

SYLLABUS: ENGLISH 391: GEORGE ELIOT & VIRGINIA WOOLF

Spring 2004, meets MWF 3:30 King 321
Kathie Linehan, Rice 10, ext. 8578
Office hours Spring 2004: Mon 3:30-4:30, Thurs 3-4

This course uses historical, stylistic, and feminist perspectives to explore the content and development of works by these two eminent British women writers. Here are some overarching issues I'd encourage you to think about as you read:

- 1) Gender issues. What awareness do these novels convey about the nature and consequences of differential male-female sex role socialization? What larger meanings and stylistic choices take shape around issues of female anger, ambition, and finding of voice?
- 2) Aesthetic issues. What aspects of structure, narrative perspective, linguistic style, imagery, etc. strike you as effective or problematic, and why? What most interests, frustrates, or puzzles you in Eliot's morally didactic social realism or Woolf's shifting centers of consciousness?
- 3) Sociohistorical contexts. What can you piece together about time, place, political background, realities of class, money, religion, etc.? What seems to be the author's philosophy about how these things impinge on the lives of the characters? What aspects of cultural background do you find yourself wanting to know more about?
- 4) The life of reading in the text. Factors behind this topic include the explosion of print culture in late 19th century England, the expansion of women's education and women's writing throughout the century, and the intensely literary orientation of both of our authors from girlhood on. How does the reading life of the characters inform their innermost existence?

TEXTS: George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), Norton Critical Edition (NCE)
George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* (1876)
Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925)
Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929)
Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (1927)

RECOMMENDED: Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being*, 2nd edition (1976, 1985; posthumously published autobiographical writings)

SCHEDULE:

- M Feb 9** Introduction (and check on pre-req)
- W Feb 11** Read *Mill*, opening five chapters, and "Brother and Sister" sonnet sequence (NCE 434-39). What in the opening portion of this novel engages you or puts you off? What might Eliot be up to in juxtaposing the moralizing, nostalgic adult narrator with the creation (or, as an act of memory, re-creation) of emotionally-charged sibling and family relationships which often seem conducive to anything but nostalgia? How does the rather schmalzy sonnet sequence connect to the novel? (Watch for the motif of education inhering in the shared early sibling experience.)

- F Feb 13** **Remainder of *Mill*, Book One, “Boy and Girl.”** Come to class with a **two-page typed prep paper** investigating any passage in Book One that interests you. Specify what attracts you to the passage in terms of its artistic richness, emotional impact, or thematic suggestiveness. **In addition**, list your current top three questions for exploration of this novel. They can be as broad or as specific as you want. If you’d care to have your thinking jogged about possible areas for consideration, here are a bunch of possibilities: female anger; differential sex role expectations for Tom and Maggie; female intelligence as a liability; macabre materialism of Dodson women; role of narrator; world of nature as symbolic frame; water imagery; competing claims to “protagonist” (brother and sister as a unit, Maggie solo, the family?).
- M Feb 16** ***Mill*, Book Two, “School-Time.”** In the first chapter of this book, watch for ironies and word plays around the schoolroom material introduced—rules for gender of nouns, etc. Likely focus for discussion: what do the first two books of the novel collectively reflect about differential sex role expectations for Maggie and Tom? What signs do you see about where the author stands on this? **Also read in NCE from middle of p. 548 to bottom of 550** (from Mary Jacobus, “The Question of Language”).
- W Feb 18** ***Mill*, Book Three, “The Downfall.”** What strikes you as the point or effect of the turn the novel is taking here—for example as regards the transition from childhood to adulthood for Tom and Maggie? Or the emotional impact of Book Three’s closing scene? Begin key-passages commentaries (see “Your Responsibilities” below); sign-ups to be arranged in class.
- F Feb 20** ***Mill*, Book Four, “The Valley of Humiliation,” and the first four chapters of Book Five.** Why is Book Four so short?! Does the narratorial disquisition, “A Variation of Protestantism Unknown to Bossuet” (Bk 4, ch. 1) feel like an overdone apology? A meaningful intervention? A bore? Why? What angles do you get on Maggie at this stage (Bk 4 and Bk 5 ch. 1-4) through her tastes in reading materials? Or in men? Are you feeling that you’re seeing in Maggie an unhealthy silencing of anger, or does this supposition miss the point of something Eliot is implicitly arguing for as a process of moral maturation? (For an endorsement of the former position, see Homans’ comments on NCE p. 579.)
- M Feb 23** ***Mill*, finish Book Five, “Wheat and Tares,” and read the first five chapters of Book Six.** How does your feeling towards either Mr. Tulliver or Tom in this final portion of Book Five interact with your feeling towards Maggie? What’s the sense of—and possible novelistic strategy of--the transition in atmosphere, value, class status as you move into Book Six?
- W Feb 25** ***Mill*, finish Book Six, “The Great Temptation.”** Sexual Attraction!! In a Victorian Novel!! But Is He Worthy? And Is She Truly Virtuous?
- F Feb 27** ***Mill*, Book Seven, “The Final Rescue,” plus NCE 605-609** (from Deirdre David, “Maggie Tulliver’s Desire.” As David indicates, reviewers and critics have been all over the map on whether this ending is weak (inadequately prepared for, a feminist cop-out, a descent into maudlin sentimentality or emotional regression, etc.) or in its own way effective (a fulfillment of water imagery, a masked affirmation of

female anger or heroism amidst unlivable circumstances, etc.) Come to class with a **two-page typed prep paper** explaining how it strikes you.

M Mar 1 *Mill*: Composition, contemporary reception, authorial response. Read the following three segments of material in **NCE**: 1) **pp . 427-29** (GE letters during composition), 2) **pp . 444-450 and 458-67** (criticism from *Saturday Review*, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Dinah Mulock in *Macmillan's*, Henry James, and Algernon Charles Swinburne), 3) **pp. 430-32** (GE letters responding to critics). Re GE letters during composition: is your thinking about the novel in any way affected by what you see in GE's letters of her feelings about the book while writing it, or what you learn about the options being considered for title? Re criticism from contemporary readers and reviewers (which will be our main topic for this class): how can the mix of critical responses further our understanding of Victorian debate over The Woman Question and the function of fiction? Re GE's response to critics: any further insights about the novel or GE herself? **Also read Virginia Woolf on GE (NCE 480-83)** and leaf through other 20th century critical excerpts to see what's there.

W Mar 3 *Daniel Deronda, Book One, "The Spoiled Child."* How does this book feel different from *Mill*? (Among other things, consider role of chapter epigraphs and recency of historical setting.) In the sharply critical treatment given to English Establishment society, does Gwendolen seem a conduit for social criticism or an object of it? Are feminist concerns implicated? Logic of beginning with gambling casino scene?

F Mar 5 *DD, Book Two, "Meeting Streams."* Possible focal points: narrative strategy of following Gwendolen's consciousness in meeting with Grandcourt? Grandcourt versus Daniel Deronda?

M Mar 8 *DD, Book Three, "Maidens Choosing."* Following the cue of "Maidens Choosing," let's look comparatively at the frameworks within which range of choice (involving both art, marriage, and subjection to male authority) is available to Mirah, Catherine, and Gwendolen; and also what about their character is revealed in the way they respond.

W Mar 10 *DD, Book Four, "Gwendolen Gets Her Choice."* Triangle of Gwendolen, Grandcourt, and Lydia Glasher; new lights on Grandcourt; special focus on ch. 31. **Two-page typed prep paper**: commentary on interaction of theme and imagery in ch. 31 (or redefine topic if you prefer).

F Mar 12 *DD, Book Five, "Mordecai."* Deronda as filter for Mirah, Gwendolen, and Mordecai. Possible focus: ways in which Jewish and English characters implicitly comment on one another.

M Mar 15 *DD, Book Six, "Revelations."* Possible focus: significance of Mordecai, Judaism, and Zionism for Eliot's treatment of English society generally.

W Mar 17 *DD, Book Seven, "The Mother and the Son."* The magnificent, subversive Halm-Eberstein: what does she add to issues of authority, autonomy, and self-expression for the woman artist? What do you read as the implied author's attitude towards her?

F Mar 19 *DD, Book Eight, "Fruit and Seed."* Messages conveyed by fates of characters? Comparison with ending of *Mill*?

M Mar 22 Transition lecture; no assigned reading. (You're welcome.)

W Mar 24 No class; draft-stage conferences on papers

F Mar 26 TBA; either GE's feminist essay, "Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft," or her Gothic tale, "The Lifted Veil."

NB 8 page midterm paper on either *Mill* or *Daniel Deronda* due by 4 p.m. Mar 26

SPRING BREAK!! WILD CHEERS!!!

M Apr 5 Introduction to Virginia Woolf. **Read in *Moments of Being*** (to be put on E-Res): **pp. 63-74** from "A Sketch of the Past" **and pp. 182-198** from "Old Bloomsbury."

NB Now a more freewheeling version of our coverage of textual segments and discussion topics; we can see if more specific daily topic assignments are needed or wanted when we get there. Prep papers will again be assigned along the way. We'll also do another round of key passage presentations, based on your preferences about which Woolf novel you'd like to work on. Two recent round-ups of Woolf criticism on reserve and likely to be especially helpful for background reading are: *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*, ed. Sue Roe and Susan Sellers, and *Approaches to Teaching Woolf's To the Lighthouse*, ed. Beth Rigal Daugherty and Mary Beth Pringle. Also especially well worth looking at for evolution of text is *To the Lighthouse: The Original Holograph*. And enormously valuable at every stage: Woolf's *A Writer's Diary*.

Apr 7, 9, 12, 14, 16 *Mrs. Dalloway*. Cover the novel in roughly five equal segments over these five classes. Possible focal points:

- style and consciousness; tunneling back to the past
- the sociopolitical world of the novel (background could include Alex Zwerdling in Beja's *Critical Essays on VW*, perhaps Bradshaw in *Cambridge Companion to VW*)
- Septimus re Clarissa
- Female relations: Clarissa re Sally and/or Miss Kilman, Elizabeth
- what creates a sense of climax/meaning in the concluding party scene?
- or any other topics suggested by your interests or by critical materials you come across.

M Apr 19 *A Room of One's Own*, ch. 1-3

W Apr 21 *A Room of One's Own*, ch. 4-5

Apr 26, 28, 30, May 3, 5, 7 *To the Lighthouse*. First three classes will cover the opening section, "The Window" in thirds, plus *Moments of Being* excerpt (see below). Then one class on "Time Passes" and two classes on the first and second halves of the final section, "The Lighthouse." Possible topics:

- the autobiographical dimension of the novel
- perspectives on Mrs. Ramsay; changing roles of women; female voice and vocation
- the role of books and reading in the text

--time, history, and war
--lessons of manuscript revision
--*Writer's Diary* suggestion of **Mr. Ramsay** at the center? In a boat, reading, "we perished, each alone."
--Lily's presiding consciousness at end; role of her painting
(Again, consult your interests and reserve reading for other ideas.)
Also, by April 28, have read from *Moments of Being* (book or E-Res) pp. 32-41 (re Woolf's mother), **pp. 79-84** (re mother's death) **and pp. 107-113** (re father).

M May 10 Video: *Virginia Woolf: The War Within*

W May 12 No class; draft-stage conferences on papers

F May 14 Bring those tired bodies in for course evaluations and wrap-up!

NB 8-page final paper due on Woolf novel of your choice, preferably by Fri. May 14; outside limit Tues May 18. There is no final exam in this course.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

- 1) Helping to make discussion productive. That means attending regularly (attendance policy below), coming prepared, and doing your bit to facilitate exchange that goes somewhere. Two further responsibilities related to discussion are:
- 2) Key passage commentaries. Once in each half of the semester I'm asking you to come to class having done an extra step in preparing that day's reading assignment: pick a SHORT passage (roughly in the range of one sentence to one paragraph) that you find especially interesting and well worth close scrutiny, and be ready to tell us what interested you in the passage and why. The "why" could have to do with the previous class's discussion, the suggested focus for that day, an independent interest of yours, your pleasure in the style, your realization that this passage ties some things together for you, your sense that it raises some questions you have a feeling may be important but that you don't know how to answer—whatever! You don't need to worry about holding forth at length; a few minutes is fine. Just remember to keep the textual selection short so you can make it a CLOSE reading, with attention to the significance of word choice, phrasing, imagery, etc. I'd encourage you to check in advance with the other person listed for the same day, but it's not mandatory.
- 3) Prep papers. These are short, relatively informal response papers, intended to warm you up for discussion on the day that they're due. I may not always return them; I merely record them on a Cr/NE basis. However, to get credit, they do have to come with you to class on the day they're due; otherwise the assignment misses the point.
- 4) Graded papers. This being a 300-level course, I would ask you to have a modest research component in at least one of your two papers. This could translate to something as small as working in a passage from Woolf's *A Writer's Diary* that sharpens a point you're making, or as large as responding to a critic you've read **AFTER** working out your own ideas about a topic. (Important to think through your own ideas first, so you don't get steamrolled. If I forget to spend class time going over this, remind me!) To keep things manageable, I'd suggest you deal centrally with only one novel for your paper. You may even want to narrow down quantitatively within the one novel (e.g. chapter analysis, framed by explanation of why you see that chapter as important in the book as a whole). Feel free to consult

with me at any time about questions on topics or possible background reading. It's OK if your topic develops as an offshoot of class discussion. To make sure you're breaking new ground, though, think of your reader as someone who has participated in all our discussions and is ready to be taken in a new direction from there.

MY POLICIES

- 1) Attendance. After registration settles down, I'll keep tabs on attendance by passing around a sign-up sheet each class (or, after registration settles down, a list of names for initialling). Two absences you get as freebies; three or more will affect your grade, proportionately. Emergency absences will be considered on a case by case basis.
- 2) Late papers. I downgrade at the rate of one-third of a letter grade for each day beyond due date. Barring true emergencies, I MUST have mid-term papers in time to grade them over Break.
- 3) Your communications with me. The days I've set aside for paper conferences are intended mostly for draft-stage consultations. I strongly encourage you to see me earlier if you'd like help working out a topic or thinking through your thesis. If my office hours (MW 3:30-4:20) don't work for you, we can find another time. I would also ask you in general to try to see me after class or in office hours for things that need to be discussed, and limit emails to brief items of information.

RESERVE: I'll be putting about 20-25 books on Woolf and Eliot on reserve for your use as a back-up to discussion preparation and/or papers. Please go over by late February and browse so you have a sense of what's there. Lotsa goodies.