English 4590.05H: Honors Seminar: Victorian Utopias & Dystopias

Prof. A. Garcha
Office hrs: Thurs. 12:00-2:20 & by appt.
Tues. & Thurs. 2:20-3:40
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Great Britain was the most technologically sophisticated, economically powerful, and scientifically advanced country in the world during the nineteenth century. As we read six texts (some of them rarely studied) from that period, we will discover that Britain was also a country that repeatedly asked questions that its own dominance prompted: Would its industrial economy lead England to further wealth and power, or would industrialism eventually lead to social ruin? Would science and its rational, unemotional approach to solving problems lead to increased happiness or to an inhumane world in which emotional connections wither? Would the large-scale governmental bureaucracies that England had developed to govern its rapidly expanding population continue to expand – and exert unprecedented amount of control over citizens – or would they implode, leaving new, more local modes of governance? Would the individualism that capitalism and democracy promote lead to increased human contentment or would it lead to social and class dissolution?

Most of the texts we will read fall into the category of utopian or dystopian fiction – they are novels that imagine wholly new future societies in which humans are either completely happy or unrecognizably oppressed. As we will see, these texts’ new worlds are often, in fact, complex – they are ones in which human happiness exists alongside frightening oppression. To help us understand these novels, we will read works of political theory (by such writers as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, Karl Marx, and Thomas Carlyle) and treatises by utopian social thinkers (including Robert Owen, Charles Fourier, and Auguste Comte); we will also review major historical transformations that impacted these writers’ world-views.

Our discussions will range between large-scale conversations about the nature of society and human happiness to much smaller-scale examinations of the details of the novels we read. We will also talk a lot about some of the subjects that consumed Victorians’ attention, including the nature of family life, the importance of love and sex, the debates about Darwin and evolution, and the impact of England’s colonial conquests.

Required texts:

W. H. Hudson, *A Crystal Age*
William Morris, *New from Nowhere* (Penguin)
Anthony Trollope, *The Fixed Period*
Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Penguin)
**Syllabus** (schedule of readings may change somewhat):

Thurs., Aug. 22: Introduction to the course, to the Victorian era, and some political theory.

**Society, Sexuality, and Science**

Tues., Aug. 27: W. H. Hudson, *A Crystal Age* (Preface to end of Chapt. 4); selections from J. J. Rousseau and Jeremy Bentham (handout)

Thurs., Aug. 29: Hudson, *A Crystal Age* (to end of Chapt. 7)

Tues., Sept. 3: Hudson, *A Crystal Age* (to end of Chapt. 13); selections from Thomas Carlyle (handout)

Thurs., Sept. 5: **Reading quiz**; Hudson, *A Crystal Age* (to end of Chapt. 16)

Tues., Sept. 10: Hudson, *A Crystal Age* (complete); selections from Auguste Comte and Charles Fourier (handout).

**Artistry and Industrial Work**


Tues., Sept. 17: Morris, *News from Nowhere* (to end of Chapt. 13); selections from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (handout)

Thurs., Sept. 19: **Reading quiz**; Morris, *News from Nowhere* (to end of Chapt. 17)

Tues., Sept. 24: **First short paper due**; Morris, *News from Nowhere* (to the end of Chapt. 26)

Thurs., Sept. 26: Morris, *News from Nowhere* (complete); selections from Robert Owen (handout)

**Government and Human Life**

Tues., Oct. 1: Anthony Trollope, *The Fixed Period* (to the end of Chapt. 4); selections from Thomas Malthus (handout)

Thurs., Oct. 3: Trollope, *The Fixed Period* (to the end of Chapt. 7)

Tues., Oct. 8: Trollope, *The Fixed Period* (to the end of Chapt. 10); selections from John Stuart Mill (handout)

**Discovery, Degeneration, and Evolution**

Tues., Oct. 15: Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (to the end of “Incident of the Letter”); selections from Charles Darwin (handout)

Thurs., Oct. 17: **Second short paper due;** Stevenson, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (continued)

Tues., Oct. 22: **Reading quiz;** Stevenson, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (complete)

Thurs., Oct. 24: Stevenson, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

**Class and Technology**


Thurs., Oct. 31: Wells, *The Time Machine* (continued); selections from Herbert Spencer and other “social Darwinists” (handout)

Tues., Nov. 5: Wells, *The Time Machine* (complete)

Thurs., Nov. 7: **Third short paper due;** Wells, *The Time Machine*.

**Geometry and Social Commentary**

Tues., Nov. 12: Edwin Abbott, *Flatland* (to the end of Chapt. 9)

Thurs., Nov. 14: **Reading quiz;** Abbott, *Flatland* (to the end of Chapt. 13)

Tues., Nov. 19: Abbott, *Flatland* (complete); selections from Victorian mathematical and social theorists (handout)

Thurs., Nov. 21: Abbott, *Flatland*

Tues., Nov. 26: Abbott, *Flatland*

Tues., Nov. 28: **Thanksgiving – no class.**

Tues., Dec. 3: Wrap-up and review for final exam

Mon., Dec. 9: **Final Exam from 2:00 to 3:45.**
Course Policies:

**Grades:** Final grades will be determined by the student’s performance on class participation, attendance, three short papers, one longer paper, and a final exam.

**Class Preparation and Participation (10% of grade):** All students must come prepared to class, having read and thought about the assigned texts. Students will be evaluated on how actively they participate and how engaged they are in the class.

**Discussion Questions (5%):** About once a week, I will e-mail you a list of study questions to help you engage with and understand some of the assigned poems. I will also choose each week a few students who will respond, briefly, to the questions during the next class session. Students will be evaluated on how thoughtfully they respond to these questions on their appointed day.

**Attendance:** Attendance is mandatory, and attendance will be taken at each class session. Except in extraordinary circumstances – for instance, in the case of a severe and prolonged illness, which would require a doctor’s note – I don’t differentiate between “excused” and “unexcused” absences. Instead, students are allowed to miss 3 classes, for whatever reason, without penalty. Each additional absence will result in a reduction of student’s final grade by 1/3 of a grade (that is, with 4 absences, an A becomes an A-; with 5, a B+). **Any student missing more than 6 classes will automatically fail.** In addition, two late arrivals to class will be considered as an absence. The student remains responsible for any information or assignments given out during missed classes.

**Quizzes (20% of grade):** There will be four reading quizzes, each on the days indicated on the syllabus. **Students will not be able to make up missed quizzes.** In calculating students’ final grades, I will drop the lowest quiz grade. The quizzes will evaluate whether students have completed the assigned reading and will cover only very basic information about the novels’ plots.

**Short papers (25% of grade):** Students will be required to complete three short response papers, each about 1 to 2 pages, on assigned topics. These papers must be typed and normally will not be accepted after the due date. Students not turning in a response paper will receive a 0 for the assignment.

**Essay (20% of grade):** Students will be required to complete one essay of approximately 8 to 10 pages; it will be due on Thurs., Dec. 5 by 5:00 pm. It is essential that you hand in your paper on time. Papers will be marked down
one “step” for each day late (e.g., an A will become an A-), and I will not accept a paper that is more than a week late.

**Final exam (20% of grade):** There will be a final exam on Monday, Dec. 9 at 2:00pm. The final will cover only the material we have discussed since the midterm. It will include identifications and short-answer questions.

**Plagiarism:** To detect plagiarism, OSU has given faculty access to turnitin.org, a searchable database designed to make finding copied phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and papers as easy as possible. In cases in which I suspect plagiarism, I will make use of that technology – but even without it, I have found I am remarkably good at spotting plagiarism and remarkably vigilant at making sure that it does not go unpunished.

Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, the following: submitting essays or portions of essays written by other people as one’s own; failing to acknowledge, through proper citation, the source of ideas essentially not one’s own; failing to indicate paraphrases or ideas or verbatim expressions not one’s own through proper use of quotation and citation; and submitting an essay written for one course to a second course without having sought prior permission from both instructors. All cases of suspected plagiarism, in accordance with university rules, will be reported to the Committee on Academic Misconduct.

The Office for Disability Services, located in 150 Pomerene Hall, offers services for students with documented disabilities. Contact the ODS at 2-3307.