

LS 815: Organizing Social Realities – The World in/of Literature: Reading, Realism, and Revolution

Spring 2016 | Dr. Carolyn Lesjak

COURSE OUTLINE

Why do we read? How do we read? What should we read? These basic questions have dominated literary studies recently. In response, proposals for new modes, methods, and aims of reading have been put forward, from surface and distant reading to the new formalism, digital humanities and world literature. Why is this debate taking place now? What is its relationship to the larger debates taking place within the world of global politics? And why do theories of realism, in particular, hold such a central place within these debates about reading and its relationship, broadly, to revolutionary politics? This seminar will take up these questions, bringing together old and new theories of reading, realism, and revolution in order to consider both the world of literature and its relation to politics, and the world in literature. Alongside our readings in theory, we will read a selection of classic nineteenth- and twentieth-century British realist novels, as well as a contemporary novel, in order to consider various theories in relation to literary/political practice.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- 20% Two oral discussions
- 30% One short essay (5-6 pp.)
- 50% Final paper/project

COURSE READINGS

- George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (Penguin)
- Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (Penguin)
- Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (Harcourt)
- Jonathan Franzen, *Purity* (Bond Street Books)

Additional readings will include: Georg Lukács, George Levine, Eric Hayot, Moretti, Marx, Badiou, D.A. Miller, Alex Woloch, Rancière, Barthes, Fredric Jameson, Eric Auerbach, Rachel Bowlby, Lauren Goodlad, Emily Apter, and Alan Liu.

CLASS SCHEDULE

(subject to change)

Weeks 1-3: *Adam Bede* and Theories of Realism I

Week 4: Theories of Reading I

Weeks 5-7: *Bleak House*

Week 8: Theories of Realism II

Weeks 9-10: *Mrs. Dalloway*

Week 11: Theories of Reading II

Weeks 12-13: *Purity*