

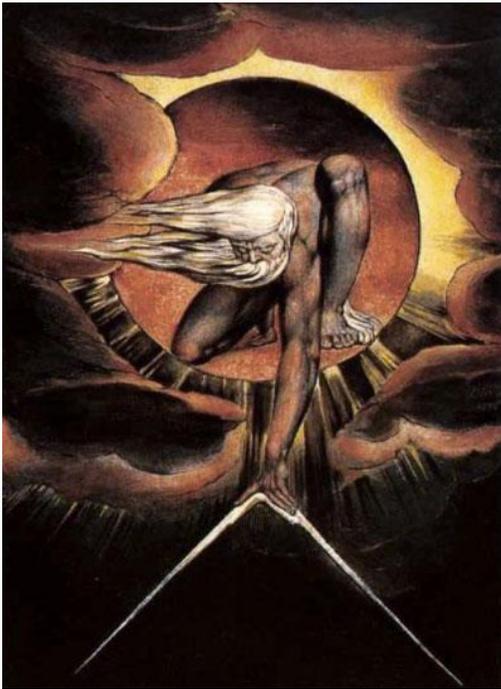
Winter Term 2012

Department of English and Cultural Studies
McMaster University

English and Cultural Studies 3M06

Studies in 19th-Century British Literature and Culture: Romantic Literature and Culture

Instructor: Dr. David L. Clark
T.A.: Ms. Roshaya Rodness



The Ancient of Days (William Blake)



Pity (William Blake)

Essay Assignment #1

Essays must be double-spaced and word-processed, and should be about ten pages or 2500-3000 words in length. Do remember to submit an essay which is *completely* free of errors in punctuation, spelling, and grammar, and which is argued in a coherent manner. Avoid merely reproducing the arguments of the texts or the content of the lectures in the course. Instead, treat this assignment as an opportunity to develop an essay that *analyzes* questions and issues arising *from* those texts, using the lectures only as a jump-off point for your own remarks. It's important to consistently root your remarks in the Romantic texts, working closely with what the authors actually say there—i.e., the figures, images, narratives, and characters that bring these texts to life. Demonstrating the merits of your thesis will therefore mean wrestling with what Blake calls “the minute particulars.”

Although you may of course refer to arguments and examples that were discussed in class, you are expected to develop an argument, finally, that you can properly call your own. Write in a way that

responds directly to the complexities and nuances of the course texts and core course questions (for the latter, see the Course Outline). The primary focus of your essay must be on materials that are assigned on the course. You are welcome to refer briefly to other Romantic texts and authors, but the emphasis in your essay should be on materials that are assigned on the course.

Students are warmly encouraged to turn to "secondary sources" when necessary; however, you are expected actively to *negotiate* with these sources and to acknowledge their use. (Wikipedia—or similar user-created platforms—is not a reliable scholarly resource and so should not be cited or used.) Any citation system (i.e., footnotes, endnotes, bibliography, or Works Cited) is acceptable, as long as it is consistent and informative.

It is especially important that your essay demonstrate three crucial characteristics of critical thinking: the precise delineation of your terms, the careful shaping and pacing of your argument, and the sustained discussion of specific passages drawn from the texts at hand. If you have any difficulties with these or other aspects of writing essays, or seek to improve your essay writing skills, I highly recommend consulting *Writing Tools: Tips on preparing and composing your essays*, a very useful and accessible resource created by the Writing Center at Harvard University:

<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/resources.html>

The Writing Tutors in the Department of English and Cultural Studies are also available to assist you with your compositional practice. See the Coursepage for information on contacting them.

Don't forget that this is the first of two essay assignments for this two term course. In selecting your essay topic, you might want to think about the writers and texts that are coming up in the second term, and about possible essay topics for that second assignment.

If you are a smoker, please ensure that you print and submit a copy of your paper that is smoke-free.

Essay Due Date and Late Submission Policy:

Essays are initially due in class, at start of class, Wednesday 14 November 2012. Essays submitted at this point will receive a marking commentary. Essays handed in after 14 November 2012 will be graded exactly the same way, without penalty but without comment. Essays may be submitted up to start of class, Wednesday, 28 November 2012, the last day of the course this term. No essays will be accepted after start of class, 28 November 2012. A grade of zero/F will therefore be assigned to essays not submitted by that point. No essays can be accepted as e-mail attachments.

Essay Topics

1) Romantic thinkers share a complex and often evolving fascination with the imagination and with the power of creativity. Yet they often have quite distinct understandings of and apprehensions about the imagination. Compare *and* contrast the treatment of imagination and creativity in the work of two Romantic thinkers.

- 2) Romantic thinkers are unusually aware of the subtle and consequential ways in which the inner world of the psyche (perceptions, judgments, memories, thoughts, imagination) and the outer world of culture (commercial relations, normative expectations, regulatory regimes, sovereign power, cultural history, domestic and international politics), are closely interlinked. Compare *and* contrast how two Romantic writers explore the relationship between these two worlds.
- 3) Romanticism writers are activated by a paradox: they imagine worlds at the same moment that they doubt the efficacy of those worlds. They affirm the importance of creativity, but worry that their creations are at best mere solipsisms, or at worst, monstrous. Compare *and* contrast how two Romantic writers wrestle with this paradox.
- 4) Slavery, and a growing sense not only of the horrors of the traffic in human beings, but also the degree to which British culture depended on that trade, informs many Romantic writings. Explore how slavery activates the work of at least one Romantic writer.
- 5) The Romantics were acutely sensitive to the ways in which a culture *schooled* individuals, shaping their lives, forming their psyches, and shaping their sense of what it means to govern and to be governed. In their writings, the Romantics often return implicitly or explicitly to the question of education. Deleterious and affirming “classrooms” sometimes emerge in their writings, competing for attention. The Romantics don’t hesitate to stage scenes of *other* or alternative forms of education, other forms of teaching and learning, as a way to affirm the importance of pedagogy while at the same time acknowledging the ever-present threat of a “bad education.” The Romantics find and create classrooms in many places and spaces, some of them quite unexpected. Compare *and* contrast the question of education in two Romantic writers.
- 6) Blake’s images are dense with detail, and place an unusually heavy burden on the spectator. That burden increases exponentially when the artist combines images and text in what W.J.T. Mitchell calls “Blakes composite art.” Select a small number of plates from Blake’s work and write a close and careful analysis of the ways in which the images and the texts together form a “composite art.”
- 7) Mary Wollstonecraft reminded her readers that British women were subject to forces that *rendered* them, i.e., formed and deformed them, while also transforming to suit the needs, fantasies, desires, and expectations of men. Compare and contrast the exploration of the question of how women are rendered in two Romantic writers.
- 8) Create a video rendering of a reading of one of the assigned texts (or part of one of the assigned texts) studied this term. Ensure that the sights and sounds in the video speak to and from the themes and problems explored in the text. Write a short (four pages) explanation of why your video looks and sounds the way that it does. For an example of a 3M06 video rendering see Michael Griffin’s “London” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bAkEyFbGjTc>
- 9) I warmly encourage students to devise your own essay topic. Note: In order to ensure that your topic is viable and manageable, you will need to discuss your essay’s objectives and arguments with Roshaya first. Regardless of the topic, your essay will need to be anchored in the work of the writers and works on this course.