

FYSP 127: The Last Romantics

Fall, 2002

Professor John Olmsted

Rice 108

Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. and by appt.

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Writing in 1931, William Butler Yeats described the poets of his generation:

We were the last romantics -- chose for theme
Traditional sanctity and loveliness;
Whatever's written in what poets name
The book of the people; whatever most can bless
The mind of man or elevate a rhyme.

Yeats here summarizes the implicit agenda of much Romantic and Modernist poetry: it is rooted in a newly conceived sense of tradition; its aim is beauty and pleasure; it draws its language and thematic concerns from ordinary working men and women; and its intention is no less than to transform human consciousness. The great contemporaries of whom he was thinking undoubtedly included Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, and it is to the poetry and prose writings of these two American poets and the Anglo-Irish Yeats that the seminar will be devoted. We will discuss both the ways that Modernist poetry grew out of the central concerns of English Romanticism and the ways in which modern poets defined themselves as reacting to what they perceived as Romantic imprecision of language and extravagance of emotion. We will also consider the political sympathies of the three writers. All wrote great and influential poetry; yet all were sympathetic to the rise of extreme right-wing ideologies in England, Germany, Spain, and Italy.

The chief aim of this course is to make you a more alert and engaged reader of poetry by studying the works of William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), Ezra Pound (1885-1972) and T.S. Eliot (1888-1969).

Like all the first year seminars, this course has as well three distinct goals:

- you will learn or refine skills necessary for close reading of a text, critical thinking, discussion, and research
- the course is designed to provide a good introduction to college-level work in the liberal arts
- students who complete the seminar successfully will earn Writing Proficiency credit

The responsibility of each member of the class is to do the assigned reading, to take an active part in class discussion and in individual group meetings, and to prepare and hand in all written work on time.

Students are expected to attend all classes and to arrive on time.

After the first few weeks we will divide the class into discussion groups. The chair of each group will arrange for one or more meetings of the group each week outside normal class times. In these group meetings you will read the assigned texts aloud, discuss them, and prepare your presentations for regular class meetings.

Groups should prepare each week to read and discuss all the assigned poems and topics. On Thursdays beginning September 19 each member of the class will hand in a two- to three-page paper in which you mention when and where you met with your group, who attended, and what was discussed. Then, in the second, longer section of the paper, treat some aspect of the texts assigned which interested you.

The final paper, due on December 12, will be twelve to fourteen pages in length and will deal with some important aspect of the work of any one of the three writers. Ideally, the topic will arise from your weekly journal papers.

Evaluation in the course will be based on class participation, on the weekly papers, and on the long final paper. Students who do not attend all classes and group discussion meetings will not receive credit for the course.

Texts:

Jon Stallworthy, ed. **The Twentieth Century**, Vol. 2C, **The Norton Anthology of English Literature**. Norton

W. B. Yeats, **The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats**. A New Edition, ed. Richard J. Finneran. Macmillan.

T.S. Eliot, **The Wasteland**, ed. Michael North. Norton.

Ezra Pound, **Selected Poems of Ezra Pound**. New Directions.

Class Schedule:

Note: A more detailed syllabus with group assignments will be available once the discussion groups are formed.

Week of

September 2 Romantic and Modern: An Introduction
Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale"
Yeats, "Sailing to Byzantium"
Shelley, Chorus from **Hellas**
Yeats, poem from **The Resurrection**

September 9 Early Yeats poems (1889-1913): "The Meditation of the Old Fisherman," "To the Rose upon the Rood of Time," "The Sorrow of Love," (see also the versions of this poem in the **Norton Anthology**, pp. A-16- A-17) "When You are Old," "He thinks of Those who have spoken evil of his beloved," "Words," and "No Second Troy."

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| September 16 | Norton Anthology, 1897-1915 Yeats, Responsibilities (1914) First journal paper due September 20 |
| September 23 | Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1915) Pound, Canto I, Selected Poems , 96 |
| September 30 | Eliot, "Sweeney Among the Nightingales" (1918) Yeats, The Wild Swans at Coole (1919) |
| October 7 | Eliot, The Wasteland (1922) |
| October 14 | The Wasteland (1922) |
| October 21 | FALL BREAK |
| October 2 | Eliot, "The Hollow Men" (1925) Pound, Cantos II and III (1922-25) Eliot, Journey of the Magi (1927) |
| November 4 | Yeats, The Tower (1928) |
| November 11 | The Tower |
| November 18 | The Winding Stair (1933) |
| November 25 | The Winding Stair |
| December 2 | Yeats, Last Poems (1939) |
| December 9 | Last Poems W. H. Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" December 12: final paper due |