Canons and Cults: Jane Austen’s Fiction, Critical Discourse, and Popular Culture

MW 2:00-3:40
L&L 223

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Office hours: M 3:00-4:00
W - 11:00-11:50
Th & F - 10:30-11:30

Texts:

Northanger Abbey - Oxford
Sense and Sensibility - Oxford
Pride and Prejudice - Penguin
Emma - Norton Critical Edition
Persuasion - Oxford
“Plan of a Novel” included in the Norton edition of Emma (also available on the Internet)
Packet at the bookstore: Love and Freindship (a piece of Austen’s juvenilia); contextual materials by James Fordyce, John Gregory, Mary Willostonecraft, Alexander Pope, Samuel Johnson; articles by Devoney Looser and Mary Spongberg

Recommended
Jane Austen in Context
The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen

Purpose:

Critical studies courses are designed for advanced study of a subject, which usually takes a fairly narrow focus. An author’s work, reputation, and critical reception comprise one of the possible ways of doing critical studies and the one we’re adopting for this course.

Jane Austen’s work is a particularly interesting subject for this type of study because she is considered one of the most significant British novelists and is also widely (we might even say wildly) popular. As you no doubt know, her novels are studied in universities around the world, scholars produce copious criticism on her work, and films, pastiches, prequels, sequels, vampire spoofs, websites, clubs, and – yes, even finger puppets – abound. Our purpose is to study five of Austen’s novels, incorporating in the short time available to us as much as we can about the historical and critical context of her work, including some knowledge of the development of the novel and its conventions and the social and political issues of her time. We will examine the ways in which Austen’s novels use and rework conventions and various ways in which their plots, characters, and themes can be interpreted. We will also discuss Austen’s reception and reputation and investigate “Jane Austen” as a popular culture phenomenon, asking how she has become an author and a “personality” who inspires such devotion. Part of our study of Austen involves considering how the Regency period is constructed, both by professional historians and by people who enjoy the culture of that period and “recreate” it by donning costumes, learning period dances, and “having tea with Jane Austen.”
I very much regret that we do not have time for all of Jane Austen’s novels. I reluctantly took *Mansfield Park* off the syllabus because it is the longest and in some ways the most difficult of her works. Especially lately, this novel has generated a great deal of critical debate and is certainly important in showing Austen’s range. I would have had to remove two of the other novels to give us enough time for *MP*.

**Outcomes: Critical Studies/Advanced Studies:**

Students will
- demonstrate knowledge of literary and critical theories;
- respond to secondary criticism and/or critical theory in their own writing;
- demonstrate proficiency in research methodologies;
- identify the characteristic themes, techniques, and conventions of a representative group of texts in literature in English 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;
- apply theoretical approaches to literary texts.

**Requirements:**

**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 discussions. 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:**

Four absences may reduce your final grade by one degree (B to B-; B- to C+). Five absences may reduce your final grade by one full letter (B+ to C+). Six or more absences may cause you to fail the course.

There are no excused absences or automatic extensions, but I understand that emergencies do arise. 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 your writing; your tone and attitude in regard to your work and the members of the class; you commitment to the course. **February 17** is the last day to drop without petitioning. **Reasons to drop by February 17:** you have missed more than three classes or know that you will miss more than three 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 Disability Support Services at 963-2171. Please let me know about any accommodations made through DSS.

Formal Papers:
Undergraduates - Two seven-page critical essays (about 2100 words each) that incorporate two literary critical sources in a significant way in each essay. Critical sources are intended, not as a substitute for your own argument but as a means of building your argument through response, disagreement, or carrying another writer’s insights further. For the first paper choose to write about Northanger Abbey, Sense and Sensibility, or Pride and Prejudice. You may also choose a subject from more than one novel to discuss if it is narrowly focused enough for a seven-page paper. For the second paper, choose to write about Emma or Persuasion. For this paper, you may choose a narrowly focused subject that deals with more than one novel. English majors in both the literature and writing specialization: be sure to save papers for your portfolio.

Graduates - Two ten-twelve-page critical essays that incorporate at least two critical sources in a significant way in each essay. As with the undergraduate essays, critical sources should be used as a means of building your own argument. Choices about texts are the same as above. 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 arguments of the source in around 100 words.

Everyone - I realize that it is very difficult to say anything “new” about Jane Austen. I will have some strategies to suggest in the paper assignments.

The sources included in your papers should be scholarly, non-Internet sources. Articles found in on-line data bases such as Project MUSE, JSTOR, and The MLA Bibliography are the kind of scholarly sources you need. In conducting literary research, always start with The MLA Bibliography. Begin with the most recent scholarship, but do not confine yourself to online full-text sources because you could miss valuable scholarship. 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 books and articles for sources not available in Summit. Interlibrary loan takes a little longer, but articles are delivered electronically, so they arrive fairly quickly. However, getting started on your research before “the last minute” is always a good idea.

Papers must be followed by a list of works cited. To cite your sources, use The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers (7th ed.) To introduce your sources into your own argument, use attributive tags, such as, “According to Margaret Homans. . . .” or “Stephen Greenblatt argues. . . .”

Papers must be typed, double-spaced on standard 81/2 x 11” paper. Leave about an inch margin on all sides. Number your pages. Use a staple or paper clip (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.
Paper rewrite option: If you receive a grade of C- or lower on your first paper, you may rewrite it. In order to be fair to others who do not have a chance to rewrite, your revision grade can be no higher than a C (76%). You must also do the following:

1) 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.
2) Demonstrate in your revision that you have attempted to deal with the problems mentioned in the comments and meet expectations of the assignment as outlined in the paper guidelines given out in class.
3) Turn in the revision one week from the date you receive the original paper back. Turn the paper in by 12:00 noon at my office or in my department mailbox.
4) At the time you turn in your revision, also turn in the graded copy with my comments. I will not have time to comment, but I will read the paper and consider whether I can justify raising the grade.

Avoiding plagiarism: Be careful to give credit to any sources you quote or authors whose ideas you use. If in doubt, consult The MLA Handbook for rules on quoting from and citing sources, or ask a professor. If discovered, plagiarism damages your credibility as well as your grade. I’m sorry to say that in the last four quarters, I have had four plagiarism cases among English majors. Plagiarism is, of course, unethical. It is also a huge waste of valuable time – and I don’t have it to waste. I will give you no credit for a plagiarized paper, and I will report it. Do your own work.

Article annotation and annotation workshops:

Twice during quarter you’ll have the opportunity to discuss a scholarly article or book chapter with a small group of your classmates. On the day of the discussion, hand in to me a typed summary of the main argument of your article and an explanation of how you plan to use the criticism in your paper (150-200 words). Will you argue with it? Use it to support a piece of evidence or a generalization about the historical context? Some other purpose? Be sure to include a full citation of the article or chapter using correct MLA format.

Critical reading/research/discussion groups:

Analyzing textual passages/Critical article or book chapter discussion: The first purpose of the critical group is to choose passages to emphasize and analyze with the class.

The second purpose of the critical group is to find and discuss with the class a recent critical article or book chapter (within the last ten years*) that provides an interesting perspective on the work you are assigned. Explain how the article offers a way to read the book or addresses a significant issue the book 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 different from reading it on your own. However, you can decide whether it’s possible to keep back information that other class members may not 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.
Much significant criticism of Jane Austen appeared in the 1980s and 1990s, so if you find an article you think is exceptionally useful from this period, it may very well be a good choice. Consult with me if in doubt.

Reports: the third purpose of the critical group is to research and report on “versions” of Jane Austen and her works in popular culture. Group 1 is concerned with biographical versions of Austen, including films about her life; Group 2 is on iconic/popular culture versions of Austen and her novels, including commodities, websites, clubs; Groups 3 and 4 are on film versions of the novels; and Group 5 is on works inspired by the novels. Your research for reports may be in print sources or the Internet or both. You may use non-scholarly sources for the reports, but analyze them carefully. What versions of Austen and/or her works do your sources want to project? What values and attitudes (ideologies) may underlie these versions? Time for reports will depend on the number of people enrolled, but prepare to talk for 20 minutes per group and we’ll hope to have a few minutes for questions/discussion. In addition to reporting to the class, turn in a two-page double-spaced report (about 600 words). On a separate page, list the sources you used with full bibliographic information. If you want to use the technology available in the room, you may want to familiarize yourself with it before the presentation. There will be a separate assignment sheet that gives a more detailed explanation.

Grades:

1st paper ..................... 70 pts.
2nd paper ..................... 70 pts.
tests ......................... 75 pts. (15 each)
text analysis and
critical research presentation .... 40 pts.
report ......................... 25 pts.
annotations .................. 30 pts. (15 each)
annotation workshops ......... 20 pts. (10 each)
attendance and participation ... 35 pts.
Total: 365
Schedule

Wed., Jan. 4 - Introduction: ideas on the development of the British novel
  For next time: read “Plan of a Novel,” Love and Friendship and Sense and Sensibility, chapters 1-20, 3-88

Mon., Jan. 9 - Love and Friendship; “Plan of a Novel” Sense and Sensibility, chapters 1-20, 3-88
  Sentiment, sensibility, and the British novel

Wed., Jan. 11 - Sense and Sensibility - vol. 1, chapter 21-vol. 2, chapter 8, 89-149
  reading/research group organizing meetings

Mon., Jan. 16 - Martin Luther King Day

Wed., Jan. 18 - Sense and Sensibility - vol. 2, chapter 9 - vol. 3, chapter 14 (finish)
  Test on L and F, S and S, “Plan of a Novel,” sentiment, sensibility, the British novel
  Northanger Abbey vol. 1. chap 1 - vol. 2, chap 5, 5-111
  For our discussion of NA, let’s concentrate on the way it adapts and plays with the novel of sensibility conventions as much as we can, leaving the Gothic genre to the group. These genres do overlap somewhat.

Mon., Jan. 23 - Northanger Abbey - vol. 2, chap 5 - 26 (finish)
  Group 1: text passages, critical article on NA

Wed., Jan. 25 - Test on Northanger Abbey, gothic conventions, group’s critical material
  Pride and Prejudice - vol. 1, chap. 1 - vol. 3, cap. 17, 5-87.

Mon., Jan. 30  Pride and Prejudice - vol. 1, chap. 18 - vol. 3 - chap 6, 87-284
  Group 2: text passages, critical article on P and P

  critical context: writings on female conduct and male conduct in the packet

Mon., Feb. 6 Test on Pride and Prejudice, courtship novel conventions, group’s material
  Annotation workshop. Bring annotation to class for discussion. Hand in revised annotations at my office Thursday, Feb. 9 by 1:00 (earlier if you wish).

Wed., Feb. 8 I’ll talk about Jane Austen and history. Bring your packet to class.
  Group 1: report on biographical versions of Jane Austen
  Group 2: report on Jane Austen commodities, associations, websites, etc.

Thursday, Feb. 9 - Annotations due at my office by 1:00.

Mon., Feb. 13 Group 3: report on film(s)
  Annotations returned
**Emma - vol. 1, chap. 1 - 13, 5-83**


**Group 4: report on film(s)**

**Fri., Feb. 17 - First Papers due at my office by 1:00.**

**Mon., Feb. 20 - Presidents’ Day**

**Wed., Feb. 22 - Emma - vol. 2, chap. 4 - vol. 3, chap. 19, 125-333**

**Group 3: text passages and critical article on Emma**

**Group 4: text passages and critical article on Emma**

**Mon., Feb. 27 - Test on Emma**

**Persuasion - vol. 1, chap. 1 - vol. 2, chap. 5, 9-131**

**Wed., Feb. 29 - Persuasion - vol. 2, chap. 6 - 8, 131-54**

**Group 5: text passages and critical article on Persuasion**

**Mon., March 5 - Persuasion - vol. 2, chap. 9-12, 154-203**

**Group 5: Report on works inspired by Jane Austen’s**

Annotation workshop (I’ll return the annotations to you by Friday, March 10 at the latest.)

**Wed., March 7 - Test on Persuasion**

(I’ll leave the corrected tests in a file in the English Department office for you to pick up.)

Analyzing the versions of Austen and her novels - assessing what we know and how we know it

Course evaluations

**Wed., March 14 - 12:00 - Take-home essays due. No late papers**