Jane Austen, Spring 2018

Office Hours: M 12:30 – 1:30, T 11:00 – 12:00, and by appointment

The report of the accident had spread among the workmen and boatmen about the Cobb, and many were collected near them, to be useful if wanted, at any rate, to enjoy the sight of a dead young lady, nay, two dead young ladies, for it proved twice as fine as the first report.

--Jane Austen, *Persuasion*

Who said Jane Austen was a stuffy old maid with no sense of humor? Her novels are infused with her laser-sharp wit and dead-on portraits of human nature. Today, she’d be a favorite on Comedy Central. Take the passage above from her novel, *Persuasion.* A party of friends heads to Lyme, where Louisa Musgrove sustains a bad fall off the Cobb while trying to get Captain Wentworth to catch her. Austen’s description is dark comedy at its best. As George Saintsbury put it, “In Miss Austen there is, though restrained and well-nuanced, an insatiable and ruthless delight in roasting and cutting up a fool.”

We’ll spend our entire semester getting to know “Miss Austen” and her works. She can be subtle and slippery, but I’m hoping you’ll come to appreciate her style, which Sir Walter Scott called that “exquisite touch, which renders ordinary commonplace things and characters interesting, from the truth of the description and sentiment.” She was E. M. Forster’s favorite author. Virginia Woolf felt her influence. And Vladimir Nabokov (*Lolita*) wrote: “At first sight, Jane Austen’s manner and matter may seem to be old-fashioned, stilted, unreal. But this is a delusion to which the bad reader succumbs.”

Fans of Jane Austen, or “Janeites,” number in the millions, from the rich and famous to ordinary people, like you and me. I was introduced to Jane Austen as a teenager, and I’ve been re-reading her novels ever since. (That’s a long time.) There are only six completed novels, some short stories, one unfinished manuscript (*Sanditon*), and her surviving letters, but her writing, so powerful and timeless and exuberant, ranks right up there with Shakespeare. Harold Bloom once said: “Like Shakespeare, she gives us figures, major and minor, utterly consistent each in his or her own mode of speech and being, and utterly different from one another.”

**Goals and Work Requirements:**

**Goal One: Read Claire Tomalin’s *Jane Austen: A Life.*** This will give us biographical context in which to discuss Austen’s novels because all discourses affect a text’s interpretation, including the life of the author. As a cultural critic would say, we cannot separate a text from its author. Everything is connected.
Goal Two: Know the context. We will put a frame around this portrait of Austen, studying the period in which she lived because texts should be read in relation to culture, history, society, and other factors that help determine a text’s meaning. Your reports will help fill in the context as we go.

Goal Three: Read Austen’s novels. The class will read all six of Austen’s novels: *Northanger Abbey, Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice, Mansfield Park, Emma,* and *Persuasion.* Time permitting, we’ll watch the major film adaptations of Jane Austen’s novels. I space out the reading by including a corresponding film adaptation after each novel, giving you time to read the next novel.

Goal Four: Read the criticism. We will look at some of the major critical essays on each novel. Tony Tanner, for example, is one of the preeminent Austen scholars, so we will read his work among that of other critics. We’ll pay particular attention to the types of critical approaches, or frames, that these critics use to analyze Austen’s works.

Goal Five: Live in the text. We will take a virtual tour of important sites in Jane Austen’s life and settings in her novels: London, Bath, Winchester, Chawton, Hampshire, Devonshire, Kent.

Goal Six: Answer the questions. Who was Jane Austen? Why are her novels so timeless? Why have her works become especially popular in our postmodern era? What is her legacy?

Learning Outcomes for English majors
In addition to the outcomes for the course, English majors will demonstrate the following:
1. the ability to discuss literature, including engaging in an exchange of ideas, and offering and supporting insights.
2. the capacity to sustain controlled, critical arguments that analyze and synthesize texts.
3. an understanding of the craft of writing, including concision, diction, grammar, and syntax.
4. the ability to produce creative writing that shows an awareness of language, freedom from cliché, and an understanding of genre, style, and topic.
5. the ability to identify and use a range of sources suitable to the scholarly conversation on a particular topic, to evaluate and integrate source material, and to document accurately.
6. an understanding of the literary tradition, the historical and cultural contexts of literature, and critical methods of reading.
7. the ability to give well-planned, engaging presentations.

Texts:
Claire Tomalin’s *Jane Austen: A Life*
The following novels (I use the Norton Critical Editions):
*Northanger Abbey*
Sense & Sensibility
Pride & Prejudice
Mansfield Park
Emma
Persuasion

The Norton editions include an incredible collection of critical essays, reviews, letters, contextual articles, biographical articles, excerpts from writers Austen admired, maps, and more. However, you do not have to use these editions.

Grading
20% Participation, reports, class activities, panel discussions
10% Creative Paper
20% Critical Paper #1 (5-7 pages)
30% Critical Paper #2 (10-12 pages)
20% Final Presentation

General Guidelines and Policies:
• Come to class prepared and ready to participate. Stay on top of your reading assignments. Your contributions are vital to the success of this class.
• I take attendance. You will lose one letter grade for each class you miss after your third. I do not accept “sick in room” excuses.
• You are expected to meet all due dates; therefore, late work, if I accept it, will receive a lower grade.
• If your paper is filled with grammatical errors—no matter how brilliant you think it is—it will not receive above a C.
• Please follow the MLA handbook for format, in-text citations, and works cited.
• Turning in someone else’s work—whether it is from a published text or a roommate’s homework—as your own constitutes plagiarism. Rules regarding this offense are laid out in the Student Handbook. All cases of plagiarism and cheating will be reported in writing to the Dean of the College.
• Turn off all cell phones and put them away before you come into class. If you are using them, I will count you absent because you’re not really engaged in the class. You also don’t need laptops or I-Pads in class, unless I request that you bring them.
• I count you absent if you fall asleep in class because you’re not really here, are you?
• Purge the word “like” from your vocabulary. Unless you are using it correctly, the repeated use of this word makes you sound illiterate, not something you want to aim for in college.
• Bottom line? Do your own work and come to class awake, cell-phone and “like” free prepared for discussion, having read and/or completed all assignments.
Class Schedule:

Disclaimer: The following list of activities is subject to change depending on how much time we spend on each. Some activities may take more time than others, or we may decide to spend more time on one novel that particularly strikes your interest or sparks your discussion.

Jan 17/19
- Introduction to the Course
- Jane Austen, Background and Context
- Claire Tomalin’s *Jane Austen: A Life*
- Discussion
- Assignment: Read *Northanger Abbey*
- Assignment: Report, The Gothic Novel

Jan 22/24/26
- Finish *Jane Austen: A Life*
- Report, The Gothic Novel
- Discussion of *Northanger Abbey*
- Critical selections

Jan 29/31/Feb 2
- Finish *Northanger Abbey*
- Film Adaptation
- Assignment: Begin reading *Sense & Sensibility*
- Assignment: Report, The Question of Primogeniture and Entailment
- Assignment: Report, Rationalism vs. Romanticism

Feb 5/7/9
- Discussion of Film Adaptation of *Northanger Abbey*
- Begin discussion of *Sense & Sensibility*
- Critical selections
- Reports

Feb 12/14/16
- Finish *Sense & Sensibility*
- Film Adaptation
- Assignment: Report, Fashion, Dances & Balls, Marriage
- Assignment: Report, The Regency Period
- Assignment: Read *Pride & Prejudice*

Feb 19/21/23
- Discussion of Film Adaptation of *Sense & Sensibility*
- Begin discussion of *Pride & Prejudice*
- Critical Paper #1 Due Monday, Feb 26th

Feb 26/28/Mar 2
- *Pride & Prejudice*
- Discussion
- Critical selections
Mar 3 – 11  
**Spring Break**  
Assignment: Read *Mansfield Park* over break

Mar 12/14/16  
*Pride and Prejudice*  
Film Adaptation  
Assignment: Report, Life of the Clergy

Mar 19/21/23  
*Mansfield Park*  
Discussion and Report

Mar 26/28  
*Mansfield Park*  
Finish discussion  
Critical selections  
Assignment: Report, Class Structure  
**Creative Paper Due Monday, Mar 26th**

Mar 29 – Apr 2  
**Easter Break**  
Assignment: Read *Emma*

Apr 3/4/6  
**Tuesday Apr 3rd Monday Classes Meet**  
*Emma*  
Discussion  
Report  
Critical selections

Apr 9/11/13  
*Emma*  
Film Adaptation  
Assignment: Report, Entertainment in Austen’s era  
Assignment: Report, Bath & Its Significance in Austen’s novels  
Assignment: Report, The British Navy  
Assignment: Read *Persuasion*

Apr 16/20  
Discussion of Film Adaptation  
Reports

Apr 18  
**Undergraduate Research Day—No Classes**

Apr 23/25/27  
*Persuasion*  
Discussion  
Critical selections  
Assignment: Report, Women and Publishing
Apr 30/May 2/4  *Persuasion* (BBC adaptation)
Discussion of adaptation
Report
Jane Austen’s Legacy
**Critical Paper #2 Due Monday, Apr 30**

May 4  Last Day of Classes

May 7/8/9/10  Final Period