English 4540: Nineteenth-Century British Poetry
Autumn Semester, 2013

COURSE SYLLABUS

Section 0010 #20751 Lecture
Wednesday and Friday 11.10am-12.30pm, Caldwell Lab 0171
Professor Clare Simmons
Office: Denney Hall 571; e-mail: simmons.9@osu.edu. Mailbox in Denney 421
Office Hours: Wednesday and Friday 9.30-11am, and by appointment.

About the Course: This course analyzes representative examples of British poetry of the long
nineteenth century—that is, from the era of the French Revolution to the first stirrings of
Modernism in the early 1900s. We will consider Romantic and Victorian poetry in their
historical and cultural contexts and identify the common and distinctive characteristics of the
two. We will also examine some of the key questions that poets and critics of the time tried to
answer, such as what is a poem and how does a poem come into being; who is a poet and what is
the poet’s role in society; what is the appropriate language for poetry; and should poetry have a
moral or didactic purpose?

During our study of poetry of the Romantic era, we shall read representative examples
not just of the “Big Six” Romantic poets—Blake, Byron, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, and
Wordsworth—but also poetry and ideas about poetry by other writers who contributed to what
William Hazlitt called the Spirit of the Age, including works by a number of women poets.
Taking as our starting point the ways in which Romantic-era poets reflect upon their world, we
will consider such questions as how to define and identify Romanticism; the impact of poetry on
society, and how much it changed ways of thinking (why do we think mountains are beautiful?);
and the rise of literature in English as an area of serious study.

As we move to the Victorian readings on our list, we will consider poetry in the context
of changing attitudes towards nature; Victorian interest in narrative and character; and the move
towards valuing art not to teach morality but as an aesthetic form. Again, we will read examples
not only by the best-known Victorian poets such as Tennyson and Browning, but works that
reflect the diversity of the Victorian world-view: if you have always thought of Victorians as
boring and sexually-repressed, you may be surprised.

Because many of you will already have encountered some Romantic and Victorian poetry
in courses such as the British survey, I have selected some works not generally covered in those
courses, including some longer works. I also want to pay attention to poetic form, so in
particular I’ve chosen examples of two easily identifiable forms, the ballad and the sonnet.
This course can be used as an upper-level course on an English major or minor as a course in
literature before 1900 or to fulfill an upper-level elective. The focus is on literary analysis in
historical context and critical reading and writing.

Course expectations: There will be two essays, the first a 750-1,000 word close reading and the
second a 1,000-1250 word essay on a broader topic; reading focus questions, available on
Carmen; a brief oral presentation; a mid-term, and a final examination. In both examinations,
you are welcome to consult your textbook and notes. Because this is a relatively small class, I
am asking everyone, either individually or in pairs, to give a brief oral presentation that will enrich the class’s understanding of the readings for that particular day. In addition, there will be a voluntary opportunity to enhance your participation grade by learning a short poem and reciting it to the group; or alternatively, writing a sonnet or ballad of your own on a contemporary subject. For more information on the reading focus questions, the paper topics, the oral presentation, and the recitations, see Carmen. Papers are due at the days and times stated in the syllabus; late papers will incur a grade penalty, so if you run into a problem with a paper, let me know before it is due. I am available to talk about any aspect of paper-writing and revision in my office hours; in addition to the hours listed above, you can make an appointment to meet with me after our class if you wish.

I believe that all students should participate actively in a class, and you cannot participate if you are not present. I will warn you now that I always take attendance, and that I reserve the right to give half-absences to people who are repeatedly late to class. If you know that you must miss a class, you should notify me in advance; I will also, of course, grant excused absences for documented medical and family emergencies. Two unexcused absences are acceptable without penalty; three will lower your participation grade to a B, four to a C, five to a D, and more to a fail for the course. If I myself have to miss a class, I will send out a message through Carmen as early as possible.

Class will definitely be more interesting if everyone participates in discussion. Please always bring the texts to class and come prepared to talk about the poems; if there are things that you feel you’d like to discuss, or that in retrospect you wish we’d discussed, please post these comments to Carmen.

**Plagiarism:** Papers should be prepared according to the *MLA Handbook* with parenthetical documentation and a Works Cited page if you use any source other than our assigned texts as an aid in writing your paper. All references to the works of others, including internet sources, must be fully documented, as plagiarism will lead to serious consequences.


Brief additional readings posted to Carmen.

**Outline of Course**

Unless otherwise stated, all readings are from the *Longman Anthology*, volume 2A for the Romantics and volume 2B for the Victorians.

**Wednesday August 21:** Introduction to course; reading a poem.

**Friday August 23:** Introduction to Romantic poetry. Please read Introduction, *Longman 2A*

**Wednesday August 28:** What is a Ballad? Read Longman pp. 390-93, including “Sir Patrick Spence”; Burns, poems on pp.403-07; Wordsworth, “We are Seven,” pp. 416-18 Scott, “William and Helen” on Carmen.

**Friday August 30:** No class; reading day. Reading questions on Wordsworth’s *Lyrical Ballads* and *The Prelude*.


**First Reading Focus Questions Due**

**Friday September 6:** Wordsworth, *The Prelude* Book 1 and selection from Book 10 (the French Revolution) and Book 11 (Spots of Time). Longman pp. 477-92; 523-27; 530-34.


**Second Reading Focus Questions Due**

**Wednesday September 18:** William Blake, *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*, Longman pp.176-203.

**Friday September 20:** What is a sonnet? See Sonnet Introduction at [http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/5791](http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/5791)
Charlotte Smith, sonnets on pp.86-90; Wordsworth, sonnets on pp.474-77 and 590-91; Shelley, “To Wordsworth,” pp.870-71; sonnets on pp.877-78.

**Wednesday September 25:** P.B Shelley, poems on pp.878-93.

**Paper One due in class**

**Friday September 27:** Byron, *Don Juan* canto 1, and selection from 2, Longman pp. 781-844.

**Third Reading Focus Questions Due**

Friday October 4: Mid-term exam, in our regular class time.


Fourth Reading Focus Questions due.


Fifth Reading Questions due


Friday November 1: Christina Rossetti, poems in *Longman* pp.1644-63.

Wednesday November 6: George Meredith, *Modern Love*, on Carmen

Friday November 8: Women and family. George Eliot, poems on Carmen; Augusta Webster, poems on Carmen
Sixth Reading Questions due


Friday November 15: The Silly Victorians and poems from *The Pearl*. See Carmen.

**Friday November 22:** Conclusions—the end of an era. Kipling, poems on pp. 1742-45. Opportunity for recitations.

**Wednesday November 27:** No class, office hours by appointment only

**Friday November 29:** No class, happy Thanksgiving

**Tuesday December 3:** Paper Two due 4pm

**Wednesday December 4:** I will be holding regular office hours

**Thursday December 5:** Final exam in our regular room from 12 noon to 1.45pm.

**Grading:**

- Paper 1 (3-4 pages) 15%
- Paper 2 (4-5 pages) 20%
- Oral presentation 10%
- Mid-term 10%
- Final examination 15%
- Attendance and participation 15%
- Reading focus questions 15%
- Recitation and poem composition (optional extra credit) 2%

**Finally:** If you have any questions or concerns, please let me know. The Office for Disability Studies, located in 150 Pomerene Hall, offers services for students with documented disabilities; contact the Office for Disability Studies at 292-3307 if you need more information, and of course, do make sure that the ODS lets me know if you have special needs. During my office hours listed above, you’re free just to call by, but if you need to arrange another time to meet with me individually, please ask me for an appointment. I look forward to assisting you in any way that I can.