

English 115F
“More than Mr. Darcy: The Life and Works of Jane Austen”
Spring 2010

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Office Hours: MWF 10:00-11:00 a.m. and by appointment

Required Texts:

Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* (Oxford University Press)
---, *Pride and Prejudice* (Oxford University Press)
---, *Mansfield Park* (Oxford University Press)
---, *Emma* (Oxford University Press)

Highly Recommended Texts:

Jane Austen and Vivien Jones, *Selected Letters* (Oxford University Press)
A reputable biography of Jane Austen (see the end of the syllabus for suggested titles)

Course Description

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a young woman of good feeling must be in love with Mr. Darcy. Like all such truths in Austen’s fiction, however, this one could stand some finessing. While the romantic Austen portrayed in film and television adaptations as well as spin-offs and sequels represents a genuine portion of the historical figure and her works, it doesn’t tell the whole or even the most important truth. Jane Austen the woman and Jane Austen the novelist offer students an excellent personal and academic model: so much of her fiction, indeed the course of her own life, turns on the acquisition of self-knowledge, sound judgment, and independent thought—qualities essential to living a good life as well as writing a good essay. Austen’s female characters in particular must learn to sift fact from feeling, impulse from reason; they must learn to distinguish friendship from ill will and taste from affectation. Although the endings of her novels always lead to successful romantic unions, those conclusions can only be reached because the principal characters have undergone a proper education in knowledge of self, others, and the world. Furthermore, Jane Austen’s justly lauded style offers students a model of clarity, concision, complexity, and wit; her work has something to teach every writer—beginning or advanced, male or female, humanities- or sciences-inclined.

Course Objectives

- To develop critical thinking and reading skills (this includes learning to temper personal responses to texts)
- To understand literary works in their cultural, historical, and biographical contexts
- To discover and effectively express one’s own point of view in written as well as verbal discourse (this includes discovering one’s own invention and composing processes)
- To develop strategies for clear and persuasive written argumentation
- To learn to assess one’s own writing as well as one’s peers’ writing with objectivity and engagement
- To gain research skills for both print and electronic resources (this includes learning to evaluate sources)

In addition to the preceding list of crucial college-level skills, the course also aims to offer an introduction to literary studies and Austen studies in particular.

Course Requirements

A. Reading

It is vital to your success and enjoyment that you carefully complete each reading assignment prior to the assigned class period. I firmly believe that good readers make good writers—and good thinkers. *So be a strong, active reader*: read with a pen or a pencil; read with a dictionary; make notes and write comments in the margins. The more you engage with the readings on your own, the more able you'll be to participate in class discussion and produce quality writing. Try to come to class with at least one substantive thing to say, issue to raise, or question to ask about the reading. This engagement will prepare you to participate fully in class discussion—and boost your Participation grade.

I will expect you to bring the class materials you need every day: the book under discussion, writing utensils, paper, etc. Do not expect to borrow materials you have forgotten to bring.

B. Writing

This course will give primary attention to the “Writing” component of the “First-Year Writing Seminar” in several ways: 1) Throughout the semester, we will focus on writing-related topics in brief workshops (e.g., brainstorming, refining thesis statements, following argumentative structures, working with textual evidence, quoting from sources, drafting introductions and conclusions, and improving style). 2) We will supplement these workshops with regular (near-daily) in-class writing and writing exercises. 3) You will write three formal academic essays over the course of the semester: for each essay, you will produce a draft, review your peers' drafts, receive feedback from me on your draft, and hand in a revision for a grade.

In the first two essays (5-6 pages each), you will advance a literary argument about our shared texts (*Sense and Sensibility* for the first essay, *Pride and Prejudice* for the second) and prove it with evidence from those texts. In the third essay you will also advance a literary argument, but you will get an opportunity to increase the complexity of your thought by engaging with a scholarly article or chapter on one of our shared texts (*Mansfield Park* or *Emma*). You will first turn in an annotated bibliography in which you briefly describe the arguments of four scholarly articles; you will then choose one of those articles to engage critically in your third essay. I have scheduled a session at the Central Library to introduce you to resources and research strategies.

C. Participation

The success of our course will depend heavily on student participation each day of discussion; happily, Austen's characters will offer us models of vigorous (as well as disastrous) conversation. Participation includes both vocal contributions to class discussion and participation in Peer Reviews and other in-class activities. Each of you is responsible for participating, and each of you is *required* to do so. If you are uncomfortable with talking in class (and most of us are), please visit with me so I can help.

I will assign an average Class Participation grade (“C”) for attending class regularly, doing the reading, participating in all Peer Review sessions, and completing the assignments on time.

Constructive, thoughtful contributions (both written and spoken) will raise this grade. Obvious lack of preparation or engagement with the class, bluffing your way through discussion, or disruptive behavior will lower this grade.

I do not plan to give reading quizzes, but I will certainly institute them if I sense that the class is not keeping up with the reading.

Course Policies

A. Plagiarism

Plagiarism is understood as the presentation of another's work as your own or the failure to document others' writing *and/or ideas* within your own work. Plagiarism is intellectual thievery; it cannot and will not be tolerated. Cases will be summarily referred to the University's Honor Council and can result in an "F" for the course, suspension, or expulsion from the University. A few words on Internet plagiarism: do not be tempted to offer material from the Web without acknowledgment. It is just as easy for instructors or the Honor Council to find plagiarized material from the Internet as it is for students to plagiarize that material in the first place. Know that I check essays for anything I find remotely suspicious. Believe me: it is far better to receive a lower grade or a late penalty for your own work than to risk failure, suspension, or expulsion. If you include outside sources in your work (which I will not ask you to do until the final essay), be sure to consult me as well as an MLA guide for the correct methods of citation. Finally, know that plagiarized material in a draft is just as much a violation of the Honor Code as plagiarized material in a revision.

Please consult the Vanderbilt Honor Code to learn more about expectations of students as well as instructors: http://www.vanderbilt.edu/student_handbook/Honor_System.htm.

B. Grading

I will determine your final grade as follows:

- Essay #1 (15%)
- Essay #2 (25%)
- Annotated Bibliography (15%)
- Essay #3 (30%)
- Participation (15%).

C. Attendance

Attendance is required, and I will take attendance at the beginning of every class. In a MWF class, five unexcused absences are allowed before your final grade will be penalized. More than nine unexcused absences may result in course failure. You are responsible for all work missed during your absence, and you must contact me in the event of an extended absence to maintain your work in the class. You may not make up work for unexcused absences. Failure to attend a required conference will count as an unexcused absence.

I will excuse absences for medical reasons when accompanied by proper documentation (e.g., a note from the Dean's Office, the Student Health Center, or a doctor); I will also excuse absences for officially sanctioned participation in University athletic events as well as the deaths and serious illnesses of immediate family members. The occasional illness (e.g., upset stomach,

headache, allergies) unaccompanied by documented medical treatment will be considered unexcused. So will leaving early for Spring Break, going home for a sibling's birthday, taking a friend to the airport, attending a study session or an interview, and the like. Explanation of pending or past absences depends entirely on you.

D. Tardiness

Coming late to class is inconvenient and disrespectful to all of us. You will earn an unexcused absence for every three times you come late to class. I will expect you to be ready to begin when class starts; I will make announcements and distribute handouts in the first moments of class.

E. Due Dates and Late Work

Essays (including thesis statements, drafts, revisions, and the annotated bibliography) are due in class at the beginning of class on the due date. A late essay is any essay turned in after that time. I will not accept emailed essays, even if they're emailed before class time. Late essays will be penalized; a late draft will result in a penalized revision grade. I will not accept essays more than one week after the due date. You must turn in all three essays (including drafts, revisions, and the annotated bibliography) to pass the course. Please keep track of all your written work.

Shoddily produced drafts and revisions will result in a penalized grade. This means drafts and revisions that fall below the minimum page-length requirement. It also means drafts and revisions that do not follow MLA (Modern Language Association) format: typed in 12-pt. Times New Roman on white computer paper, double-spaced with one-inch margins, page-numbered in the top right corner with your last name, and stapled.

F. Computer Malfunctions

Technological malfunctions (e.g., printer problems, computer crashes, paper shortages at the library) will not excuse a late essay, however lamentable the circumstances, so begin your work in time to accommodate such unforeseen problems.

G. Disruptions

I will expect you to turn off your cell phones and other electronic devices while in class; you may use a laptop for writing workshops only. Do not leave the room unless necessary.

H. Email

While I do check my email daily, I do not guarantee that I will check it in the late evening or early morning. (In other words, do not expect prompt responses to middle-of-the-night emergency messages.) When you send me (or any other professor) an email, observe some basic courtesies: begin with a salutation (e.g., Dear Professor Hearn, or even Hi, Prof. Hearn); write in complete sentences; be specific and concise; and acknowledge my reply, even if it's a short "Thanks." In short, consider your emails a form of professional correspondence.

I. Grade Discussions

While I am not in the habit of negotiating grades, I am happy to discuss my evaluation of your work. Please make an appointment to meet with me in person if you wish to do so.

Course Resources

A. The Writing Studio

For further assistance with your writing, I suggest you make an appointment at the Writing Studio (117 Alumni Hall/217 Commons Center, 343-2225, www.vanderbilt.edu/writing).

B. Special Accommodations

Please know that I am fully committed to insuring a productive educational environment for all students. If you have any physical or learning needs that may affect your work in this or any class, please let me know and contact the Opportunity Development Center (322-4705) as soon as possible so that we can discuss appropriate accommodations.

C. Recommended Biographies of Jane Austen

James Edward Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen*

David Cecil, *A Portrait of Jane Austen*

Park Honan, *Jane Austen*

David Nokes, *Jane Austen: A Life*

Carol Shields, *Jane Austen*

Claire Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*

The standard edition of Jane Austen's letters is *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. Deirdre Le Faye.

D. General Guides to Jane Austen's Work

Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen**

Richard Jenkyns, *A Fine Brush on Ivory**

Deirdre Le Faye, *Jane Austen: The World of Her Novels*

Josephine Ross, *Jane Austen: A Companion**

Natalie Tyler, *The Friendly Jane Austen**

*These titles have been placed on reserve at Central Library.