Charles Dickens' Victorian London:

Fictions of Urbanization

IDSEM-UG 1874/M-W 2-3:15/GCASL 383

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Office Hours: M-W 3:30-5:30 and by appointment

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The years during which Queen Victoria reigned (1837-1901) saw London become the first truly modern, global metropolis. Charles Dickens is the most important novelistic voice of that city, producing unforgettable images of its streets, its people, and its institutions throughout his writing career. In this course, we engage a study of the writer and his works through the exploration of London as a modern urban space. We'll focus our attention on three of Dickens' novels: Oliver Twist (1837-39); Bleak House (1852-53); and Little Dorrit (1855-57), as well as some of Dickens' journalism and other contemporary sources. We'll set this writing in the context of the rise and expansion of the periodical press, while focusing our attention on some of the major urban issues that arose in the mid-century: slum clearance, policing, the rise of the middle class, education, and environmental issues that emerged in a rapidly expanding urban space. Some of our central questions will be as follows: How does the novel "write" the city? How does the city shape the form of the novel? Punctuating and enriching our reading and discussion of these novels and the city they imagine and depict, we'll travel to London over spring break.

Learning Goals: In this course, we will reflect on broad questions relevant to interdisciplinary study through an examination of some fundamental questions about the novel in relation to issues that bear on urbanism, taking nineteenth-century London as a kind of case study—and Dickens as our key writer. Students will acquire a familiarity with the major themes and literary techniques deployed by Dickens; they will acquire a sufficient knowledge of nineteenth-century London to read these texts with an understanding of their historical and cultural context; and they will develop tools for thinking about the relationship between forms of cultural production and the political, social, and economic questions that bear on the development of modern urban environments.

Required Texts:

Dickens, Oliver Twist. Norton.


----, Selected Journalism (also online at Dickens Journals Online: http://www.djo.org.uk/)


Other texts, both required and supplementary, available via NYU-Classes.

General Requirements

- Attendance and participation are REQUIRED. More than three unexcused absences will affect your grade negatively. More than five will cause you to fail the course. Absences for the observance of religious holidays are not included in this policy; please do alert me, however, if you must miss class for religious observance.

- This course is a seminar and therefore your preparedness and participation are essential.

- You must be on time; lateness not only affects your class performance but distracts everyone else.
• Electronic devices are permitted in this course only in so far as their use is related to our class work: note-taking, consulting readings that may be on-line or saved as documents, etc. Do not shop or using social media during class time.

**London Trip Information**: You will receive a separate document indicating our schedule and activities for the trip. Please refer all inquiries concerning the practicalities of travel, visas, passports, etc, to the Gallatin Global Office.

**Required Writing and Other Projects**: You will be writing three short papers (5-7) pages in the first part of the semester; in the second half, you'll work on a group project which will lead to an in-class presentation and your final written project. You will also be asked to keep a "weekly question" journal, submitting a discussion question once a week.

**Academic Integrity Statement**: As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, purchasing papers from 'paper mills' or other sources, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website [www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html] for a full description of the academic integrity policy. If you ever have questions about quoting or citing sources, please ask me.

**Grading Policy**: I am generally skeptical of specific percentage break-outs for assignments. I have found that in the humanities, it is difficult to make such break-outs with any mathematical accuracy. The reason for this is that assignments build on each other, develop into each other, such that if you are doing all the work for the course [preparing, doing short writing in a timely manner, participating in discussion, doing formal paper assignments with care and seriousness], each element will strengthen your overall work. Skipping out on any of these assignments will weaken your work--and thus, damage your grade. Furthermore, percentage break-outs tend to suggest, however occultly, that there are some assignments you can 'skip,' or pay less attention to, and others that should get the bulk of your attention. *This course does not work that way.* Nonetheless, you can think of it like this:

- Attendance is *degree zero*. If you aren't here, you can't perform. You get no credit for being here; you lose credit if you are not.
- Preparedness, participation, and short writing constitute about 15 per cent of your grade.
- The first three papers mount up to about 15 per cent each.
- Your group project will amount to about 20 per cent.
- Your final paper will amount to about 20 per cent.
Class Schedule

Note: This schedule offers a general map of the semester. It is subject to minor changes, depending on class interests, pacing, etc.


Part One: Criminal Intentions: Oliver Twist

January 27: Dickens, Oliver Twist, chapters 1-3, 17-35.
  • Sanders, "Charles Dickens' Metropolis"

February 1: Dickens, OT, 36-124
  • Norton Oliver, 365-373.
  • Dickens, Selected Journalism, "A Walk In a Workhouse;" "Wapping Workhouse"
  • Richardson, Dickens and the Workhouse, TBA.

February 3: Mayhew, London Labor, 348-380:
  • "A Visit to the Rookery of St. Giles..."
  • "Pickpockets and Shoplifters"
  • "Statement of a Young Pickpocket"
  • "Narrative of a Burglar"
  • Collins, from Dickens and Crime

February 8: Oliver, 125-200.

February 10: cont'd, 201-238.
  • first short essay due

February 15: Presidents' Day

February 17: cont'd. 239-295
February 22: 296-323

- Nead, "The Rape of the Glances," from *Victorian Babylon*

February 24: 324-360.

- Norton *Oliver*, Dickens' Letters about *Oliver Twist*, 374-379.
- Nead, "Holywell Street: The London Ghetto"
- Second short essay due.

**Part 2: A Variety of Environmental Hazards: Bleak House**


- Jackson, "Inglorious Mud," "The Veil of Soot," from *Dirty Old London*
- *The Illustrated London News*, "A London Fog"
- Flanders, "The Waters of Death"
- Primary Sources: "The Great Stink"

March 1: *Bleak House*, chapters 1-6, 3-75.

- Sanders, "Mostly Bleak House"

March 3: *Bleak House*, chapters 7-9, 76-114.

- Nead, "Maps and Sewers" from *Victorian Babylon*
- Dickens, "Speech to the Metropolitan Sanitary Association"
- Carlyle, from "Past and Present"

March 7: *BH*, chapters 10-17, 102-215.
- Mayhew, "Of the London Streetfolk;" "Watercress Girl;" "Of the Rage and Bottle and Marine Store Shops;" "Crossing Sweepers"

- Collins, "Dickens and the Ragged Schools"

March 9: *BH*, chapters 18-22.


- Third short essay due.

March Break 13-19: London Trip

March 21: Jet Lag Recovery Day/No Class


- Baker, "The Court of Chancery," from *An Introduction to English Legal History*

- "Martyrs of Chancery" from *Household Words*

April 4:

- Tartakovsky, "Dickens and Lawyers"

- Sanders, "Dickens in Legal Land: Inns and Prisons," from *Charles Dickens' Victorian London*

- Petch, "Law, Equity and Conscience"

- Dolin, "Law, Literature and Symbolic Revolution"

April 6: *BH*, chapters 40-42, 495-519.

April 11: *BH*, chapters 43-49, 520-598.

April 13: *BH*, chapters 50-53, 599-635.

- Miller, "Moments of Decision in *Bleak House*"

April 18: *BH*, Chapters 54-59
April 20: BH, Chapters 60-64.

- Dever, "Death and The Mother"


Part III: London then and now

April 27: Final Presentations

May 2: Final Presentations

May 4: Final Presentations

May 10: No class.

May 13: Final Papers Due.