

English 221-01: Novel of Manners

CRN 10264

Professor J. Brady
Palmer 306 (office)
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Fall, 2005
11:00-11:50 MWF in
Buckman 207

Reading List:

Jane Austen, *Emma* (Penguin)
Jane Austen, *Persuasion* (Penguin)
Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (Penguin)
Henry James, *Washington Square* (Penguin)
Henry James, *The Bostonians* (Penguin)
Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (Penguin)
Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth* (Penguin)
Edith Wharton, *The Custom of the Country* (Penguin)
Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence* (Penguin)

Office Hours:

Monday-Thursday: 1:00-3:00

Course Description:

‘Isn’t marriage your vocation? Isn’t it all what you’re brought up for?’

-- Lawrence Selden to Lily Bart, in *The House of Mirth*

This course is a study of the development of the novel of manners over a century, as reflected in the work of those writers most identified with the genre: Jane Austen, Henry James, and Edith Wharton. We move from the heroine-centered courtship plots of Austen’s fiction, set in Regency England, through Edith Wharton and Henry James’s American adaptations of the genre in the late nineteenth century and the opening decades of the twentieth century. We will study many of the novels in pairs, often considering the second novel in the pairing as a revision of the first. These pairings will include authors rewriting their own novels (in the case of Austen and Wharton) or others’ (for instance, in James’ reworking of Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* in his novella *Washington Square*). The course will also include a political novel by James set in the post-Civil War era in the United States, which treats with corrosive irony the popular theme of political reconciliation between the North and South achieved through the protagonists’ courtship and marriage. We

will also study Veblen's classic economic study of the leisure class as a relevant gloss on the novels of Edith Wharton set in America's Gilded Age. We conclude with Wharton's retrospective look at the courtship rituals of this class in *The Age of Innocence*, a Pulitzer-prize winning novel written after the cataclysm of World War I. The novels in this course, largely traditional in structure, and spanning comedy, melodrama, satire, and tragedy, focus on the implications of the assumption Lawrence Selden makes in *The House of Mirth*: that marriage is the heroine's vocation.

This course may be taken for credit toward a minor in women's studies or as part of a minor or major in English.

Attendance Policy:

Late arrivals to class will be counted as an absence and any student who misses or comes late to class more than five times in the semester will receive a zero in the 10% of the grade reflecting class participation and attendance and may be asked to withdraw from the course.

Schedule:

Aug. 26, 29, 31, Sept. 2, 7	<i>Emma</i> (1815)
Sept. 9, 12, 14, 16	<i>Persuasion</i> (1818)
Friday, Sept. 16	Essay due, 5 pages
Sept. 19, 21, 23	<i>Northanger Abbey</i> (1818)
Sept. 26, 28, 30, Oct. 3	<i>Washington Square</i> (1880)
Wednesday, October 5	Essay due, 5 pages
Oct. 7, 10, 12, 14, 19	<i>The Bostonians</i> (1886)
Friday, October 21	In-class essay on <i>The Bostonians</i>
October 24, 26	<i>The Theory of the Leisure Class</i> (1899)
Oct. 28, 31, Nov. 2, 4, 7	<i>The House of Mirth</i> (1905)
Nov. 9, 11, 14, 16, 18	<i>The Custom of the Country</i> (1913)

Monday, November 21	Essay due, 5 pages
Thanksgiving Recess	
Nov. 28, 30, Dec. 1, 5	<i>The Age of Innocence</i> (1921)
Wednesday, December 7	In-class essay on <i>The Age of Innocence</i>

Method of Evaluation:

Essay on Austen's <i>Emma</i> and <i>Persuasion</i> (5-6 pages)	20%
Essay on <i>Northanger Abbey</i> and <i>Washington Square</i> (5-6 pages)	20%
In-class essay on <i>The Bostonians</i>	10%
In-class question*	10%
In-class participation, including attendance	10%
Essay on Wharton's <i>House of Mirth</i> and <i>Custom of the Country</i> (5-6 pages)	20%
In-class essay on <i>The Age of Innocence</i>	10%

* Each student will pose one formal question to the class during the semester, speaking from notes only. Your question should be focused, given a context, and its potential significance made clear to your classmates. The question should explore a fresh area or dimension of the text you think important to our understanding of the work. Having posed your question, you will then guide class discussion.

** All late essays will be penalized by at least a letter grade, and may not be rewritten.

Essay #1: Austen's Fiction

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Palmer 306

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You are to write an essay of 5-6 pages on one of the following topics, most of which require you to address both *Emma* and *Persuasion*. Please title your essay so as to give your reader a clear sense of the direction of your argument. Paginate your essay. Write in the present tense and double-check all quotations for accuracy. Be sure to offer relevant textual evidence supporting your claims in the body of your essay. This essay is worth 20% of your grade in this course and is due to me by noon, Friday, September 16th. Late essays will be penalized by at least a letter grade and may not be rewritten.

1. Austen's rakes as contrasts to her ideal gentlemen.
2. The representation of illness in Austen's later fiction.
3. The exercise of undue influence ("persuasion") as a recurrent theme in Austen's courtship plots.
4. Social class and the disposition of characters in the endings of Austen's novels, *Emma* in particular.
5. The heroines' relationships to their fathers in *Emma* and *Persuasion* (and, possibly, the absent mother).
6. Austen's handling of single women in straitened circumstances in her fiction as a critique of her novels' fairy-tale endings.
7. The secret courtship of *Emma*: Austen's cues and Emma's misreadings/misconstructions
8. Servants in Austen's later fiction (see Veblen).

