ENG 5005-001: Puzzling the Victorians

Gregg A. Hecimovich  
Eastern Illinois University
Syllabus for Puzzling the Victorians: English 5005 at EIU (Spring 2001)

Spring 2001
Instructor: Gregg A. Hecimovich

Puzzling the Victorians: English 5005

Course Description

The Age of Victoria was an Age of Word Games. Why are the classic novels of the nineteenth century rife with puzzles—puzzles of plot, mysteries of relations, the charm of words? This course will explore the relationship puzzles hold to the cognitive challenges Victorian art demands by inviting readers to re-think cultural and conceptual boundaries. By exploring the oral and literary traditions of charms and riddles, we will come to a better understanding of the epistemological work literature performs in the nineteenth century—how literature tricks audiences into seeing and knowing their world anew. We will focus on the novels of Austen, the Brontës, Thackeray, Dickens, and Wilkie Collins, as well as periodical riddles and parlor game books from the period. Charming, amusing, and instructive—this course demonstrates the riddling nature of all literary performance.

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Seminar Meets:
R 7:00 - 9:30 pm

Office Hours
MW 1:00-3:00 pm & by appointment

Texts

- Sophocles. The Theban Plays.
- Jane Austen. Emma.
- Charlotte Bronte. Jane Eyre
- Emily Bronte. Wuthering Heights
- W. M. Thackeray. Vanity Fair
- Charles Dickens. Our Mutual Friend

http://www.eiu.edu/~multilit/english5005-sp01/syllabus.htm 1/10/01
Goals. This course has three primary goals. The first goal is to read critically and widely from representative 19th-Century British Literature. The texts we encounter are peculiar for their clever use of riddles and word games. Proceeding from this first goal, the second aim is to work toward a wider vision of "word magic" and the ancient power of naming. Riddles, as we will discover, recover the power of "word magic" by renewing the chains of signification that circumscribe a word and charm it with its meaning.

The third aim of the course is the broadest, most practical, and probably the most difficult goal: to become more sophisticated and critical readers of fiction and its various modes, with a heightened understanding of the power of creative language in shaping our perceptions of the world.

Requirements.

- Literature Presentation and Paper (10-15 pages) 35%
- Final exam (comprehensive) 30%
- Midterm exam 20%
- Reading Quizzes / Participation / DSIR's 15%

Please Note!! You must complete the literature paper, the midterm, and the final exam to complete the course. Failure to complete any one of these three components represents incomplete work for the semester and any one with incomplete work will not receive a passing grade for the course—however masterfully he or she has completed the other components.

Course Participation. This is not a lecture course. The format of the course and its overall success depend upon your active and informed contributions. The response papers (or DSIR's) and reading quizzes will allow you a couple of "formal" ways to guide and participate in class discussion. Note that 15% of your final grade will be determined by your participation including your work on DSIR's and Reading Quizzes (see below). That means a significant portion of your grade will be up to you and how much you want to participate in the course's various conversations.
Papers. You will write a major literature paper (10-15 pages). Due dates and subject choices will be scheduled during the semester. In conference, we will discuss in detail these projects. I will provide a list of possible topics to give you some ideas for the literature papers, although I'm quite flexible about the topics you decide upon or the methodologies you employ. Generally, I expect your literature paper to advocate and to develop an inventive reading of the work or groups of works you sign up to consider. Papers must involve some aspect of the theme of the course: puzzling narratives. Still, as you will see, the essay will come out of your own interests and concerns.

All research must be scrupulously documented. Plagiarism shouldn't be a problem, but if it is, it's a serious one, and can only result in failure.

Late Papers. Papers turned in after the assigned due date will be penalized one-third of a grade for each calendar day they are late. Although I encourage you to turn in your paper in class, you have until 4:30 p.m. on the due date to hand in your paper (either to me in my office or in my mailbox, 308 Coleman). In other words, I want you to be in class the day the final draft is due whether or not you have your paper fully completed.

Double-Sided Illuminated Readings. You will be required to submit a close reading (or brief analysis) for select class meetings. The close reading will be a critical analysis of some aspect of that day's assignment. The DSIR's will be a half page typed or hand-written summary and critical analysis of that day's reading assignment.

Illustrations, mathematical equations, doodles are welcomed. These close readings should cite a passage from the reading, and then analyze and interpret the passage. You should consider these open, free, and informal. This is the place to muse freely.

DSIR's cannot be made up or turned in after class. If you know you will not be in class to turn yours in, make arrangements to have someone else turn it in for you.

Attendance Policy. You need to be in class all the time. I allow up to four absences, whether excused or unexcused. Each absence after that will lower your final grade one full grade (if your calculated final grade is a B, for instance, and you have four absences, you will receive a C for the course). Seven or more absences will result in a failing grade.

Students with Disabilities. If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6683) as soon as possible.
Schedule for Puzzling the Victorians: English 5005 at EIU (Spring 2001)

Spring 2001

English 5005: Puzzling the Victorians

Schedule (Weeks 1-8)

"[The reader] who expected something quite different, is all the more aware, from the contrast, that he has learned something. His mind seems to say, 'True enough!—and I never thought of it! Good riddles delights us for the same reason; their form is metaphorical, and their solution is an act of learning.' - Aristotle"

weeks 9 -16

Week 1 (Jan 11)
Jan 11 Intro to class; Assignment 1: Questionnaire (5pts);
"'Perhaps you could tell me what this could be': What's in a Riddle" (Class Discussion)

Week 2 (Jan 18)
18: Oedipus Rex; Riddles and Parlour Games;
Schedule Reports and Papers

Week 3 (Jan 25)
25: Riddle Readings 1 (Selected Critical Readings from Frye); Riddle Readings 2 (Selected Critical Readings from Welsh)
Emma
"Rural England" Report
Game Assignment

Week 4 (Feb 01)
Feb 01: Emma
Victorian Music Report
Game Presentations

Week 5 (Feb 08)

http://www.eiu.edu/~multilit/english5005-sp01/schedule.htm
08:  **Jane Eyre**  
Role of Women in the Nineteenth Century Report  
Emma Paper Presentation # 1  
Emma Paper Presentation # 2  
Emma Paper Presentation # 3

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Week 6 (Feb 15)

15:  **Jane Eyre**  
Jane Eyre Paper Presentation # 1  
Jane Eyre Paper Presentation # 2  
Jane Eyre Paper Presentation # 3

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Week 7 (Feb 22)

22:  **Wuthering Heights**  
Evolution and Religion Report  
Wuthering Heights Paper Presentation # 1

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Week 8 (Mar 01)

Mar 01:  **Wuthering Heights**  
Victorian Evangelicalism Report  
Wuthering Heights Paper Presentation # 2  
Wuthering Heights Paper Presentation # 3

**weeks 9 -16**
Reading Schedule (Weeks 9 - 16)

Week 09 (Mar 08)
Mar 08 Midterm Exam; Vanity Fair
Vanity Fair Victorian Gentleman Report

Week 10 (Mar 12-16)
15: SPRING BREAK

Week 11 (Mar 22)
22: Vanity Fair
Vanity Fair Paper Presentation # 1
Vanity Fair Paper Presentation # 2
Vanity Fair Paper Presentation # 3

Week 12 (Mar 29)
Victorian Sexual Attitudes Report
Prostitution Reader Report
Victorian Fashion Report Instigators
Victorian Architecture Report Instigators
Victorian Furniture Report
The English Common Reader Report
Mudie's Circulating Library Report

Week 13 (April 05)
Apr 05: Our Mutual Friend;
Selected Reading, Hecimovich, The Cup and the Lip
and the Riddle of Our Mutual Friend
Victorian Serial Publishing Report
Our Mutual Friend Paper Presentation # 1

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Week 14 (April 12)

12  **Our Mutual Friend**
   Our Mutual Friend Paper Presentation # 2
   Our Mutual Friend Paper Presentation # 3

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Week 15 (April 19)

19:  **The Moonstone**
    The Moonstone Paper Presentation # 1

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Week 16 (April 26)

26:  **The Moonstone**
    The Moonstone Paper Presentation # 2
    The Moonstone Paper Presentation # 3
    Course Review

MAY

Thurs 03:  Final Exam 7:00-9:30 PM

[Schedule | Resources | Syllabus]

weeks 1 -8
Student Questionnaire / E-mail assignment

You should scribble answers to the following questions and be prepared to share your answers to the class. Your first assignment, worth 5 points, will be to e-mail your answers to this questionnaire before class on Wednesday. Make sure you include in your e-mail the e-mail address you want to use for class correspondence. (I must receive your e-mail before 9 AM, or you will not receive credit for the assignment).

Name:
Class:
Phone:
E-mail:
Major:
Year:

What town are you from / where did you grow up?

What has been your favorite place to go in/or near the town?

Favorite area of English Literature (genres, figures, period, etc):

What interested you in this course?

Who is your favorite writer?

Do you think literature is important? Why or why not?

What other English courses have you taken at the college level?

Have you ever been in a fight? When? Describe it, or the closest you have come?

What things would you describe as passions—things that you love?

What do you do for pleasure?

[In class only]: Walk up to the blackboard and draw a picture of a thing that best represents you. Write your name under the picture.
Report and Paper Signup Times. Each student must sign up for one report and one paper subject.

**Reports:**

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- The English Common Reader Report
- Mudie's Circulating Library Report

Week 13 (April 05)

- Victorian Serial Publishing Report

Papers:

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| Week 16 (April 26)       |

http://www.eiu.edu/~multilit/english5005-sp01/reportpapersonline.html
The Moonstone Paper Presentation # 2
The Moonstone Paper Presentation # 3