

**English 6565, Figure Seminar: The Brontes, 3 hrs**  
**Spring 2013, Prereq: Graduate Standing**

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## **Course Description**

A study of the Bronte sisters in the context of nineteenth British culture and significant milestones in 19<sup>th</sup> century England. Examination of the figures and selected texts.

## **Course Rationale**

Welcome to this study of the writings of Emily, Anne, and Charlotte Bronte. The 1825 portrait of the sisters painted by their brother Branwell shows three unassuming Yorkshire women, young then but already revealing in their eyes a glint of earnestness and faintly discernible shades of the wildness of their bleak, northern homeland. This course explores wildness and reverie, agrarianism and industrialization, heart and mind, and any number of oppositions which form the muddle of early Victorian times. Romanticism was by no means dead in the great north of England in the 1840's. The wild Romanticism of *Wuthering Heights* comes from the pen of reclusive Emily Bronte, who seems to reach a pale hand out of her shadowy retreat—as did her narrator from the boxbed by the window—just long enough to shock Victorian sensibilities. One year later Emily is dead, only months after Branwell's death. One year after Emily's death, Anne dies. Their other two sisters died years earlier at the school that Charlotte, the only survivor, also attended and memorialized in *Jane Eyre*.

Critics have divided themselves over the relative passions of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*. One critic has gone as far as to call Charlotte's book "bloodless." This course will skirt several periods, concentrating on Victorianism but touching on Romanticism and Modernism as well. The easy interplay of characteristics from different periods serves well to call into question the building of set boundaries between literary eras. We'll also blend schools of literary theory in our attempts at interpretation. The failure to arrive at distinct, inseparable interpretations will, because of the skill of our writers, ultimately fail.

## **Course Objectives**

This course combines an examination of the authors and their works with a brief overview of the era in which these works were written. At the end of the course, you should be conversant in the texts and their cultural context. You should be able to demonstrate mastery of the texts orally and in writing, supplementing your textual knowledge with the literary era perspectives presented in class. You should also know basic biographical information, literary styles, and literary theory as presented in class.

## Course Requirements

Your primary requirements will be to write four short papers and one formal critical research paper. You will also be responsible for class presentations. The word seminar itself is important; in this course much of the material will be prepared and disseminated by you. Since this is a writing-based course, the papers will call for strong, effective prose.

Your active participation in class will have a significant impact on your final grade. We will be doing in-class exercises and one-page papers from time to time. Your attendance in class is required, and you are responsible for all assignment changes mentioned in class. I follow the attendance policy of Mississippi College; see Attendance Regulations in the catalog (note carefully that 4 unexcused absences for a class that meets once a week will result in an automatic F for the course). Your grade will be affected by tardiness for class and absences. I value your participation highly; please be on time and be prepared. I will also be interested in how you respond to each other in class.

Your final paper must conform to MLA guidelines and be typed, double-spaced, with one-inch margins (handout to follow). You must complete four single-spaced one-page papers (a sample will be handed out). For these papers, you may choose to turn in five papers and drop the one with the lowest grade. Each of these papers will be due on the last class date in which that work is being studied (see the schedule; for example, the *Jane Eyre* paper is due on Feb 6 and the paper on *Villette* is due on Feb 27). Late work will not normally be accepted (to be fair to all, late work that is accepted will be marked down in grade). **THE LAST DAY TO DROP A COURSE IS MARCH 22. STUDENTS CANNOT WITHDRAW AFTER THIS DATE WITH A “W”(PASSING) UNLESS THEY MEET THE CONDITIONS OUTLINED UNDER “WITHDRAWAL FROM COLLEGE” IN THE MC GENERAL BULLETIN. NOTE ALSO THAT A FULL REFUND FOR DROPPED COURSES IS PROVIDED ONLY IF THE COURSE IS DROPPED IN THE FIRST WEEK. SEE MC GRADUATE CATALOG FOR MORE INFORMATION.**

## Academic Integrity

“Mississippi College students are expected to be scrupulously honest. Dishonesty, such as cheating or plagiarism, or furnishing false information, including forgery, alteration or misuse of College documents, records or identification, will be regarded as a serious offense subject to severe penalty, including, but not limited to, loss of credit and possible dismissal” (**MC Graduate Catalog**).

## Texts

Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre* (Dover) (Publishers are listed but you may use other published editions except for the poetry collection below)

Charlotte Bronte, *Villette* (Dover)

Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Bronte* (Penguin)

Emily Bronte, *Wuthering Heights* (Dover)

Anne Bronte, *Agnes Grey* (Dover)

Brontes, *Best Poems of the Bronte Sisters* (Dover)

Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (Norton)

Du Maurier, *The Infernal World of Branwell Bronte*

## Grading

Research Paper           40%

Short Papers               40%

Participation             20%

(includes seminar presentations, oral reports, discussion leading, written exercises, and in-class activity)

My grading scale is as follows: A=93-100, B=85-92, C=75-84, D=65-74, F=0-65

**Schedule** (tentative--subject to change)

Jan 16	Introduction
Jan 23	<i>Jane Eyre</i> /Gaskell bio
Jan 30	<i>Jane Eyre</i> /Gaskell bio
Feb 6	<i>Jane Eyre</i> /Gaskell bio
Feb 13	<i>Villette</i> /Gaskell bio
Feb 20	<i>Villette</i> /Gaskell bio
Feb 27	<i>Villette</i> /Gaskell bio
March 6	<i>Wuthering Heights</i> /Gaskell bio
March 20	<i>Wuthering Heights</i> / <i>Infernal World</i>
March 27	<i>Wuthering Heights</i> / <i>Infernal World</i>
April 3	<i>Wuthering Heights</i> / <i>Infernal World</i> / <i>Agnes Grey</i>
April 10	<i>Agnes Grey</i>
April 17	<i>Agnes Grey</i> / <i>Wide Sargasso Sea</i>
April 24	<i>Wide Sargasso Sea</i>