

VICTORIAN FICTIONS OF DISABILITY

ENGLISH 9207B

Course Location and Time:

UC 4415 Tuesday 3:30-6:30

Instructor:

Dr. Jo Devereux UC 4433 Office Hours TBA

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What did disability mean to the Victorians? When exactly did the notion of disability come into being? How was disability linked to industrialization? What role did sentimentality play in Victorian fictional representations of disability and how do those representations contrast with non-fictional writings on this pressing social concern during the nineteenth century? In the twenty-first century, how has the field of disability studies affected critical approaches to the history of Victorian disability? In this course, students will consider these and other questions as we examine the representation of physical and mental disability in three Victorian novels of the mid-nineteenth century: Anthony Trollope's *Barchester Towers* (1857), George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), and Wilkie Collins' *Poor Miss Finch* (1872). Alongside these novels, we will also explore non-fictional Victorian writing on disability, especially in Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1861-1862).

Key topics may include, but will not be restricted to, the relationship between disability and

activism

affect

asylums

education

eugenics

gender

genre

labour

law

marriage and reproductive rights

medicine

politics
 poverty
 psychiatry
 race
 sexuality
 social class
 spectacle, freak shows, and melodrama
 technology and industry

Course Materials:

Required Texts (all available at Western Bookstore):

Collins, Wilkie. *Poor Miss Finch*, edited by Catherine Peters. Oxford UP, 1995.

Eliot, George. *The Mill on the Floss*, edited by Gordon S. Haight. Oxford UP, 2015.

Mayhew, Henry. *London Labour and the London Poor: Selections*, edited by Janice Schroeder and Barbara Leckie. Broadview, 2020.

Trollope, Anthony. *Barchester Towers*, edited by John Bowen. Oxford UP, 2014.

Methods of Evaluation:

Each student will present one 20-minute (8 page) seminar. A written version will be due one week after the oral presentation. Each student will also write one essay of approximately 3,500 words, due on the last day of classes. The essay should be on a different topic from the seminar paper.

Oral seminar presentation: 20%.

Written version of seminar paper (due one week after oral delivery) 25%.

Essay (approx. 3,500 words, due on 31 March): 45%.

Class participation: 10%

Timetable:

4 Jan	Introduction
11 Jan	Victorian Ideas of Disability
18 Jan	Current scholarship on Victorian disability
25 Jan	<i>Barchester Towers</i> (1857)
1 Feb	<i>Barchester Towers</i> (1857)
8 Feb	<i>The Mill on the Floss</i> (1860)
15 Feb	<i>The Mill on the Floss</i> (1860)
22 Feb	READING WEEK
1 Mar	<i>London Labour and the London Poor</i> (1861-1862)
8 Mar	<i>London Labour and the London Poor</i> (1861-1862)
15 Mar	<i>Poor Miss Finch</i> (1872)
22 Mar	<i>Poor Miss Finch</i> (1872)
29 Mar	Conclusion

Statement on Academic Offences:

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

Graduate Course Health and Wellness:

As part of a successful graduate student experience at Western, we encourage students to make their health and wellness a priority. Western provides several on campus health-related services to help you achieve optimum health and engage in healthy living while pursuing your graduate degree. For example, to support physical activity, all students, as part of their registration, receive membership in Western’s Campus Recreation Centre. Numerous cultural events are offered throughout the year. For example, please check out the Faculty of Music web page <http://www.music.uwo.ca/>, and our own McIntosh Gallery <http://www.mcintoshgallery.ca/>. Information regarding health- and wellness-related services available to students may be found at <http://www.health.uwo.ca/>. Students seeking help regarding mental health concerns are advised to speak to someone they feel comfortable confiding in, such as their faculty supervisor, their program director (graduate chair), or other relevant administrators in their unit. Campus mental health resources may be found at http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental_health/resources.html.