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English 252, Fall 2020
19th-c. British Literature
Wednesday 3:10-6:00

Energy, Environment, and Victorian Literature

This course will approach Victorian literature through the lens of the energy humanities and the environmental humanities, considering the forms and genres of nineteenth-century fiction in terms of the rise of fossil-fueled modernity. The Industrial Revolution, which happened first in coal-rich Britain, has long been seen as a turning point in environmental history. This course will revisit Victorian literature from the perspective of contemporary environmental crisis to ask what environmental thought can gain by looking to literature, especially to literature from the moment when energy path dependencies were yet hardening into the global system of fossil capitalism that we inhabit today. Situating ourselves in the broader field of literature and the environment, we will read a variety of realist and speculative genres of fiction including provincial realism, the industrial novel, science fiction, hollow earth fiction, and the urban Gothic.

Readings

Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*. Penguin. 0141439556.
Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*. Longman Cultural Edition. 0321107217
George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*. Broadview. 1551114674.
E. M. Forster, “The Machine Stops” (Canvas)
Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, “Sultana’s Dream” (Canvas)
Edward Bulwer Lytton, *The Coming Race*. Broadview. 155111836X or 9781551118369
William Morris, *News from Nowhere*. Broadview. 1551112671
Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Broadview. ISBN: 9781551111261
H. G. Wells *The War of the Worlds*. Penguin. 0141441038
*All secondary readings posted on Canvas

Assignments and Expectations

Students are expected to attend seminar, having completed the readings for the day, and to participate actively in discussion. There will be primary and secondary reading assignments for each class; both are required. Participation will figure into your course grade. The major assignments for the class will be a presentation, keywords paper, and seminar paper, described below.

“Place or Thing” Presentations and Other Discussion Assignments

Each student will sign up to present at one of our class meetings. For these presentations, please choose an *object, location, or environment* represented in the assigned text to research and describe to the class. The environmental humanities have long been broadly concerned with, among other aims, refocusing readerly and critical attention on materiality and on the ways texts mediate environmental materiality. Your main goal in the presentation will be to show how contextual or historical background on a particular object, location, or environment represented in the text can help us understand the material conditions of the narrative world and thus provide

better grounding for interpreting it. These “place or thing” presentations will last about 10 minutes. Some class meetings will have two presentations; when that happens, please coordinate with the other presenter to ensure you are focusing on different objects, locations, or environments. [The sign-up sheet for the "place or thing" presentations is here.](#)

Each student will also bring to seminar each week a question or a passage on which to focus class discussion. (If the class is large, this may be every-other-week.)

During weeks with visitors, groups of students will work together to come up with questions for our guests; [a sign-up sheet for this discussion activity is available here.](#)

Keywords Paper

For this assignment you will write a short paper of 3-5 pages (double spaced) on a keyword of your choice, following the model of the VLC keywords we will be reading throughout the class. You should feel free to devise your own keyword. This paper is due any time before the last day of class (December 9th), depending on your schedule. Students will have the option to present their keyword at an optional end-of-the-quarter conference with two other graduate seminars on Victorian environments.

Seminar Paper

Your paper should be 10 pages long (double spaced, not including bibliography), and will be due Thursday December 17th. Papers should be submitted electronically via Canvas. Your seminar paper may develop from your keywords assignment, and I encourage you to think of the two assignments in tandem (although the seminar paper should not simply recast your keywords paper in longer form). Many of you will be familiar with the general expectations for a graduate seminar paper, but for those of you new to graduate study, I will highlight key aspects of the assignment here. The practice of writing a seminar paper should prepare you to write professional criticism in literary studies, thus your paper, like any journal article or dissertation chapter, should develop an original argument based on comprehensive research of related work in the field. Ideally, a seminar paper should develop out of the critical problems and questions under investigation in the course; this means that normally your paper will focus on a literary text or texts that we studied together and will bear some relation to the major topics of the course. If you would like to write on a topic or text outside this scope, please feel free to talk to me about it in office hours. I expect your final papers to show evidence of careful research of the issues under investigation in your essay. You may use primary and secondary sources or just secondary sources, but be sure that your argument is grounded in thorough research with reliable materials. Your paper should make an original argument that has not been made about your particular text. (It is fine to write on a topic that another critic already discusses so long as your paper takes a different approach or explores different ground.)

Calendar

9/30 Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (1854)
VLC keyword entry: “Anthropocene” by Jesse Oak Taylor
Cara New Daggett, *Birth of Energy*, Chapters 1 and 2

- 10/7 H. G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds* (1898)
 VLC keyword entry: “Sustainability” by Deanna Kreisel
 Nathaniel Otjen, “Energy Anxiety and Fossil Fuel Modernity in H. G. Wells’s
The War of the Worlds”
- 10/14 Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (1847), pp. 3-170
 VLC keyword entry: “Enclosure” by Zach Fruit
 Heidi Scott, chapter 5 from *Fuel: An Ecocritical History*
***Heidi Scott Zoom visit**
- 10/21 Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (1847), pp. 171-337
 Susan Gillman, “Remembering Slavery Again”
 Kathryn Yusoff, “White Utopia/Black Inferno: Life on a Geologic Spike”

***This week we will be doing an optional joint class (1.5 hours long) with grad seminars led by Deanna Kreisel and Devin Garofalo, time TBD. Our regular Wednesday seminar will be half as long, accordingly.**
- 10/28 George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), pp. 51-286
 VLC keyword entry: “Logistics” by Susan Zieger
 Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital* (chapter 2)
- 11/4 Class cancelled
- 11/11 George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), pp. 287-518
 VLC keyword entry: “Environment” by Nathan K. Hensley
 Elizabeth Carolyn Miller (me!), “Fixed Capital and the Flow: Water Power, Steam Power, and *The Mill on the Floss*” (okay to skim) and “‘The Red Deep, Where the Buried Joy Seemed Still to Hover’: *The Mill on the Floss*” (excerpt from my book manuscript, “Extraction Ecologies and the Literature of the Long Exhaustion, 1830s-1930s”).
- 11/18 Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *The Coming Race* (1871)
 VLC keyword entry: “Environment” by Allen MacDuffie
 Allen MacDuffie, “The Heat Death of the Sun at the Dawn of the Anthropocene,” Chapter 2 of *Victorian Literature, Energy, and the Ecological Imagination*
- 11/25 William Morris, *News from Nowhere* (1890)
 VLC keyword entry: “Ecology” by Elizabeth Carolyn Miller
 Benjamin Morgan, “How We Might Live: Utopian Ecology in William Morris and Samuel Butler” (okay to skim Butler parts)
 Elizabeth Carolyn Miller, “William Morris, Extraction Capitalism, and the Aesthetics of Surface” (okay to skim)
***Benjamin Morgan Zoom visit**

12/2 Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891)
Devin Griffiths, “Petrodrama: Melodrama and Energetic Modernity”
***Devin Griffiths Zoom visit**

12/9 E. M. Forster, “The Machine Stops” (1909)
Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, “Sultana’s Dream” (1905)

Keyword papers due on Canvas on or before 12/9

Seminar papers due on Canvas 12/17

Date TBD: Optional Zoom conference with Devin’s and Deanna’s classes: “Keywords”