

ENGLISH 9162B
Biopolitics and Taxonomy in late Victorian Britain
Draft course outline—final version to be circulated at the seminar’s first meeting .

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Office number 2502D. Hours: Wed. 3:30-4:30; Th 11-12 and by appt.

In his late work, Michel Foucault described a long-term transformation in the modality of power in the West, by which the sovereign rulers of the early modern period, whose power was defined by a monopoly on lethal force—i.e., grounded in the power to kill—were replaced by governments operating through a more dispersed set of apparatuses, whose role was not to take life but to foster it. The grim irony of this transformation was that biopower proved far more lethal than sovereign power; the sovereign’s power to punish the subject was replaced by the biopolitical state’s responsibility to kill in the name of life. From the nineteenth century on the isolation and destruction of populations identified as threats to the health or the reproductive fitness of society as a whole became a major aim of state power. Foucault argues that the logic of biopolitics led eventually to genocide.

The lethal logic of biopolitics is fully evident in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, where a dedicated band of medical men devote themselves to the discovery and death of a seemingly-human invader whose existence poses a lethal threat to the British population. We will read and discuss this novel, but our work in this course will however in general be less focused on the antithesis of health and disease that organizes biopolitics than on its relation to problems of taxonomy, and to the massive changes in the classification of living beings by species and race that characterize the nineteenth century. Our work will be to study how these changes are reflected in and enacted by literary and scientific texts, and to discuss their relation to the broader history and theory of biopolitics. Besides Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, Victorian texts to be studied will include selections from the writings of Charles Darwin and Francis Galton; Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*; Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*. We will also discuss theoretical writings by Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, Roberto Esposito, and Gilles Deleuze.

Required Books:

Darwin, *The Origin of Species*. Ed Beer. Oxford. 0199219222

Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, ed. Cotsell, Oxford, ISBN 9780199536252

Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass*
ed. Kelly, Broadview, ISBN 1554812410

Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, ed. Byron, Broadview ISBN 1551111365

Other readings will be made available as .pdfs. I will scan a number of them from *Biopolitics: A Reader*, Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze, eds. (Duke UP, 2013). Seminar members wishing further theoretical reading will find this anthology an excellent resource, well worth buying if you can afford it.

Assignments:

-- A 5000 word paper on a topic of your choice will be due two weeks after our last meeting, on April 18; please choose your topic as early as possible in consultation with me. You may if you wish submit a formal description of your paper topic any time up to March 28 and I will return it with comments. The finished paper is to be submitted as if for publication, with full scholarly apparatus in accordance with either the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* or the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

--Once during the term each of you will give a 15-minute presentation in which you will introduce a topic to be discussed in that day's seminar. Presentation topics must be chosen in consultation with me.

--A 1500-word paper to be submitted on February 7. I will offer you a choice of topics for this paper; if you wish to write on a topic of your own, please consult with me.

--Throughout the term, and above all, read the material assigned on the syllabus and come to class prepared to discuss it, and to ask and answer questions about it.

Evaluation:--45% of your overall grade will be determined by the final paper.

--20% of your grade will be determined by the first paper.

--20 % of your grade will be determined by your presentation. In determining your presentation grade, I will consider how well you have explicated the work under discussion; the clarity, concision and organization of your presentation; and how well you answer questions and facilitate discussion in the group.

--15% of your grade will be determined by my evaluation of your participation in and contribution to the seminar. In determining this portion of your grade, I will consider the quality of your attention to and interventions in class discussion, and of your preparations for class. Further, this portion of the grade **will be forfeited by any student with more than two unexcused absences from class**. If medical or other circumstances affect your participation in the seminar, please discuss them with me. As circumstances warrant, I will excuse you from class and make whatever arrangements are possible to help you keep up with our work, without penalty to your grade.

Schedule: Please complete all readings before the dates listed.

Week 1: Jan 10. Introductions.

Week 2: Jan 17. Biopolitics in theory and history. Readings from Michel Foucault *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* pp. 135-145, and *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-76*, lecture of 17 March 1976. From Giorgio Agamben, "Introduction" to *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*.

Week 3: Jan 24. Darwin, *The Origin of Species* pp. 1-181(ch. 1-7).

Week 4: Jan 31. *The Origin of Species* pp. 182-360 (ch. 8-14).

Week 5: Feb 7. Elizabeth Grosz, from *Becoming Undone* (2011), “The Inhuman in the Humantiies: Darwin and the Ends of Man.” Selection from Charles Kingsley *The Water Babies* (1863); Robert Browning, “Caliban Upon Setebos, or, Natural Theology on the Island” (1864).

Week 6: Feb. 14. Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865); *Through the Looking Glass* (1872).

Week 7: Feb 21. Reading week—no class.

Week 8: Feb 28. *Alice*, continued. Selection from Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I am*. Selection from Gilles Deleuze *The Logic of Sense* pp. 1-27.

Week 9: Mar 7. Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-65).

Week 10: Mar 14. *Our Mutual Friend*.

Week 11: Mar 21. *Our Mutual Friend*.

Week 12: Mar 28. Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (1897)

Week 13: April 4. *Dracula*.

As required by the University, I remind you that students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf

In my own voice, let me observe that we become scholars and critics by modeling ourselves on others. I urge you to read widely this term and to use your reading to find your own style and mode of critical argument. If when preparing an essay or presentation for this class you become in any way concerned about the question of plagiarism, please come and discuss the matter with me.