

English 355, Fall Term 2000
Palmer 208
Off. Hrs. T & W 10-11, TH 3-4

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Nineteenth-Century British Novel

The publicists and media consultants of Silicon Valley have applied themselves to their work with both intelligence and something like religious zeal. They tell us constantly, with the fervor of true believers, that computer technology has utterly transformed our world, and that our lives are wholly different now, or at least that -- if your particular life doesn't actually look all that different -- it will very, very soon.

But one could easily make the argument that the nineteenth century witnessed a much more cataclysmic transformation in the shape of human life than the twentieth. In the England of 1800, the great majority of the population lived in rural communities, where nearly all work was connected with agriculture. Home and work were completely interconnected. Communication with other places could only travel as quickly as a person, or horse, could walk. Newspapers were expensive to produce, and postage with high because travel was slow. Clocks were very expensive, and for most people sunset concluded the day.

On a given morning in 1900, most people woke up according to a schedule based not on the seasons, but on the business day. Most woke up in cities or in suburbs that had not existed a century before. They read an inexpensive morning newspaper, printed on cheap, factory-made paper. All over the country, news in these papers was almost exactly the same, since major events were reported overnight by telegraph. These people commuted to a separate workplace, often by train or subway, or they stayed home, not to continue the weaving or the work of the farm, but to pursue a newly defined realm of human activity: housekeeping.

This course has two purposes. The first is to study the literature of this century, a literature which chronicles and examines the massive changes I have described, as well as the more ineffable changes in thought and style that accompany them. The second purpose is to build skills in literary analysis, the most important of which is the skill of close reading. A "close reading" is the building-block of all literary criticism, and it involves a detailed examination of the language in one passage from a given work, in order to interpret that passage's meaning and its significance for the work as a whole. Debating these kinds of interpretations, and the linguistic evidence for or against, will be the central task of the semester, both in class and in your writing.

Books:

Austen: *Mansfield Park*

Dickens: *Bleak House*

Course Pack, available at the bookstore

Eliot: *Middlemarch*

Stoker: *Dracula*

Writing:

4 papers of roughly 5 pages each, one on each of the 4 novels. These will all be interpretive papers, asking you to present coherent readings of specific passages from the novels, and to use

these close readings to defend an argument about the novel's meaning, or to answer some particularly thorny interpretive question the novel poses. If you like, you may use the critical or historical material in the course pack, but no outside reading or research will be required for these papers.

I will provide suggested topics, along with a more detailed handout outlining expectations and standards for written work in the class. But I will always encourage you to write about what interests you most in these books, even if that means ignoring my topics.

Reading:

All readers of 19th-century fiction must face the very grave risk of absorption. You may find yourself approaching the mid-point of one of these books, diligently proceeding page by page, and suddenly, without any previous warning, you perceive that you are *actually curious to know what happens next*. If this happens, do not panic.

I'm being facetious, but there is a danger that, when you get hungry for the next chapter, you begin absorbing information rather than paying attention to the language. To get ready for class, you might think of trying to answer the following question (a question which, in fact, you may be asked): "What's the most important passage in this section? And why?" Or even: "What is the most important *word* in this section, and why?" Come to class with theories to try out and with questions to air. I expect you to be prepared in this way for each class, and I expect you to contribute every day.

Presentation:

I'll be asking each of you to choose one assigned reading and make a short presentation on it in class. The goal of your presentation should be to focus us on what, in your reading of the text, are its most important linguistic features and its most important ideas. You can do this by raising overall questions, or by asking the rest of us to respond to your sense of a specific passage on a specific page. The best presentations will do a bit of both. I do ask that you focus our attention on specific passages from the text, but you should think of yourself as opening a conversation, rather than delivering a lecture. The most effective presentations can often start with something like, "I'm really confused by this passage, but here's my reaction to it right now...." You should be prepared to speak for five minutes, or perhaps a bit more, and your goal, again, should be to outline the most important features and issues of the reading for that day.

Grades:

Paper on <i>Mansfield Park</i> :	20%
Paper on <i>Bleak House</i>	25%
Paper on <i>Middlemarch</i>	25%
Paper on <i>Dracula</i>	20%
Presentation	10%

Absences and Late Arrivals:

You may miss up to 3 classes without excuse or penalty. More than three absences will be grounds for failing the course. If you are repeatedly late or unprepared for class, you can be counted as absent.

Schedule of Assignments*

Mansfield Park

8/28	Ward**; Rodney
	<i>Mansfield Park</i> chapters 1-6; Price; Repton; Wordsworth (handout) chapters 7-14
9/2 Labor Day	No Class
9/4	chapters 15-21
9/9	chapters 22-31
9/11	chapters 32-37
9/16	chapters 38-48
Tuesday, 9/12:	Evening Screening of <i>Metropolitan</i> (Dir. Whit Stillman, 1990)
9/18	Said (R), Trilling (R)
9/23	Marx, "Fetishism"; Ruskin (handout); Patmore
9/25	

Bleak House

9/30	<i>Bleak House</i> Parts I & II (See Table of Contents, pp 8-10)
10/2	Part III Parts IV & V (Class Cancelled)
10/7	<i>Mansfield Park</i> Paper Due
10/9	Parts VI & VII VIII & IX
10/14	X & XI
10/16	XII & XIII XIV & XV
10/21 Fall Break	No Class XVI & XVII
10/23	XVIII XIX & XX
10/28	(No Class - Fall Break)
10/30	Miller; Danahay

Middlemarch

* Expect some changing and rearranging.

** Readings other than the four major novels are listed here by the author's last name. Unless otherwise noted, all can be found in the course pack.

11/4 Mill; "Parliamentary Reform" (handout)
11/6

Pages 3- 34
Bleak House Paper Due
35-119
123-203

204-319
323-427
431-496

497- 636
639-693
693-730; Feuerbach; Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach"

733-837

Dracula

11/11 Beckson
11/13 *Dracula* Chapters I-IV

11/18 V-VIII
Middlemarch Paper Due
11/20

11/25 IX-XIII
11/27-9 Thanksgiving XIV-XVIII

12/2 XIX-XXI
12/4 XXII-XXVII

12/9 Wicke

Monday, December 16: *Dracula* Paper due at my office by Noon