

We Other Victorians?

Historicism, Presentism, and the Endless Nineteenth Century

English 556 Spring 2016

Mon. 3-6 PM, Fisher-Bennett 20

Emily Steinlight

emily.steinlight@english.upenn.edu

Fisher-Bennett 116, ext. 8-5143

Office hours: Thurs. 10-12 or by appointment

Course Description

A strange fact worth acknowledging: to the Victorians we owe our field. Before them, no modern literary studies in English. Indeed, nineteenth-century writers were the first to speak of “literature” in its current sense. The disciplinary divisions they drew remain present in the structure of academic institutions and in the scholarly work we do; so too does their ideal of professionalism and the peculiar morality they attached to vocation. Not least among our debts to the nineteenth century, for better or for worse, is a certain fidelity to historicism and to the notion of literary periods. The field, in its organization and its favored methods, attests to that commitment. To what extent, then, can we historicize historicism? Can we do so while recognizing that we still dwell—conceptually, materially, and geopolitically—in a world historically forged by the nineteenth century? How might our situatedness in the present, and in the particular context of the early twenty-first century U.S., enter critically rather than inadvertently into the way we read Victorian literature and history now? What conflicting historicisms confront each other in literary studies today, and what alternatives to historicism seem desirable or practicable? This graduate seminar will provide an introduction to Victorian studies while attending to methodological debates about periodicity, the place of the present, and related concerns in and beyond the field. We will read fiction, poetry, and essays by Eliot, Dickens, Hardy, Wilde, Tennyson, Carlyle, Ruskin, and others, as well as criticism and theory from Marx to Nietzsche to Foucault and from Steven Marcus to Sharon Marcus.

Required Texts

Alfred Tennyson, *In Memoriam A. H. H.* (Norton, 2003; ISBN 9780393979268)

Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (Penguin Classics, 2003; ISBN 9780141439679)

George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (Penguin Classics, 2008; ISBN 9780140436648)

Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. I (Penguin Classics, 1992; ISBN 9780140445688)

Thomas Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (Penguin Classics, 2003; ISBN 9780141439785)

Robert Louis Stevenson, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Broadview, 3rd ed., 2015; ISBN 9781554810246)

Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Oxford, 2008; ISBN 9780199535989)

All books can be purchased at the Penn Book Center

*Supplementary readings will be available electronically on the Canvas site

Assignments and Course Requirements

Participation (30%)

Presentation (20%)

Roundtable Position Paper (20%)

Seminar Paper (30%)

Schedule of Class Meetings

Jan. 13 (Monday classes meet on Wednesday)

Introduction

* *V21 Manifesto*

* Eric Hayot, "Against Periodization; or, On Institutional Time"

* Marshall Brown, "Periods and Resistances"

Jan. 18: Classes cancelled for Martin Luther King Day

Jan. 25

* Steven Marcus, selections from *The Other Victorians* (Intro and "A Child Is Being Beaten")

* Michel Foucault, selections from *History of Sexuality* ("We Other Victorians")

* Ann Laura Stoler, selections from *Race and the Education of Desire*

Feb. 1

Alfred Tennyson, *In Memoriam A. H. H.*

* Charles Lyell, selections from *Principles of Geology*

* Isobel Armstrong, "Tennyson in the 1850s: From Geology to Pathology"

* Jeff Nunokawa, "*In Memoriam* and the Extinction of the Homosexual"

Feb. 8

* Hayden White, selections from *The Content of the Form*

* Caroline Levine, "Strategic Formalism" (optional: E. B. Browning's "The Cry of the Children")

* Sandra Macpherson, "A Little Formalism"

Feb. 15

Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*, pp. 9-150

* Thomas Carlyle, "Signs of the Times"

* Friedrich Engels, selections from *The Condition of the Working Class in England* ("The Great Towns")

* John Ruskin, selections from *The Stones of Venice* ("The Nature of Gothic Architecture")

Feb. 22

Hard Times, pp. 150-288

* Franco Moretti, selections from *The Bourgeois* (Intro and "Fog")

Feb. 29

Karl Marx, selections from *Capital* (ch. 1-2 and ch. 26-28)

* Anna Kornbluh, "Marx's Victorian Novel"

* Fredric Jameson, selections from *Representing Capital* (Intro and "History as Coda")

Spring Break: Mar. 5-13

Mar. 14

George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, pp. 7-185

* Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life"

* Charles Darwin, selections from *The Origin of Species*

Mar. 21

Adam Bede, pp. 186-361

* Ted Underwood, selections from *Why Literary Periods Mattered*

Mar. 28

Adam Bede, pp. 362-539

* Deanna Kreisel, "Incognito, Intervention, and Dismemberment in *Adam Bede*"

Apr. 4

Thomas Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, pp. 3-162

* Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life"

Apr. 11

The Mayor of Casterbridge, pp. 165-321

* Genevieve Abravanel, "Hardy's Transatlantic Wessex"

Apr. 18

Robert Louis Stevenson, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*

* Stephen Arata, "The Sedulous Ape"

* Nathan Hensley, "Allegories of the Contemporary"

Apr. 25

Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and wrap-up

* Sharon Marcus, "At Home with the Other Victorians"

* Jacques Rancière, "The Politics of Literature"

* Simon During, selections from *Against Democracy: Literary Experience in the Era of Emancipations*

Seminar Paper due May 5