

ENGL 3924/WMST 3720
Women's Literature: The Brontë Sisters
Fall 2014: Tu/Th 2-3:20 pm, LANG 204

Professor Nora Gilbert

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Office: LANG 409A

Office Hours: Tu. 1-2 pm, Th. 3:30-4:30 pm, or by appt.

Course description:

Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë emerged on the British literary scene almost simultaneously, as their novels *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Agnes Grey* were published in 1847 under the pseudonyms of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell. Many early critics assumed that all “Bell” creations were in fact written by one author, and there continues to be a perception that the Brontës’ writings can be read as one interconnected *oeuvre*. This class will, to some extent, propagate such a perception, focusing as it does on the major novels of the three sisters collectively. But it will also call attention to the very different ideological standpoints that can be found in each author’s work, and will consider why the field of literary studies is so invested in mythologizing the Brontë sisterhood. It should also be noted that a particular focus of this “women’s literature” course will be on the issues of gender and sexuality that play such a pivotal role in all of the Brontës’ fictions. To many Victorian readers, these fictions were quite radical in their representations of women, sex, and the institution of marriage; to many twenty-first century readers, the Brontës have become feminist icons whose works offer inspiring portraits of strong heroines and also damning critiques of the patriarchal constructs to which they and their creators felt themselves to be confined. Please be aware that the format of this course is extremely discussion-based. Though I will certainly guide our class conversations and make sure that we cover all of the textual and historical ground that I consider to be the most interesting and the most important, I will not be lecturing at you. We will be working through these materials together, and your participation and thoughts and questions are not only desired but required.

Required texts:

(All Oxford World’s Classics editions: you **must** purchase this edition and bring the appropriate text to class each day. No e-books allowed.)

Anne Brontë, *Agnes Grey*

Anne Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*

Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley*

Charlotte Brontë, *Villette*

Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*

Grade breakdown:

Class participation/attendance/in-class assignments: 20%

Reading grade (established by pop reading quizzes): 15%

Oral presentation on your chosen cultural context theme: 10%

1-pg. analysis of each novel's treatment of your chosen theme: 30% (5% each)

5-7 pg. final paper: 25%

Course requirements:

Participation: Because your participation is so crucial to the fabric of this class, it will comprise 20% of your grade. Attendance obviously affects your ability to participate, so any missed or tardy classes will serve to lower your participation grade. You cannot pass the class if you miss more than 6 classes, no matter what the reason. I will also give some in-class writing assignments, which factor into your participation grade as well. Come. Think. Discuss. Give yourself the gift of 20%.

Reading grade: You cannot participate if you don't come to class, but you also cannot participate if you don't do the reading. To give you extra motivation to keep up with the reading on a regular basis, there will be a brief quiz at the beginning of certain classes scattered randomly throughout the semester. Glancing over Spark Notes will not enable you to pass these quizzes. Reading the actual texts, however, will make passing the quizzes a breeze. No quizzes may be made up, but the lowest score of the semester will be dropped.

Oral Presentation: To give you a sense of focus throughout the semester, you will be assigned one cultural context theme—e.g., Victorian education, Victorian medicine, Victorian imperialism—selected from your top 5 picks out of a list of themes that I will provide, and that will become your area of expertise. You will present a 7- or 8-minute mini-lecture to the class on this theme, and should make it as engaging and informative as possible. This presentation needs to have a multimedia component and will require extensive research on your part. If you toss something together at the last minute, it will certainly be reflected in your grade.

1-pg. Analyses: When we finish reading each novel, you will write a 1-pg (single-spaced) detailed analysis of the ways in which your chosen theme played out in the novel. Despite the brevity of these assignments, they should be cogently written, carefully proofread, and supported by direct quotes from the text. Writing these should help you to formulate your ideas for your final paper.

Final Paper: Because you will be thinking about one theme all semester long, coming up with a final paper topic should be an organic process, though I will still give you pointers and assistance with coming up with your thesis statement when the time comes to do so. You will first turn in a complete draft of the paper to me and I will provide detailed feedback on it, but no grade. If you do not turn in your paper by the first draft due date, you forfeit your right to feedback. You will then have the opportunity to revise and resubmit the paper in light of my comments, and I will assign a grade to the final product at the end of the semester.

Course policies:

Plagiarism: If you fail to give full credit to the sources you are citing, lift a paper off of the internet, reuse a paper that was written for another class, or have someone else write any part of your paper for you, you are plagiarizing **and I will catch you doing so**. (All papers must be uploaded to turnitin.com via the course's Blackboard page.) Plagiarism will result in failure of the course and permanent documentation on your academic record. Zero tolerance policy.

Students with Disabilities: Anyone with a disability requiring accommodation must present a written accommodation request to the instructor within eleven days after the first class session. Copies of the school's ADA Compliance Policy, Policy on Auxiliary Aids and Reasonable Accommodation, and the ADA Grievance Procedures are available through the main office of the School of Library and Information Sciences (940-565-2445). It is also recommended that you register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (940-565-4323).

Discussion schedule:

8/26: Course Introduction

8/28: Lucasta Miller, *The Brontë Myth* (excerpts on Blackboard)
"Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell" (pp. 173-180 of *Agnes Grey*)

9/2: *Agnes Grey*, Ch. 1 - 13

9/4: *Agnes Grey*, Ch. 14 - end
Thematic analysis #1 due

9/9: *Jane Eyre* Vol. I, Ch. 1 - Vol. I, Ch. 9

9/11: *Jane Eyre*, Vol. I, Ch. 10 - Vol. II, Ch. 2

9/16: *Jane Eyre*, Vol. II, Ch. 3 - Vol. II, Ch. 11

9/18: *Jane Eyre*, Vol. III, Ch. 1 - Vol. III, Ch. 7

9/23: *Jane Eyre*, Vol. III Ch. 8 - end
Thematic analysis #2 due

9/25: *Wuthering Heights*, Vol. I, Ch. 1 - Vol. I, Ch. 9

9/30: *Wuthering Heights*, Vol. I, Ch. 10 - Vol. II, Ch. 2

10/2: *Wuthering Heights*, Vol. II, Ch. 3 - Vol. II, Ch. 12

- 10/7: *Wuthering Heights*, Vol. II, Ch. 13 - end
Thematic analysis #3 due
- 10/9: *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Ch. 1 - Ch. 7
- 10/14: *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Ch. 8 - Ch. 23
- 10/16: *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Ch. 24 - Ch. 33
- 10/21: *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Ch. 34 - Ch. 45
- 10/23: *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Ch. 46 - end
Thematic analysis #4 due
- 10/28: *Shirley*, Vol. I, Ch. 1 - Vol. I, Ch. 8
- 10/30: *Shirley*, Vol. I, Ch. 9 - Vol. II, Ch. 4
- 11/4: *Shirley*, Vol. II, Ch. 5 - Vol. II, Ch. 12
- 11/6: *Shirley*, Vol. III, Ch. 1 - Vol. III, Ch. 7
- 11/11: *Shirley*, Vol. III, Ch. 8 - end
Thematic analysis #5 due
- 11/13: *Villette*, Ch. 1 - Ch. 9
- 11/18: *Villette*, Ch. 10 - Ch. 17
First draft of final paper due
- 11/20: *Villette*, Ch. 18 - Ch. 25
- 11/25: *Villette*, Ch. 26 - Ch. 35
(First draft returned with feedback)
- 12/2: *Villette*, Ch. 36 - end
Thematic analysis #6 due
- 12/4: Debriefing, drawing conclusions, and end-of-semester party
- 12/8: **FINAL, REVISED PAPERS DUE BY 5:00 PM**