

The University of Houston, Department of English
ENGL 8360: Nineteenth-Century British Novel / Spring Semester 2014

“England’s Green and Pleasant Land”

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Office Hours: 2:30-4:00 Mon and by appt.



This course will explore the nineteenth-century British novel through the lens of environmental studies and ecocriticism. Inspired by a line from William Blake’s introduction to his epic poem *Milton*, this version of ENGL 8360 will analyze the British novel as an ironic reflection of “England’s green and pleasant land,” a description that Blake explicitly set against the “dark Satanic mills” of his own industrial era. We will explore various environments—regional, urban, and global—as they were represented in and shaped nineteenth-century fiction. Topics for discussion will include the concepts of “nature,” “place,” and “space” in our primary texts; the influence of Darwinian thought and evolutionary theory on the Victorian novel; the relationship of empire to industrial development; and the perception of environmental catastrophe. [Image: J.S. Lowry, *Industrial Landscape 1950*. bbc.ac.uk]

Required Texts

Novels

No specific editions are required.

Austen, Jane. *Mansfield Park*. 1814.

Ballantyne, Robert. *The Coral Island*. 1857.

Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. 1899.

Dickens, Charles. *Our Mutual Friend*. 1864-65.

Gaskell, Elizabeth. *Mary Barton*. 1848.

_____. “Our Society at Cranford.” 1851.

Hardy, Thomas. *The Return of the Native*. 1878.

Wells, H.G. “The Star.” 1897.

_____. *The War of the Worlds*. 1897.

Secondary Texts

All secondary texts are linked to or posted on our Blackboard site.

Beer, Gillian. “Finding a Scale for the Human: Plot and Writing in Hardy’s Novels.” *Darwin’s Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. 3rd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. 220-41.

Buell, Lawrence. “The Emergence of Environmental Criticism.” *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2005. 1-28.

_____. “Space, Place, and Imagination from Local to Global.” *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2005. 62-96.

Freeland, Natalka. “The Politics of Dirt in *Mary Barton* and *Ruth*.” *SEL: Studies in English Literature* 42:4 (Autumn 2002): 799-818.

- Heise, Ursula K. "From the Blue Planet to Google Earth: Environmentalism, Ecocriticism, and the Imagination of the Global." *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. 17-62.
- Law, Jules. "A River Runs Through Him: *Our Mutual Friend* and the Embankment of the Thames." *The Social Life of Fluids: Blood, Milk, and Water in the Victorian Novel*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010. 46-68.
- McCarthy, Jeffrey Mathes. "'A Choice of Nightmares': The Ecology of *Heart of Darkness*." *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies* 5:3 (Fall 2009): 620-48.
- Miller, J. Hillis. "Topography in *The Return of the Native*." *Essays in Literature* 8:2 (Fall 1981): 119-34.
- Mitchell, W.J.T. "Imperial Landscape." *Landscape and Power*. Ed. W.J.T. Mitchell. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994. 5-34.
- Morton, Timothy. *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. "The Monarch of all I Survey." *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Critical Environments

- Mon Jan 13** Introduction to Course
- Mon Jan 20** **No Class: Martin Luther King Day**
- Mon Jan 27** Lawrence Buell, "The Emergence of Environmental Criticism"
Lawrence Buell, "Space, Place, and Imagination from Local to Global"
Elizabeth Gaskell, "Our Society at Cranford" (short story)
H.G. Wells, "The Star" (short story)
Craft of Research 1 and 2

Landscape

- Mon Feb 3** Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* (entire)
W.J.T. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape"
- Mon Feb 10** Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, Books 1-3
J. Hillis Miller, "Topography in *The Return of the Native*"
- Mon Feb 17** Hardy, *Native*, Books 4-5
Gillian Beer, "Finding a Scale for the Human"

Cityscape

- Mon Feb 24** Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton* (entire)
Natalka Freeland, "The Politics of Dirt"
Craft of Research 3 and 4
- Mon Mar 3** Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, Books 1-2
Jules Law, "A River Runs Through Him"
- Mon Mar 10** **No Class: Spring Break**
- Mon Mar 17** Dickens, *Friend*, Books 3-4
Timothy Morton, selection from *Ecology Without Nature*

Mon Mar 17 **** Due Date:** Meet with Lynn Voskuil by today to discuss your topic for the final paper and your selection of a critical article for the short paper

Worldscape

Mon Mar 24 John Ballantyne, *The Coral Island* (entire)
Mary Louise Pratt, “The Monarch of All I Survey”

Mon Mar 31 **No Class on Monday**
Craft of Research 5 and 6

**** Due Date:** Short Paper due by midnight / submit as email attachment / no hard copy

Class for this week is Timothy Morton’s keynote address for the Interdisciplinary Nineteenth-Century Studies (INCS) conference. The keynote is scheduled for **Saturday, March 29, 5:00-6:30**, at the Hotel Zaza in the Museum District. See incs2014.org for more details.

Mon Apr 7 Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (entire)
Jeffrey McCarthy, “A Choice of Nightmares”

Mon Apr 14 H.G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds* (entire)
Ursula Heise, “From the Blue Planet to Google Earth”

Mon Apr 21 Paper Workshop

Mon Apr 28 Paper Workshop

Mon May 5 **** Due Date:** Final paper due by midnight / submit as email attachment / no hard copy

Course Requirements

Class Participation: 25 percent

“Class participation” means coming to class with the assignments completed, ready to participate in discussion. In addition, class participation involves three specific activities.

- 1) Class participation requires working together with other students in a “Case Study Group” to focus on one of the three units we will discuss this semester. Each group will be responsible to play a relatively large role in class discussion during its unit. In addition, each group will be responsible to write the lead blog post for two of the three weeks (see No. 2 below). Groups will be assigned by lot during our first class session. Each group is required to meet with me at least once before its unit begins so that we can formulate ideas and techniques for its role in discussion; they may meet with me more than once, but are not required to do so. I also recommend that group members meet with each other—either in person or online—to make sure that blogging and discussion responsibilities are appropriately divided and covered.
- 2) Class participation requires contributing to the class blog, which we will use to help us prepare our texts for class discussion. For our sessions on January 27, February 3, February 24, and March 24—that is, for our initial critical session and for the first week of each unit—I will provide a post (of 300-500 words) for discussion

based on our readings; **I will do so by Friday at 5:00 pm** preceding each of those weeks. During those weeks, you are required to post a response to my comment, to raise your own question, or to respond to the post of another student who may have posted before you; your response, in other words, may focus on an issue of your choice with reference to either our primary or secondary reading for that class session. **You must do so by Monday morning at 10:00 am.** Please post no fewer than 150 words and no more than 400 words. On the other two weeks of each unit, your Case Study Group will be responsible for the substantive lead comment. **Case Study Group members will be required to post their comments by Friday at 5:00 pm each week they are responsible; everyone else will respond by Monday at 10:00 am, just as they do when I am the lead discussant.**

- 3) Class participation requires leading the discussion of one paper for our Paper Workshop groups during the final two weeks of the course. We will discuss in greater detail what that involves as we approach the end of the course.

Paper Assignments / 25 and 50 percent, respectively, of your semester grade

Argument Analysis of a critical article / 1500-1800 words / due on March 31

Each person will be responsible for mastering a critical article of his or her own selection, one that you have identified as central to the research for your final paper. “Mastery” essentially means analyzing and evaluating its argument in a short paper. The readings from *Craft of Research* will give you some useful analytical language for this assignment; we will also draw on this language when we discuss the articles in class. If it helps, think of this assignment as a review of your article, a review that functions much like a book review in an academic journal or a publication like *The New York Review of Books*. Remember that a good review does not simply summarize or paraphrase the work in question; instead, it analyzes and evaluates the argument. I will look for analytical, evaluative language in your paper. Each person is required to meet with me individually by March 17. The purpose of this conference is to discuss the topic you want to pursue in your final paper and to confirm your selection of the critical article you want to analyze for the short paper. Clearly, you will need to do a bit of spade work before scheduling an appointment with me regarding these selections.

Seminar Paper / 4500-6000 words / final draft due on May 5

The most important assignment for this course is the final seminar paper; its length is approximately equivalent to an article you might publish in a scholarly journal. The text and topic are for you to determine, but you must discuss your ideas with me no later than March 17. Our readings from *The Craft of Research* should help you not only figure out your topic but also construct your argument. We will discuss drafts of your papers during the final several weeks of the semester; everyone will receive a thorough workshop discussion, which should help you with your final draft. We’ll discuss the workshop format later in the semester, closer to the time your drafts are due.

Interdisciplinary Nineteenth-Century Studies Conference

This semester, the University of Houston will host the Indisciplinary Nineteenth-Century Studies conference on March 27-30, 2014, at the Hotel Zaza in Houston’s Museum District. One of the two conference keynotes will constitute our class session for March 31. If you would like to attend the conference, you are welcome to register. If you would like to work a few hours at the registration desk, you will receive a registration waiver, which will allow you to attend the entire conference for free. The keynotes are open to the public, so you will not need to register just to attend Tim Morton’s address. For more information, see incs2014.org.