

Brown University  
Religious Studies 0090, Spring 2014  
***Radical Democracy and Ecology in Religious Romanticism***

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**Books Ordered:**

Mary Oliver's *Why I Wake Early*

William Wordsworth, *The Major Works*, ed. Steven Gill (Oxford World Classics)

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Major Works*, ed. H J Jackson (Oxford World Classics)

Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Grasmere and Alfoxden Journals* (Oxford World Classics)

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, ed. Marilyn Butler (Oxford World Classics)

Henry Thoreau, *Walden: Fully Annotated*, ed. Cramer (Yale University Press)

Readings on OCRA (password: Ecology)

**Course Description**

We will endeavor to create an intimate community of learning as we jointly explore the political, environmental, and religious aspects of Romanticism (especially British Romanticism). It has become commonplace to think of Romanticism as consisting mainly of nostalgic notions of the pastoral or narcissistic reports of the individual's private gaze on the sublime landscape. In contrast to this approach, we will focus on the radical political and environmental perspectives embedded within Romantic religious and poetic sensibilities. In the process, we will reflect on how this Romantic heritage can serve as a contemporary public resource for the cultivation of interrelated environmental and democratic beliefs and practices.

The seminar will be taught in the tradition of the liberal arts, exposing us to modern cultural history and to ethical inquiry. "What is the relevance of this material to me and to my community?" will be an implicit, sometimes explicit, question in the course.

**Course Requirements**

A. You are expected to participate actively in every aspect of the course. Participation will be an important factor in your life.

B. Attend every class.

C. Read attentively. The number of pages of assigned reading is sometimes quite limited, but the reading nonetheless requires much attention. Be prepared to say something about them during our discussions.

D. No cell phones; no lap tops; no exiting to the bathroom (emergencies only; there will be a break).

E. Additional requirements:

1) *Daily poem.*

Each class will begin with a poem from Mary Oliver's *Why I Wake Early*. Each member of the seminar will be responsible for the selection and reading of one poem.

2) *A journal.*

You will be required to make at least one entry per week in the journal. Sometimes I will ask you to reflect on a particular question in your journal; other times it will be open-ended. On occasion, I will ask you to write in class in your journal on a particular topic. This assignment is not intended to be onerous, but to provide a flexible venue in which to reflect on a variety of issues that arise during our course together.

3) *A Learning portfolio.*

Your portfolio will include various assignments, for example, maps, songs, poems, and short papers.

4) *Lead a portion of a discussion*

Members of the seminar will lead discussions throughout the semester (starting week 4). You are not expected to become an expert for the session you lead nor are you expected to lecture. You are expected to be an informed reader and thoughtful host for our conversations.

5) *Short papers.*

Two papers on what you consider to be significant topics in the course. The first paper should be approximately 5-pages and the second paper 8-pages. The papers, unlike the journal, should take the form of an argument and not a personal reflection. The first paper is due on October 24; the second paper is due on December 3. Please send me your papers via email as a pdf document. In order that I do not "lose" your paper in my inbox, please put in the subject heading, "PAPER #, YOUR NAME, TITLE"—ALL IN CAPS). Your journal/learning portfolio are due on the day of the class retreat (provisionally scheduled for December 3).

6) *A class retreat* at the end of the semester.

### **Institutional Grade Evaluation**

The grade opportunity for this course is S/NC. Much work will be required for a "S." You must attend every class meeting. If you cannot attend due to illness or an extraordinary circumstance, you must write to me in advance. Assignments are to be read carefully, sometimes twice, sometimes more than twice. All written work must demonstrate scholarly care and thoughtfulness.

## Course Schedule And Readings

### Week 1, Sept 3: *How Did You Get Here? Where Are You Heading?*

During this first session we will discuss the nature of undergraduate education, the importance of the material for this seminar, and we will begin to learn about the paths that led each of us to Brown and to the topics of this seminar. To help us with this conversation, read these two, short texts *before* we meet for this first session:

- Annie Dillard, *Writing Life*, pages 67-79 (OCRA)
- Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, pp. 197-204 (OCRA)

**Assignment:** In your journal, write about your expectations for this seminar. What are you hoping to take away from the seminar? What will you bring to the seminar?

### Week 2, Sept 10: Background traditions to Romanticism: Rousseau (with some allusion to Bacon and Descartes)

- *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, trans. Cole, Brumitt, Hall (OCRA)
- “The Savoyard Priest,” pp. 266-313, from *Emile*, trans. Allan Bloom (OCRA)

**In-class journal assignment:** We will write briefly on the following set of questions: What is Rousseau’s central point or argument in the *Discourse*? What is his central point in the “The Savoyard Priest”? Can you see a connection between these two readings?

### Week 3, Sept 17: William Wordsworth

- “Salisbury Plain”
- “Letter to Bishop of Llandaff” (OCRA)
- “The Female Vagrant” (OCRA)
- “The Old Cumberland Beggar”
- “Expostulation and Reply”
- “The Tables Turned”

**Assignment:** Bring to class the lyrics of a song that respond to or resonate with one of the poems or the “Letter to Bishop of Llandaff.”

### Week 4, Sept 24: Wordsworth, continued

- “The Ruined Cottage”
- *The Prelude* (1805 edition), books 1, 2, 6

**Assignment:** The “Ruined Cottage” and *The Prelude* can perhaps be understood as journeys of being lost and journeys of being found. Do these works by Wordsworth

illuminate your own journey to and within Brown? Please bring this reflection to class.

#### **Week 5, Oct. 1: Wordsworth, continued**

- *The Prelude* (1805 edition), books 8-13.

**Assignment:** In your journal, reflect on the roles that religion and nature (the natural world) play in this week's poetry. Bring your reflection to class.

#### **Week 6, Oct. 8: Wordsworth, continued**

- "Home at Grasmere"
- "Michael"
- Preface to "Lyrical Ballads"
- A Guide Through the District Of The Lakes (OCRA)

**Assignment:** "Home" is a central theme in three of the four readings for this week. Please make a map of your home and bring it to class. Home means different things to different people; and maps can take a variety of shapes (a road atlas is only one type of a map). Feel free, then, to be creative with this assignment.

#### **Week 7, Oct. 15: Coleridge**

- "To a Young Ass"
- "Religious Musings"
- "The Eolian Harp"

**Assignment:** In your journal, reflect on the two types of religion described in the "The Eolian Harp." Are they irreconcilable? Bring this journal reflection to class.

#### **Week 8, Oct. 22: NO CLASS; work on second paper, due on Friday, Oct. 24.**

#### **Week 9, Oct. 29: Coleridge, continued**

- "Fears in Solitude"
- "Hymn Before Sunrise..."
- "This Lime Tree Bower My Prison"
- "Frost at Midnight"

**Assignment:** Before class, find a spot on campus that is your "Lime Tree Bower Prison." That is, find a place on campus that speaks to you in a similar fashion as the Lime Tree Bower spoke to Coleridge, a place that intimates that:

No plot so narrow, be but Nature there,  
No waste so vacant, but may well employ  
Each faculty of sense, and keep the heart  
Awake to Love and Beauty!

During class, we will pair off and show our partner our spot.

### **Week 10, Nov. 5: Dorothy Wordsworth**

- “Floating Island at Hawkshead” (OCRA)
- *The Grasmere and Alfoxden Journals* (you may want to begin with the *Alfoxden Journal*)

**Assignment:** In your journal, reflect on the similarities and differences between Dorothy’s and William’s perspectives on the natural world. Bring this journal entry to class.

### **Week 11, Nov. 12: Mary and Percy Shelley**

- Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*
- Percy Shelley, “Mont Blanc” (OCRA)

**Assignment:** In your journal, reflect on the similarities and differences between Percy Shelley’s “Mont Blanc,” Coleridge’s “Hymn Before Sunrise..,” and Wordsworth’s “Mont Blanc” (*Prelude*, book VI, 452-56). Now compare these to Mary Shelly’s alpine and arctic scenes in *Frankenstein*. Bring this journal entry to class.

### **Week 12, Nov. 19: Thoreau**

- *Walden* (chapters: Economy; Where I lived, and What I lived For; Reading; Spring; Conclusion)

**Assignment:** Copy your favorite quotation from *Walden*, bring it to class, and explain why you chose this particular passage. Also, in your journal, reflect on the similarities and differences between *Walden* and Wordsworth’s “Home at Grasmere.”

### **Week 13, Nov. 26: No class. THANKSGIVING BREAK**

### **Week 14, Dec. 3 (provisional date): Class retreat (details TBA).**

**REMINDER:** Your final paper, your journal, and your learning portfolio are due on the day of the class retreat.