**English 724: “Victorian Marriage”**

Talia Schaffer Mon 4:30-6:20

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and by appointment

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About this course

The Victorian novel always seems to end with a happy marriage - or does it? Recent analysis of "the marriage plot" has revealed that it is actually much more complicated than readers have assumed. Victorian novels by authors like Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, Emily Bronte, George Eliot, Anthony Trollope, Henry James, Ellen Wood, and Charlotte Yonge, turn out to feature marriages that are quite strange from a modern perspective.  Sometimes characters marry family members; sometimes their marriages seem like disguises for same-sex affiliations; sometimes they deliberately choose a marriage without romantic love. In this course we will explore what marriage meant in this tumultuous era, when marriage was being redefined in drastically new ways. Our readings may include such novels as *Jane Eyre, Wuthering Heights, Middlemarch, Can You Forgive Her?, Portrait of a Lady*, and *East Lynne,* along with Victorian journalism on the "Marriage Question" and anthropological accounts of "primitive marriage." We will also read important new works of literary criticism, including Sharon Marcus's *Between Women* and Mary Jean Corbett's *Family Likeness*, that help us re-imagine the nature of the family, incest, and same-sex relations. Weekly blog, presentation, and final paper.

Required texts

Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre.* (Penguin, ISBN 978-0141441146)

Brontë, Emily, *Wuthering Heights* (Oxford World’s Classics, ISBN 978-0199541898)

Trollope, Anthony, *Can You Forgive Her?* (Oxford World’s Classics, ISBN 978-0199578177)

Wood, Ellen, *East Lynne* (Oxford World’s Classics, ISBN 978-0199536030)

\*Readings with an asterisk are available via Blackboard

Learning Goals

In this course I hope you will:

• learn to perform independent scholarly research

• practice close, attentive textual readings

• familiarize yourself with theoretical approaches

• acquire knowledge of another culture

Course Schedule

M, Aug 27 introduction; family history debate handout

Phegley handout

\*Stone Ch 1, 2, 6

\*Berkowitz, Macfarlane

M, Sept 3 NO CLASS: LABOR DAY

M, Sept 10 *Jane Eyre* first half

\*period reviews

M, Sept 17 NO CLASS: ROSH HASHANAH

M, Sept 24 *Jane Eyre* through end

\*Corbett

M, Oct 1 *Wuthering Heights* through vol II, ch.2 (p.149)

M, Oct 8 NO CLASS: COLUMBUS DAY

(but keep reading *Wuthering Heights*)

(M) W, Oct 10 *Wuthering Heights* through end

\*period reviews

film

M, Oct 15 *Can You Forgive Her?* [p.150]

\*McLennan, \*Maine

M, Oct 22 *Can You Forgive Her?* [p.300]

\*period reviews

M, Oct 29 *Can You Forgive Her?* [p.500]

\*Marcus

M, Nov 5 *Can You Forgive Her?* through end

M, Nov 12 *East Lynne* through Ch.17 (p.167)

\*Cobbe

M, Nov 19 *East Lynne* through Ch.39 (p.384)

M, Nov 26 *East Lynne* through Ch.48 (p.485)

M, Dec 3 *East Lynne* through end

\*period reviews

M, Dec 10 Final discussion

Final paper due

Requirements and grading:

One presentation (about 20 min.) 30%

One long paper (about 20 pp.) 30%

Blog 20%

Effort grade 20%

Please note that graduate classes are graded differently from undergraduate classes. Here is what grades mean:

A+ : fantastic, near-publishable, truly professional work

A: excellent, virtually flawless

A-: good and solid, but has some minor problems

B+: struggling, but you are trying and I see evidence of effort

B: this is inadequate, really more like an undergrad paper

B-: not acceptable at all but you handed in something, so it’s getting some sort of a grade

In short, some kind of an A means you’re doing good work. Some kind of a B means there’s a problem. Anything below a B is a failing grade.

Presentations:

Everyone has to give one brief presentation. Aim to keep it no longer than 20 min., which means about 8 double-spaced typed pages. The week before your presentation, please post a link to the article on the blog site, so people can read it in advance. You will need to give a handout with any especially important (or long) passages from the article on it; make sure the full citation for the article is on the handout, including the URL or database where you got it. Please give me a copy of the presentation afterwards, and bring extra copies for anyone else in the class who might want it.

In the presentation, you should 1. introduce the critical article, explaining how you found it and why you chose it. 2. Briefly summarize it (in one paragraph). 3. Explain what aspects of the argument do and don’t work, focusing on the ideas rather than the writing quality. Ie, do not say that it flows, or is too dense, or is organized or disorganized. Instead, explore questions like this: Does this argument make sense about the novel as you know it? Does it give you insights that seem plausible? Are there other ways of reading the text, or other evidence in the text, that might contradict it? Is there other material in the text that would lead you to extend or change the critic’s suppositions?

Long paper:

The long paper is due on the last day of class and should be 20 pages. It is independent research into a topic that you’ve chosen, related to the course theme in some way. It need not be on a text we’ve done in the course, and it need not be on marriage – I want you to explore your own interests. We will have blog assignments and class time devoted to helping you work this up.

Blog:

I’ve set up a blog on Blackboard. Since we meet on Mondays, I’d like to have everyone post a comment on that week’s reading by the previous Friday at 4:30pm. You don’t have to have finished the reading in order to blog, and in fact your postings may be better if you are still in the middle of the text. The blogs should respond to either 1) my prompt (which I will put up weekly), or 2) another student’s comment.

If you are doing a presentation the following week, please post the information for your article so the class can read it. Either link to the article directly, or attach a scan if the article is not online.

The blog is your chance to talk in a more relaxed, informal, ongoing way, about what you’re finding in these books. Confused by something? Excited to see a connection? Reading ahead? Drowning in the readings? Post it here. We will also be carrying on a lively (I hope) discussion of our preparations for the final paper on the blog – you will be prompted to refine your topic, to critique another student’s topic, to post a preliminary bibliography, to discuss writing issues and strategies. I rely on the blog to help me know how you are feeling about the texts and to spark topics for class discussion.