

Nineteenth-Century Novel
ENGL 4373/5373
CRN 25339/25346
Spring Semester, 2011
Irby Hall 316
Richard Gaughan

When we talk about novels as belonging to this or that century, we don't mean to suggest that some magic switch is thrown that changes the themes, style, and formal characteristics of novels. While it's true that literary forms, like all artistic forms, have a history, that history has more to do with the inner logic of that form and the ways it can be explored and developed than with the calendar. But, literature is also responsive to its times, and the novel tends to be even more responsive than the more established genres. In fact, since the modern novel originated as a parody of high culture and without any particular literary pedigree, it is the most adaptable and improvisational of the genres and has never been shy about using whatever is happening around it as raw material. So, as the eighteenth century, with its Great Chains of Being and checks and balances, gave way to the revolutionary turmoil of the nineteenth century, it stands to reason that the novels would also change their concerns and the manner in which they told their stories.

The novels we will be reading come from all parts of a very busy, from a literary point of view, century. We will begin with three novels that might generally be classified as Romantic, if for no other reason than their emphasis on larger-than-life individuals and their struggles with the limits life imposes on their desires. These are, of course, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, and Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*. After this dose of Romanticism, we will look at three novels from the Victorian period, a period less concerned with the frustrations the individual faces in life and more with the question of whether there is such a thing as an individual at all. The great English novelists of mid-century (Dickens, George Eliot, Thackeray, and Trollope) were all social realists, which is to say they were interested in the ways social pressures influence character and may overwhelm, control, or destroy it. One reason for this concern with society was the simple fact that society was changing profoundly and rapidly as a result of the ascendancy of the capitalist classes and the Industrial Revolution. A social, economic, historical, and cultural process that probably began in the late seventeenth century (if not before) was coming to fruition and raising a lot of important questions. Foremost among them was the value of personal identity when identity could change, or be changed, so quickly in the new, more socially mobile society. We'll read two great novels and one very important one from this period in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton*, George Eliot's *Silas Marner*, and Dickens's *Great Expectations*. Finally, we will end our semester with Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, an unsparing look at the fate of the individual in a world controlled by large impersonal forces, some of them as old as humanity and others as new as the latest state-of-the-art machine. For some people, Hardy takes the social realism of the Victorians to the next phase of naturalism, which is to say that the struggle between the individual and society becomes not really a struggle at all but the inevitable defeat of the individual. I'm not convinced by this view, but Hardy certainly does not make Tess's life an easy one. In any case, Hardy points us in the direction of the somber and disillusioned novels of the twentieth century.

Course Requirements:

Undergraduates:

There will be three in-class essays, one the final exam, and a 5-7 page paper on one of the novels that will require some research. All of these exams will test your ability to analyze and interpret the novels we are reading.

Graduate Students:

Graduate students will take the same exams as the undergraduates, but will also be responsible for an annotated bibliography and a somewhat longer research paper. The bibliography is intended to be preparation for the paper. Graduate students will compile a list of critical works, books and articles, and this will provide them with a context for writing an extended analysis of one of the novels. I will be meeting with the graduate students regularly so that they can identify their interests and begin work on the bibliography and the novel they will have chosen.

Final grade will be determined mostly by the written assignments, but regular class attendance and participation can help your grade, if it is borderline.

The reading for this class will be on the heavy side. I figure we will need to read about 100 pages per class to get through the novels in fourteen weeks. On the bright side, that's only about thirty pages a day. You should also bear in mind that I chose the small novels for this course.

Reading List:

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*
Emily Bronte, *Wuthering Heights*
Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre*
Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton*
George Eliot, *Silas Marner*
Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*
Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*

The University of Central Arkansas affirms its commitment to academic integrity and expects all members of the university community to accept shared responsibility for maintaining academic integrity. Students in this course are subject to the provisions of the university's Academic Integrity Policy, as approved by the Board of Trustees as Board Policy No. 709 on February 10, 2010, and published in the Student Handbook. Penalties for academic misconduct in this course may include a failing grade on an assignment, a failing grade in the course, or any other course-related sanction the instructor determines to be appropriate. Continued enrollment in this course affirms a student's acceptance of the university policy.

I don't tolerate plagiarism or cheating of any kind. If you cheat and I find out about it, I will fail you for the course. In case you haven't noticed, cheating undercuts your own education, not to mention your character.

You should familiarize yourselves with all the policies listed in the Student Handbook, in particular those relating to academics (beginning on page 25) and sexual harassment (on page 93).

The University of Central Arkansas adheres to the requirements of the Americans With Disabilities Act. If you need accommodations under this act due to a disability, contact the Office of Disability Support Services at 450-3416.

Since I invariably treat my students with consideration and respect, I expect courtesy and respect from my students. I will not tolerate any kind of behavior directed towards me or any students that interferes with the class. You will receive one and only one warning. After that I will drop you from the class.

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