

Course Themes

Victorian Literature

Empire

- Definitions of/Differences between imperialism and colonialism (See Course Notes-- Postcolonialism). These exist as a reciprocal relationship
- Considering empire not only as historical fact but also in terms of moral responsibility and culpability
- Defining and reinforcing Englishness by setting against Otherness: physical features, cultural customs, behavior and attitudes
- Various ideas about and responses to empire, e.g., White Man's Burden and "violence begets violence"/use of force to enact moral responsibility and humanitarianism
- Empire as a blank space in which to create stories (fiction and real): adventure, reinforce cultural values, the opportunity to create wealth, opportunity, identity
- What is the best, right way to manage an empire vs the very notion of empire itself

Education

- What type of education best serves children?: Facts, practical, utilitarian (NA 72-73; 12)/Imagination, feeling, self-expression. Combine these? What type of education do children need? Inclusion of morality and ethics?
- The ways in which social class and gender affect education and shape curriculums
- How should teachers be trained/how should they teach? The challenges teachers face in urban and rural schools
- What should the purpose of a university be?: Useful (career preparation) vs Liberal (formation of the mind/character) knowledge
- The link between education and democracy/individualism/freedom

Individualism and Society

- How does one live as an individual and belong to a community or society (religion, social class)?
- Notion of identity/selfhood: Stable self, divided self, multiple selves. Gender and social class: How others see us shapes how we see ourselves
- Individualism—personal desire, choice—freedom and free will—determine one’s own identity. If excessive, can lead to disorder, lack of common standards, and even anarchy
- Society—Order and stability—accepted rules of behavior, standard values and attitudes. If excessive, can be restrictive and confining, loss of individuality. Darwin: The struggle for existence
- Do the demands of belonging to a society (e.g., giving up some freedoms or personal desires) actually allow individuals to be free and secure? Do we need to be “watched” in order to act morally and ethically? Does individuality make a society better, more productive and more innovative/progressive, even if there are occasional risks that individuals will violate the rights of others?

Play and Games

- Play---Games---Sports: Continuum of play moves (left to right) toward greater structure and less freedom. Play: freedom, spontaneity, loose structure, imagination, joy, locomotion, end in itself. Games: purpose, structure (rules), merit-based, fairness, equal opportunity, means to an end—winning. Games emphasize structure and limit (not eliminate) play. Play and games can foster social interactions, friendships, community, good will, joy. Play and games can rejuvenate the human spirit. For adults, return to childhood. Games can instill order and measurable outcomes—meaning. They depend on following rules, which limit (but not eliminate) freedom
- Play and games signal a key Victorian tension between freedom and structure. Individuals frame an understanding of themselves and others as well as relate to society through play and games: Material play and games are rooted in daily life and social practices—how individuals can shape and fulfill their desires. Play is about having fun and facing realities, transferring fears, anger, and frustration to play and working them out. For the Victorians, play and games offered a sense of control and order in a complex, changing world—make it manageable
- Work and play exist on the same continuum: In the nineteenth century, play was about a change of work (new and changing work patterns; how to balance leisure or play with work) and from work (re-create oneself for greater productivity). Work can incorporate play and games; play can be serious, but this speaks to the absorption of the player in play.

Victorian Short Story

- Moral message—more or less clear, specific. Current Victorian issues: gender, social class, love/marriage, entertainment value
- Accessibility of short fiction (vs novel): Cost, readability, age
- Archetypal characters/form, genre: ghost story (sensation), fairy tale
- Definition: length (read in one sitting), incidents and actions subordinated to a single, unique effect, dramatic conflict involving one or a few characters in a single situation/moment