

EN 368 19<sup>th</sup> Century British Women Writers  
Fall 2009, MWF 12 noon  
Carney 204

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Carney 436, 2-3702  
Office hours: Tues 10-12,  
Wed 1-3 and by appointment

During the nineteenth century women writers came in force to the stage of world culture. As novelists, poets and essayists they explored and interrogated all facets of the life around them – politics and romance, religion and ambition, empire, the industrial and scientific revolutions, new perspectives on class, gender, and psychology. We're reading mainly novelists here, but we'll also look briefly at poets and essayists, thinking about all these works both as individual artistic constructions and as building blocks in a tradition, one stretching from "romantic" and "Victorian" to "modernist" times. Each work is both a cry of the heart, and the offering of a critical and reflective mind.

The course requires a substantial commitment to reading and discussion: along the way I will ask small groups of students to share responsibility for shaping discussions. Writing assignments will include short exercises to facilitate discussion or report on an assignment, a 5-6 page close-reading paper on an element in one of the first two novels, a 6-8 page reflective paper on an element in *North and South* or *Middlemarch*, and a set of final essays in a take-home final exam.

#### Schedule of Readings, Discussions, Assignments

- Sept. x-9-11 Introduction: women writing and a women writers tradition: prelude from poets and essayists (class booklet – Felicia Hemans, Emily Bronte, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti, Adelaide Procter, Amy Levy, Mary Coleridge Alice Meynell: Harriet Martineau, Marian Evans, Helen Taylor, Virginia Woolf)

#### **Two Romances, with Second Chances**

- Sept. 14-16-18 Jane Austen's *Persuasion* (1818)
- Sept. 21-23-25 *Persuasion*, with essays by Frances Restuccia, "Mortification: Beyond the Persuasion Principle," and Alan Richardson, "Nervous Sensibility in Austen's Late Style."
- Sept. 28-30-Oct. 2 Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* (1848, New Riverside Edition)
- Oct. 5-7-9 *Wuthering Heights* and selected essays in NR edition
- **First 5-6 page essay due in my office Tues. Oct. 13**

#### **Two Novels of Humanist Social Politics**

- Oct. x-14-16 Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855)
- Oct. 19-21-23 *North and South* (small group meetings)
- Oct. 26-28-30 George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1872)
- Nov. 2-4-6 **Middlemarch** (small group meetings)
- **Second essay, 6-8 pages, due in class Nov. 11**

### Transition to “Modernism”

- Nov. x-11-13 Olive Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm* (1883)
- Nov. 16-18-20 *African Farm*, Mary Ward’s *Helbeck of Bannisdale* (1898)
- Nov. 23 (Thanksgiving) *Helbeck*
- Nov. 30-Dec. 2-4 Baroness Orczy’s *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1905); Virginia Woolf’s *The Voyage Out* (1915)
- Dec. 7-9-11 *The Voyage Out*; finale, and final exam handed out, to be returned to me **in person in my office** during the scheduled examination time for this course, which is **Fri. Dec. 18, between 12:30 and 3 p.m.**

**Assignments and Grading:** Careful reading, steady attendance, participating in discussion (including various requests for presentations), and the writing of two mid-size papers and a final set of essays on a take-home exam. I will offer some topics for the October and November papers, but also leave room for a potential topic of your own, after discussion with me. The three major writing assignments, the two papers and the final exam, will together count for 80% of your grade in the course; a composite grade for participation in discussions and presentations makes up the remaining 20%.

**Plagiarism:** I trust that Boston College students need only the gentlest reminder that the academic integrity contract that is part of your citizenship in the University requires that all written work be entirely your own, including, of course, the final take-home exam. If it’s been a while since you looked at the BC Academic Integrity Policy, call it up again at <http://www.bc.edu/offices/stserv/academic/resources/policy.html#integrity> For the papers I will invite, but not require, references to the critical essays assigned in class, or to some of the critical reading sources listed below. As these assignments come closer we’ll talk more directly about the important craft of citing sources, which in college becomes second-nature for doing intellectual work.

**Critical Reading:** I hope that reading the required essays on *Persuasion* and *Wuthering Heights* may give you a taste for reading ABOUT writing. For continued work in this field, I think that your reading and thinking and writing about these novels would be stimulated, as mine has been, by a look at any or all of these recent books on nineteenth century British writers. The reading is recommended but not required, though you should get acquainted with these books if you’re thinking, however preliminarily, about graduate school in English. Often the best thing to do is to read the introductory chapter and then skip to the chapter on a writer you’re interested in. These books should be on reserve in O’Neill by the beginning of the second week of classes.

- Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: the Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (1979)
- Catherine Gallagher, *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form* (1985)
- John Kucich, *Repression in Victorian Fiction: Bronte, Eliot and Dickens* (1987)
- Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (1987)
- Rosemarie Bodenheimer, *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans: George Eliot, Her Letters and Fiction* (1994)

- Ruth Jenkins, *Reclaiming Myths of Power: Women Writers and the Victorian Spiritual Crisis* (1995)
- Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (2007)

Some reminders to facilitate the integration of historical and literary understanding...

- **16<sup>th</sup> century:** religious and political motives underlie ‘reform’ in the English Christian Church...the Anglican State/Church aspires to steer a “middle way” between Roman Catholicism and more Puritan or Calvinist forms of Protestantism
- **17<sup>th</sup> century:** English Civil war, anti-Royalist Oliver Cromwell and the Puritan Commonwealth, the ‘Restoration’ (1660) and later the ‘Glorious Revolution’ (1688) increase the power of Parliament, the beginnings of ‘party’ politics, American settlement
- **1703** formal ‘union’ of Scotland and England is the foundation for the idea of ‘the British’
- **1745** Jacobite uprising in Scotland finds little support in England for ‘restoring’ the Stuart line
- **1776** American Declaration of Independence
- **1789-1815** The French Revolution, the republic, ‘the terror,’ Napoleon and empire (French-English war strengthens British naval power, enables the hero of *Persuasion* to make his name and fortune)
- **1801** Act of Union forcibly unites Ireland to England and Scotland in ‘Great Britain’
- **1815** British coalition under the Duke of Wellington defeats Napoleon at Waterloo (growing up in the 1830’s, the Bronte children imagine and write about a romantic-heroic world with the Duke of Wellington at its center; *Wuthering Heights*: Haunting the whole century, the French Revolution is re-staged in Dickens’s 1859 best-seller *A Tale of Two Cities*, and again in Emmuska Orczy’s 1905 bestseller *The Scarlet Pimpernel*)
- **1819** working class protest meeting quelled by government forces at the field of St. Peter’s near Manchester. (“Peterloo” marks industrial revolution and class conflict, especially for Manchester’s Elizabeth Gaskell, writing *North and South*)
- **1829** ‘Catholic Emancipation’ finally allows Britain’s Catholics to vote and hold office
- **1832** first of a series of ‘Reform Bills’ that gradually extend the franchise to the middle and eventually (1867, 1884) the working classes. (**Middlemarch** is set before and during 1832, but written in the years just after the passage of the 1867 Bill.)
- **1837** Queen Victoria crowned
- **1845** John Henry Newman, famous Anglican scholar, converts to Catholicism, signifying a decades long Catholic revival in England (Mary Arnold Ward’s father part of this movement, which forms the background of several of her novels, including *Helbeck of Bannisdale*)
- **1848** revolutions in several European countries, climax of the Irish Famine in Britain
- **1853** The Crimean War—Russia and Britain fight over hegemony in the Turkish/‘Eastern’ territory, protecting empire in India and the Middle East. Wars for the same purpose in Afghanistan throughout the rest of the century.
- **1861-5** American Civil War: British support the North despite hardships for English manufacturers denied American cotton, (as *North and South* depicts)
- **1870’s** In Africa, conflicts between British (Capetown Colony) and Dutch (Transvaal) forces, Zulu’s defeated 1879, background for Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm*)

- **1892** British Labour Party formed **1903** Queen Victoria dies **1914** First World War (though Woolf's *The Voyage Out* depicts no 'historical' events, a massive shift of sensibility for a new century is evident)