Mystery, Sensation and the Supernatural: Victorian Popular Fiction

419/519- fall quarter 2013

Dr. Sutphin

Office hours: M 4:00-5:00
Th 12:00-1:00
F 11:00-12:00
and by appointment

Course website:
cwu.edu/~sutphinc

Texts:

*The Woman in White*, Wilkie Collins
*Lady Audley’s Secret*, Mary Elizabeth Braddon
*The Oxford Book of Victorian Ghost Stories*, edited by Michael Cox and R. A. Gilbert
*Detection by Gaslight: 14 Victorian Detective Stories*, edited by Douglas G. Greene

Packet at the bookstore contains stories by Grant Allen, Arthur Conan Doyle, Wilkie Collins, Lanoe Falconer, Mary Wilkins Freeman, Elizabeth Gaskell, Richard Middleton, and Margaret Oliphant and an introduction to detective fiction by Michael Cox.

Purpose:

In addition to the general outcomes for focused studies, the purpose of this course is to interpret several examples of Victorian popular fiction in terms of literary and social codes and conventions. We will examine the conventions of the sensation novel, the ghost story, and the detective story, with the understanding that these genres often overlap. We will discuss why this fiction was so popular in its own day and why it continues to engage readers. We will also discuss how labeling a novel or story “sensation fiction” or “genre fiction” usually worked against its being regarded as canonical high literary art, and we will ask questions about the usefulness of such traditional dichotomies as popular/artistic and romance/realism. For example, what literary and social agendas do such dichotomies and categories serve? An important and fascinating part of our study will be to explore how popular sensation and supernatural fiction reveals and tries to resolve anxieties of the Victorian era – particularly, anxieties about gender identity, class and rank, madness and sanity, and race and inheritance. Victorian fiction has a great deal to say about the “other,” and in constructing “others,” society attempts to construct itself. And last, but certainly not least, our purpose is to have fun. Even though these works do not have the “shock” value, they once did, many people still enjoy reading them and also enjoy figuring out why so many Victorians enjoyed reading them.
English Department Outcomes for Focused Studies:

Students will demonstrate knowledge of literary and critical theories; integrate literary and critical theories into their own writing; demonstrate proficiency in research methods; identify the characteristic themes, techniques, and conventions of a series of texts focused by theme, author, theoretical approach, or social and historical context; develop a thesis-driven argument that is focused by specific interpretive or analytical questions, that is supported by evidence and that synthesizes multiple perspectives.

Course policies:

Reading, discussion, and attendance: Since this is primarily a discussion class, it is essential that you keep up with your reading, attend class, and contribute to the conversation. In addition, you will be working with other class members who will count on you to participate. Read carefully and actively, write questions and responses in the margins of your texts or in a notebook. These questions and responses will serve as the basis for both class participation and papers.

Note on attendance, handing in assignments, and participation:

Because our class meets only two days a week--three absences may reduce your final grade by one degree (A- to B+) four absences may reduce your final grade by one full letter (A- to B-) five or more absences may cause you to fail the course.

There are no excused absences or automatic extensions. Late assignments are generally unacceptable. However, I understand that emergencies do arise. An exception may be made if I agree that your circumstances warrant it. If you establish a pattern of conscientious attendance and turning in assignments on time, your credibility increases, and when you have an emergency, I can assume that you are a responsible person and are doing everything you can to meet your obligations. If you establish a pattern of absences, late assignments, and continual excuses, you damage your credibility, making it difficult for me to justify giving you a break. Ask for an extension only if you have a genuine emergency. While coming to class every day is important, simply being here doesn’t earn an “A” in this category. Being here is a basic requirement. You exhibit the level of your participation through the thoughtfulness of your questions and comments, the degree of care and reflection you give to your writing, your tone and attitude in regard to your work and the members of the class, your commitment to the course. November 1 is the last day to drop without petitioning. Reasons to drop by Nov. 1: you have missed more than two classes or know that you will miss more than two class periods before the end of the quarter and/or you missed the due date for the first paper or did not participate in the
critical approach group. Don’t just disappear if you decide not to attend class and fall behind in your work; withdraw to avoid receiving a failing grade.

If you need disability related educational accommodations, contact Disabilities Services at 963-2171. Please let me know about any accommodations made through DS.

Assignments:

Papers: Argument, Research, Citation and Format:

Undergraduates: Two six-to-seven-page critical essays (about 2100 words each) that make an argument about the text under discussion and that incorporate one or two literary critical sources in a significant way in each essay.

Grades: Two ten-to-twelve- page critical essays (about 3300-4000 words each) that make an argument about the text under discussion and incorporate at least two literary critical sources in a significant way in each essay. In addition to the works cited for your paper, include a separate annotated list of three to four critical works that you consulted but did not use in your paper. Annotations should summarize the main argument of the source in around 100 words.

Everyone: Your paper should advance and support a thesis. The paper incorporates criticism but should not be primarily a summary of other writers’ ideas. Use criticism to advance your own argument. The most fruitful approaches are usually to argue with a critic or to build upon his or her ideas – for example, exploring more thoroughly an issue that he/she has mentioned only briefly. If you have trouble finding an argument that hasn’t yet been made, see if you can identify a literary controversy (two or more critics disagree on a particular issue) and explain which interpretation is the most convincing.

Use only scholarly sources, either in print or from library data bases, such as Project Muse and JSTOR. Evidence that a work is scholarly includes the following: publication by a university press, scholarly notes on sources, works cited, detailed index. Start with the MLA Bibliography on line as your major research source. Begin with the most recent scholarship. MLA has some full-text items, but note that it often links you to other data bases for full-text sources. If you see an article, book chapter, or book that looks useful but does not appear in full text, don’t give up. Our library may own a paper copy of this source. If not, the library service called Summit can provide you with scholarly books our library does not own if they are owned by a library in our consortium. Interlibrary loan can provide articles in journals our library doesn’t subscribe to and books owned outside the consortium. Articles are delivered electronically so arrive fairly quickly. Books take longer. Getting started on your research early is always a good idea!

Papers must be followed by a list of works cited (including the works about which you are writing) giving full bibliographic information according to the latest MLA format. Note that databases usually do not cite the source in MLA format, although some have links to various formats. Even the MLA Bibliography does not cite journal articles the way you should cite them in your works cited. For rules on citing and incorporating your sources into your paper, consult The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers (7th ed.). MLA prefers attributive tags (“Martha Benson argues,” or “According to Martha Benson,” (you need to vary the form) rather
than freestanding citations.

Avoid plagiarism: Be careful to give credit to any sources you quote or authors whose ideas you use. If in doubt, consult The MLA Handbook, or consult with me. If discovered, plagiarism damages your credibility as well as your grade. I’m sorry to say that I have seen several cases of plagiarism among English majors lately. Plagiarism is, of course, unethical. It is also a huge waste of valuable time – and I don’t have time to waste. I will give you no credit for a plagiarized paper. The English Department is currently discussing a policy on the subject. Do your own work.

Type the title of your paper, your name, the course, professor’s name, and the date at the top left hand corner of the first page (no title pages). Papers must be typed, double-spaced on standard 8 ½ x 11" paper. Leave about an inch margin on all sides. Number your pages. Staple the pages together (no plastic folders please). Consult a recent handbook for grammar and punctuation rules. Proofread your paper carefully before and after it comes out of the printer.

There will be one paper workshop (worth 12 pts.) on the last day of class. This workshop provides you with the opportunity to discuss your ideas with others and help other writers work out their ideas as well. On the day of the workshop, bring a typed three–page draft of your ideas so far. Also be prepared to talk about any scholarly material you’re considering using in the paper.

Paper Due Dates:

I am requiring that you write a paper on either of the novels. Because they are both long, if we waited until we had finished reading them both, the first paper due date would be very late in the quarter. Each novel has a different due date – the Woman in White paper is due Fri., Oct. 25 and the Lady Audley’s Secret paper is due Thurs., Nov. 7. If I get all the papers on Nov. 7, I will not have time to get them back to you with adequate feedback before the final paper is due. I realize that many people will want to put off the paper due date (that is, until after the second novel), but a little consideration shows that this is not necessarily the best plan. Work tends to pile up as the quarter progresses. I realize that you may not know which novel you’d prefer to write about until you’ve read them both, but the quarter is short and the lack of time often calls for difficult decisions. Some people may argue that they want to write on both novels, and therefore, need to wait for the second due date. Nevertheless, I need 12 people to commit to the first due date, so here’s the plan: I will have a sign-up sheet in my office. The first people to come and sign up get the due date they want. Any left-over slots are assigned to people who didn’t sign up. Sign up by Fri., Oct. 3.

Paper revision policy:
If you receive a grade of C- or lower on your paper, you may rewrite if you meet the following conditions:

1) You take the paper with my comments to the Writing Center and consult with someone there. That person will notify me that you have been there and when.
2) Your revision shows evidence that you have attempted to deal with the problems mentioned in the comments and meet the expectations of the assignment as outlined in the paper guidelines given out in class.
3) You turn in the revision one week from the date you received the original paper back by 12:00 at my office or in my department mailbox.
4) At the time you turn in your paper, you also turn in the graded copy with my comments.

I will not have time to comment on your revision, but I will read it and see whether I can justify raising your grade to a C. C (76%) is the highest grade possible on a revision in order to be fair to others who did not have the option to rewrite.

Four tests (15 points each): 1) The Woman in White; 2) Lady Audley’s Secret; 3) ghost stories; 4) detective stories. Tests will also include significant points from information presented in class, including scholarly articles.

You may make up one test if you take it within a week. For example, if you miss a test on Monday, you must make it up before 2:00 the following Monday. If you miss a test given Wednesday, you must make it up before 2:00 the following Wednesday. If you need to make up a test, go to the English Department office. There should be a copy of the test in the make-up test file with your name on it. Take the test at the table just outside the English Dept. office.

Leading discussion: Especially with the novels, we need some focus strategies, so I will ask the graduate students to choose passages and begin discussion on designated days. Choose passages that are within the page requirement for that particular day and be prepared to tell us why you think they are significant. You are not responsible for the entire class period. Your responsibility is to focus our attention on certain passages or patterns in the text and ask questions that will generate discussion. In thinking about significance, consider the following questions: How do the passages advance character development, plot, or theme? What conventions of the genre do they contain? What issues or anxieties do they comment on?

Critical reading/research/discussion groups:

Critical article discussion: The first purpose of the critical group is to find and discuss with the class a recent critical article (within the last ten to fifteen years*) that provides an interesting perspective on the work you are assigned. Explain how the article offers a way to read the work or addresses a significant issue the work raises. Your responsibility is to summarize/analyze the article and lead class discussion for a period of approximately 40 minutes. Scholarly articles do often give away the plot, and sometimes we just have to live with that – studying a novel is somewhat different from reading it on your own. However, you can decide whether it’s possible to keep back information that other class members don’t yet have.
You don’t necessarily have to have finished the novel by the time your group presents the article, although you should be on schedule. **Be sure to provide the class with a complete citation in MLA format.**

*If you find an article you think is exceptionally useful that is over fifteen years old, consult with me.*

Reports: The second purpose of the critical group is to report on historical/cultural research that would provide context for works. For *The Woman in White* and *Lady Audley’s Secret*, you could look for information on popular culture, for example, “tie-ins” (products) or the “after life” of these books (that is, dramatic adaptations, and fiction inspired by the original). If you explore that topic, look for nineteenth-century popular culture as well as twentieth/twenty-first. Or you might choose to research a subject of importance in the text, such as nineteenth-century views on sanity and insanity; the legal status of women, etc.)

Possible topics for ghost stories: adaptations of the ghost stories; nineteenth-century spiritualism; the Society for Psychical Research.

Possible topics for detectives stories: adaptations or sequels (Sherlock Holmes films and TV movies, as well as pastiches abound – are there others?); detection in the Victorian period; crimes reported in the Victorian press.

See the schedule for dates. Your research may be in print sources or the Internet or both. **You may use unscholarly sources for reports, but analyze them carefully.** Time for reports will depend on the number of people enrolled, but prepare to talk for 10-15 minutes and we’ll have some time for questions/discussion. In addition to reporting to the class, turn in a report (double-spaced, about 650-675 words). On a separate page, **list the sources you used** with full bibliographic information, according to MLA format. As you would with any other research project, cite the sources in the text. You may use the technology available in the classroom, but you don’t have to.

**Grades:**

| Undergrads | 1st paper | 70 pts | 2nd paper | 70 pts | workshop | 12 pts | critical research presentation | 40 pts | popular culture reports | 25 pts | tests | 60 pts. (15 pts. each) | attendance and participation | 35 pts | total | 312 pts. |
| Grads | 100 pts | | 100 pts. | 12 pts. | 40 pts. | 25 pts. | 60 pts. | 35 pts. | 312 pts. |

**Schedule**

Wed., Sept. 25 - Introduction

Groups assigned
Mon., Sept. 30 - *The Woman in White*, 5-148 (35.5/day for 4 days?)  
Chapters 1-15 (section 2)  
Lecture on the sensation novel

Chapters 15 (section 3)-“The Second Epoch” (section 1)  
Grad student chooses passages and starts discussion.

Mon., Oct. 7 - *The Woman in White*, 212-364 (38 for 4 days)  
Library resources

Wed., Oct. 9 - *The Woman in White*, 364-419 “End of the Second Epoch” (27.5 for two days)  
Grad student chooses passages and starts discussion.

“The Third Epoch”- paragraph that ends “my quaint little friend,  
Professor  
Pesca”  
*Woman in White - Group 1*: 1) scholarly article; 2) popular culture

Wed., Oct. 16 - Instructional study day - no regular class (very late notice to faculty)  
*If I am able to get the film The Suspicions of Mr. Whicher* and the  
player to  
show it on, I will give you the option of watching it on this day.

*Woman in White - Group 2*: 1) scholarly article; 2) popular culture

Wed., Oct. 23 - Test on *Woman in White*  
*Lady Audley’s Secret*, 1-72, Vol. I, chapters 1-8 (36)  
Grad student chooses passages and starts discussion.

*Lady Audley’s Secret - Group: 3*): scholarly article; 2) popular culture

Fri., Oct. 25 - *Woman in White* papers due for those who sign up for this due date  
Hand the paper in at my office (if I’m there) or in my mail box by 2:00 p.m.

*Lady Audley’s Secret - Group 4*: 1) scholarly article; 2) popular culture  
Grad student chooses passages and starts discussion.
Mon., Nov. 4 - *Lady Audley’s Secret*, 309-447, Vol. 3 (34.5)
Grad student chooses passages and starts discussion.

Wed., Nov. 6 - Test on *Lady Audley’s Secret*
“The Truth, the Whole Truth, and Nothing But the Truth,” Rhoda Broughton (book); “The Open Door,” *Margaret Oliphant* (packet - not the story in the book by the same name); “Cecilia de Noel,” Lanoe Falconer (packet)
Grad student chooses passages and starts discussion.

Mon., - Nov. 11 - Veterans’ Day

Wed., Nov. 13 - “The Old Nurse’s Story,” Elizabeth Gaskell (book); “The Lost Ghost,” Mary Wilkins Freeman (packet); “Uncle Cornelius His Story,” George MacDonald (book); “An Eddy on the Floor,” Bernard Capes (book); “The Body Snatcher,”
Robert Louis Stevenson (book)
**Ghost Story - Group 5:** 1) scholarly article; 2) popular culture

Thurs., Nov. 7 - *Lady Audley’s Secret* papers due for those who sign up for this due date
Hand in at my office (if I’m there) or in my mailbox by 2:00 p.m.

Mon., Nov. 18 - “At the End of the Passage,” Rudyard Kipling (book); “To Let,” Bithia Mary Croker (book); “On the Brighton Road,” Richard Middleton (packet)
Grad student chooses passages and starts discussion.
Test on ghost stories

**Detective Story - Group 7:** 1) scholarly article; 2) popular culture

**Ghost or Detective Story - Group 8:** 1) scholarly article or book section; 2) popular culture
Grad student chooses passages and starts discussion.

Wed., Nov. 27 - Thanksgiving holiday
Mon., Dec. 2 - Test on detective stories
“The Haverstock Hill Murder,” George R. Sims (book); “Mr. Bovey’s Unexpected Will,” L. T. Meade and Robert Eustace (book); “The Great Ruby Robbery,” Grant Allen (packet); “The Biter Bit,” Wilkie Collins (packet)
Grad student chooses passages and starts discussion.

Wed., Dec. 4 - Further discussion of stories/issues we neglected
Paper workshop

Wed., Dec. 11 - 11:00 - Papers on ghost and/or detective stories due at 11:00 at my office or in my department mail box. These papers may make use of material from the two long novels as long as a significant part of the paper is devoted to the shorter fiction we’ve read this quarter.