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Spring 2015

English 634—Readings in Nineteenth-Century British Literature

ENGL 634--Readings in Nineteenth-Century British Literature. Wide reading in British literature of the 19th Century; introduction of major figures, genres, and issues in the period; introduction to current critical conversations in 19th Century literary studies, including historical and social contexts.

This course will examine works written by British subjects during the nineteenth century. The emphasis of the course will be on how these texts relate to each other and to their sociopolitical contexts. Our objective is to understand the historical, cultural and literary contexts in which these authors produced their works. The works we will be reading represent several genres—poetry, drama, novel, short fiction and essay—and we’ll be discussing the particular innovations in these genres during the nineteenth century. We will study visual and imperial culture during the period, attending to the ways that these writers and artists represented English and Continental cultures, as well as cultures of the Near East and the New World. We will also attend to developments in contemporary scholarship concerned with the writings of the nineteenth century. Students should be able to analyze primary texts, to incorporate secondary texts into research, and to produce well-argued analyses with awareness of the historical context for the works.

Readings may include (Please note that we will not read all of these works, but this list will give you a sense of the works that we will cover.):


Drama: Joanna Baillie’s Family Legend; Percy Shelley’s The Cenci; Byron’s Cain; George Bernard Shaw’s Mrs. Warren’s Profession; Oscar Wilde’s Lady Windermere’s Fan.

Novels: Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein; Jane Austen’s Persuasion; Maria Edgeworth’s Ennui; Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre; Charles Dickens’s Hard Times; George Eliot’s The Mill on the Floss; William Thackeray’s Vanity Fair; Robert Louis Stevenson’s Kidnapped or The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

Grade Determination (tentative):
Attendance and participation 15%
Four short response papers (2-3 pp. each) 20%
Oral presentation 10%
Conference paper abstract and bibliography (5-6 pp.) 15%
Midterm exam (take home) 20%
Final exam (take home) 20%