” of the “sea” which is God’s presence. Also, in case you didn’t catch it, notice that the line “Did tremble like a guilty Thing surprised” is an allusion to the sighting of the ghost in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.

In section ten, Wordsworth completely accepts his place. He says that nothing can bring back “the hour of splendor in the grass, of glory in the flower,” but nevertheless he will not grieve. Instead, he has a faith that “looks through death,” and that has brought him a sense of the “primal sympathy” of God, and developed in him a “philosophic mind.” And that’s his solution to the problem of lost wonder, he described at the beginning—to apply those “obstinate questionings” to adult questions.

In section eleven, Wordsworth sings out his love for life, and gives thanks to the human heart, its tenderness, joys, and fears; and he says that the “meanest flower” that lives brings him thoughts that can be “too deep for tears.”

In my thinking, this poem is about Wordsworth’s feelings associated with aging, and with loss of childhood. Childhood is a time of participating in the natural world, rather than of analyzing it. Childhood is a time of intense experience in place of the adult logical reasoning. Wordsworth sees the presence of God in the joy of the intense experience of nature during springtime, and as an older man he feels distant from it, and he feels grief. The poem is a profound working out of his feelings. That’s my take, but, trust me on this, nothing replaces your own reading of the poem, your own wrestling with the meanings.

read the poem again, noting your own feelings and understandings. You may be asked to discuss your understanding of this poem on the final.

Click Next to proceed to Assignment 1.