Susan Egenolf Course Description—Fall 2017

ENGL 638—Art and Literature in the Industrial Age

This course will explore 18th- and 19th-century art and literature and their relationship to industry, including industry as a moral imperative, domestic manufacture and farming, as well as trade between Britain, the Continent, the near East, and the Western hemisphere. Students will study such entrepreneurs as Robert Owen, director of the textile mills at New Lanark, Scotland, and Sir Joseph Banks, botanist, explorer, adviser to the King on the Royal Botanical garden, Kew, and trustee of the British Museum for more than 40 years, as well as the art of Turner, Constable, and Gainsborough, in order to understand the reciprocal influence of aesthetics and industry in the 18th and early-19th centuries. We will trace the movement of people and goods to and from Britain, its colonies, the Continent and the rest of the world in the service of Empire. We will examine both the representations and products of industry, including neo-classical manufacture, picturesque tourism (and the subcategory of the subterranean British tour that focused upon descending into mines and quarries), slavery, laborers, and the material objects of industrialization. The course likely will be arranged in four sections: laboring bodies; neo-classicism in the industrial age; moral imperatives of industry; and the manufactory: process and products. This course will foster students’ understanding of the interdependent relationship between industry and artistic production in the period. Students will read primary and critical materials that will afford them a nuanced understanding of the sociohistorical contexts of artistic and industrial production in the period. I will also ask students to consider various types of texts in their readings of the interconnectivity of art and industry, incorporating workhouse manifestos, poetry, travel letters, paintings and manufactured objects (sculpture, pottery, textiles, ruins) into the materials for the course.

Students in the course will also contribute (and be credited for) research and writing for the installation of the Josiah Wedgwood-George Woodall Exhibit that will open in Spring 2018 in the Forsyth Gallery on campus. We’ll spend class time early in the semester talking and reading about practices of collection and display in the 18th and 19th centuries, then students will have hands-on experience with modern collection display of 18th- and 19th-century objects.