ENGL415W E100 Seminar in Media, Culture and Performance

**Simon Fraser University**

**FALL 2023 - ENGL 415W E100**

**SEMINAR IN MEDIA, CULTURE AND PERFORMANCE (4)**

**JANE AUSTEN AND THE “ACCOMPLISHED WOMAN”**

Instructor: Michelle Levy

COURSE OUTLINE:

“Then,” observed Elizabeth, “you must comprehend a great deal in your idea of an accomplished woman.”

“Yes, I do comprehend a great deal in it.”

“Oh! certainly,” cried his faithful assistant, “no one can be really esteemed accomplished who does not greatly surpass what is usually met with.  A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, all the modern languages, to deserve the word; and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions, or the word will be but half deserved.”

“All this she must possess,” added Darcy, “and to all this she must yet add something more substantial, in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading.”

“I am no longer surprised at your knowing only six accomplished women.  I rather wonder now at your knowing any.”

--Conversation between Elizabeth Bennet, Caroline Bingley and Mr. Darcy, from Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice

In this scene, Jane Austen satirically comments on the “accomplishments” women were urged to acquire. As Mary Wollstonecraft had noted two decades prior, in The Vindication of the Rights of Women, this “smattering of accomplishments” was designed to make women attractive to men, to enable them to “rise in the world” in the only way they could, through marriage. Darcy attempts in this conversation to elevate what is meant by female accomplishments to include “the improvement of her mind,” but Elizabeth is quick to point out how absurdly unachievable his expectations are for women.

In this course, we will keep in mind both Elizabeth’s skepticism and Darcy’s enthusiasm towards the idea of female accomplishments while reading Jane Austen’s novels and manuscript works. We will think about how women were socialized and educated, thought to think and act. We will do so by learning about and, as is feasible, engaging in, the activities that consume Austen’s women characters, including “music, singing, drawing, dancing.” In addition, we will write letters using tools and materials that stimulate the practices of Austen and her characters; we will sew and study women’s fashion; we will consider what “extensive reading” and knowledge of “all the modern languages” might have entailed; we will listen to and play music, we will draw and view the art that Austen would have heard and seen; we will prepare the food Austen’s characters might have been served. This embodied element of the course is meant to be both entertaining and instructive, as we learn about Austen by placing ourselves in her shoes and walking in her imagined footsteps. As with Elizabeth Bennet herself, you will not be expected to master or even participate in all these activities, but you are asked to bring a spirit of exploration and open-mindedness to the course.  
  
It is possible that some courses will be held in other locations and off campus to accommodate the planned activities.

**Course Assignments**

Participation (includes one presentation 10%) 20%

Proposal for First Creative Project Due Sept. 25 [only required if you are doing a creative project]

Essay or Creative Project (~1500 words) 25% Due Oct. 10

Revision of Essay or Creative Project Due Oct. 30

Proposal for Final Creative Project Due Nov. 20 [only required if you are doing a creative project]

Reading Journals (6 entries @ 300-400 words) 25% First three due Nov. 6; last three due Dec. 4

Final Essay or Creative Project (~2500 words) 30% Dec. 11

**Short Essay or Creative Project**

~ 1500-2000 words | Due Oct. 10 (25%)

You have two options for this assignment: a short essay or a creative assignment.

**Short Essay**

As a fourth-year class, I do not set essay topics. However, I expect the following in a fourth-year essay in this class:

* You discuss at least one longer work by Jane Austen, ideally more than one.
* You identify a topic and use that topic to shape your analysis.
* You integrate secondary sources that are relevant to your topic. These can be sources assigned but I expect you to do independent research to identify other scholarship or sources that are relevant.
* You demonstrate an understanding of the historical period.
* You have an argument that is specific and original and that builds upon existing work on your topic. This argument should be well-crafted, critically engaged, and attentive to the textual evidence. Your argument should be contained in a thesis statement, a single sentence (in most cases) that clearly asserts the argument. An argument is a statement that asserts something about your chosen subject that would not be obvious even to someone who had carefully and thoughtfully read the book. Your thesis statement will come about through a similar process of revision. Throughout, you need to keep returning to the works in question, rereading them and revising your thesis to make it tighter and stronger.
* Your thesis will only succeed if you have the textual evidence to back it up.  In the essay itself, you will want to make repeated references to the works in question, in the form of direct quotations, summary and paraphrase, and of course, analysis of these textual references.
* You properly cite your sources using MLA style. Please include page references (in MLA citation format) to all direct quotations, a works cited, and be sure to reference all secondary sources you use.
* I expect the writing and thinking in your paper to be your own.

Evaluation of the essay is based on three elements:

(1) the forcefulness and clarity of your argument;

(2) the use of textual evidence to establish your argument;

(3) the quality of writing, as measured by its clarity, structure and grammatical correctness.

I am here to help you develop your ideas for your essay. I am available during office hours and can meet outside of these by pre-arranged appointment.

**Creative Assignments**

I would like to see a brief (100-150 word) proposal for all creative assignments; alternatively, you can run your idea by me during office hours. Please submit the proposal to me by email no later than Sept. 25 to ensure that I have a chance to review it.

A creative assignment could be a rewriting/reimagining of an aspect of an Austen text we have read, or could involve creation in another media (a work of visual art, a video, a piece of music). Ideally, it will touch upon the embodied element of this class: for example, it could be an outgrowth of your presentation, in the form of an audio essay that includes clips from and discusses music relevant to Austen, or a video recreation of a dance from the period, or a piece of clothing or sewing that replicates what Austen might have worn/made. The creative assignment is an opportunity for you to explore your own creativity and to develop existing or new skills. All creative assignments must be accompanied by a 750-word narrative that describes how your creation engages critically with an issue or set of issues raised in the original work. This written reflection offers an intellectual analysis of what you have done and what it has taught you about the Austen text(s) it is based upon.

Evaluation of the creative assignment is based on three elements:

(1) the depth of your engagement with the primary text or texts, through your direct references or allusions to them, and how you build upon them. A central question I will be asking is, how does your creative response deepen our understanding of the original?;

(2) the quality of writing, as measured by its clarity, structure and grammatical correctness. If you are using another medium, this will be adapted to assess your success in that medium.

(3) the narrative and how it explains your critical engagement with the original work.