

Decadence and dread: three novels of the fin-de-siècle

Start date 18th September 2016 **Time** 10.00am – 4:45pm

Venue Madingley Hall
Madingley
Cambridge

Tutor Dr Jenny Bavidge **Course code** 1617NDX015

Director of Programmes Emma Jennings

For further information on this course, please contact Public Programme Co-ordinator, Clare Kerr
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To book See: www.ice.cam.ac.uk or telephone 01223 746262

Tutor biography

Jenny Bavidge is University Senior Lecturer and Academic Director for English at ICE and is a Fellow in English at Murray Edwards College. She is President of the Literary London Society.

Jenny teaches within a wide range of areas, including 19th and 20th-century American and British literature, close reading and critical theory, and has also taught on film. She has published on London literature, ecocriticism, and rats.

Course programme

9:30	Terrace bar open for pre-course tea/ coffee
10.00 – 11:15	<p>Session 1</p> <p>Introduction: the cultural atmosphere of the fin-de-siècle</p> <p>Our first session will begin with a lecture examining the literature of the British fin-de-siècle in its cultural and historical context. We will outline some of the pressing concerns of the period and begin to explore aesthetic, literary and philosophical responses to fears of ‘degeneration’.</p>
11.15	Coffee
11:45 – 13:00	<p>Session 2</p> <p>Robert Louis Stevenson’s <i>The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde</i> (1880)</p> <p>We will take a close look at Stevenson’s unsettling tale of a monstrously divided self and begin to pick out some of the themes common to all three of our texts, particularly the setting of a shrouded and dark London and the sense of barely-contained savagery at the very heart of Empire and ‘civilisation’.</p> <p>Preparation: Please look out for the novel’s use of physical settings and the urban landscape. How is London described?</p>
13:00	Lunch
14:00 – 15:15	<p>Session 3</p> <p>Oscar Wilde’s <i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i> (1890)</p> <p>In this session, our discussion of Wilde’s seductive novella will be informed by Wilde’s aesthetic and philosophical theories. We will examine the novella’s depictions of decadence, drug-taking and sexuality and debate Wilde’s own claim that the story’s moral is that ‘all excess, as well as all renunciation, brings its own punishment.’</p> <p>Preparation: As you read, consider how Wilde is using the novel to work through philosophical and moral questions about art, beauty and responsibility. What do you understand the moral of the tale to be?</p>
15:15	Tea

15:30 – 16:45

Session 4

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897)

Our final session takes on the dubious pleasures of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. We will examine the novel's uneasy alliance of Gothic tropes with nineteenth-century modernity, as the grandfather of all our modern-day vampires emerges into a world of typewriters and train timetables. We will also consider the broad range of critical responses to this endlessly protean narrative, including interpretations by feminist and postcolonial perspectives.

Preparation: Please close-read the first few chapters, documenting Jonathan Harker's arrival in Dracula's country and then his castle. Why does Stoker choose this character to be his first narrator? What is the effect of introducing multiple narrators and accounts later in the novel?

16:45

Day school ends

Course syllabus

Aims:

- to introduce students to three major works of the fin-de-siècle period
- to encourage discussion and exploration of the major themes and contexts of fin-de-siècle literature
- to cover some critical debates around and contemporary responses to the period and its literature.

Content:

The artists and writers at work during the last years of the nineteenth century produced a rich stew of aesthetic and literary innovation, often daring in tone, style and subject matter. The cultural movements which are combined under the general heading of the 'fin-de-siècle', including symbolism and decadence, also contributed to the development of modernism. The literature of the British fin-de-siècle is often Gothic, mordant and melodramatic; it may seem to be symptomatic of a hysterical and anxious period, full of images of split selves, monstrous doubles, infection, and disintegration of all kinds, undoubtedly influenced by the scientific and pseudo-scientific theories of the time. However, the texts which will form the focus of our day school also experiment with complex and contested ideas about the self and society, about race and empire, and about gender roles and sexual identity. Our aim will be to attend to the literary representation of these complicated and intertwining contexts, and to notice how Stevenson, Wilde and Stoker created characters who spoke not only to their own times but have survived and persisted into our own era.

Presentation of the course:

The course will be primarily taught through short informal lectures and class discussion. Enjoyment and understanding of the course will be vastly enhanced if students have read all three texts in full and the course will be taught on the basis that all students are familiar with all three works.

Outcomes:

As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:

- understand the selected texts in the cultural and historical contexts of the late nineteenth century.
- understand the nature of the narrative structure and style of the selected works and how the form of the novels reflects their themes and content.
- demonstrate knowledge of the major themes and concerns of British fin-de-siècle literature.

Reading and resources list

Please read all three novels and bring a copy of each with you to class. The tutor will be using Oxford World's Classics editions, and scholarly editions (eg. Norton, Oxford) are recommended, but any edition will do.

You may also wish to read some of Oscar Wilde's other prose, which will be relevant to our discussions. 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism' is available in various formats at <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1017> and 'The Decay of Lying' can be found here: <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/wilde/decay.html>.

Useful online resources include:

The Yellow Nineties Online: <http://www.1890s.ca>

The Oscholars: <http://www.oscholars.com>

Listed below are a number of texts that might be of interest for future reference, but do not need to be bought (or consulted) for the course.

Author	Title	Publisher and date
Ledger, Sally, and Scott McCracken, eds.	<i>The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History, c. 1880–1900.</i>	Cambridge University Press, 1995.
Ledger, Sally, and Roger Luckhurst, eds.	<i>Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle.</i>	Oxford University Press, 2000.
Marshall, Gail, ed.	<i>The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle.</i>	Cambridge University Press, 2007.
Pykett, Lyn, ed.	<i>Reading Fin-de-Siècle Fictions.</i>	Longman, 1996.

Additional information

Venue

Details of how to find Madingley Hall can be found on our website:

<http://www.ice.cam.ac.uk/who-we-are/how-to-find-the-institute>

Refreshments

Tea and coffee and lunch will be provided. If you have any specific dietary requirements or allergies and have not already advised us, please inform our Admissions Team on ice.admissions@ice.cam.ac.uk or +44 (0)1223 746262.

Note Students of the Institute of Continuing Education are entitled to 20% discount on books published by Cambridge University Press (CUP) which are purchased at the Press bookshop, 1 Trinity Street, Cambridge (Mon-Sat 9am – 5:30pm, Sun 11am – 5pm). A letter or email confirming

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