

One day, one novel: *Vanity Fair*

Start date	25/02/2017	End date	25/02/2017
Venue	Madingley Hall Madingley Cambridge		
Tutor	Dr Jenny Bavidge	Course code	1617NDX028

Director of Programmes Emma Jennings
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To book See: www.ice.cam.ac.uk or telephone 01223 746262

Tutor biography

Jenny Bavidge is University Senior Lecturer in English Literature and Academic Director in English Literature for the Institute of Continuing Education and is a Fellow in English at Murray Edwards College, Cambridge. She received her undergraduate degree from the University of Oxford and her PhD from the University of London in 2001. Before joining the Institute in 2011, she was Senior Lecturer at the University of Greenwich. She is President of the Literary London Society and conference coordinator for the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment. Her publications have included work on London in literature, children's literature, ecocriticism, and rats.

Course programme

- 09:30 Terrace bar open for pre-course tea/coffee
- 10:00 – 11:15 **Session 1: Social, historical and literary contexts for *Vanity Fair***
Vanity Fair was first published as a serial in *Punch* magazine from 1847-8 and was subtitled 'Pen and Pencil Sketches of English Life'. In this opening session, we'll consider the implications of this subtitle and how far we can describe the novel as a realist depiction of 'English life' as it was lived in the 1810/20s. We'll also ask how this story, set in the era of the Napoleonic wars, spoke to readers in the 1840s.
Preparation: What sort of novel is *Vanity Fair*? As you read try to identify the different registers in which Thackeray writes (eg. satirical, comic, romantic, realist) and keep a note of some examples.
- 11:15 Coffee
- 11:45 – 13:00 **Session 2: Becky vs Amelia**
The subtitle of the single volume publication of *Vanity Fair* in 1848 was 'A novel without a Hero'. But how many heroines does it have? None, one, two, or more? In this session, we'll discuss the nature of Thackeray's female characters and the category of the 'domestic' in his work.
Preparation: Please makes some notes about the kind of imagery variously associated with Becky and Amelia throughout the novel.
- 13:00 Lunch
- 14:00 – 15:15 **Session 3: 'This dreary minor key...': the philosophy of *Vanity Fair***
Thackeray said that his novel was full of 'dismal roguery'. While we might agree that there's a good deal of 'roguery' to be observed, generations of readers have found the novel to be far from dismal. In this session, we will examine the mood and tone of the novel and discuss the moral structure of Thackeray's work, and the tension it maintains between reality and appearance, performance and sincerity.
Preparation: Please read the 'Preface' and the final chapter with close attention. What kind of ending does Thackeray give his novel? How would you compare it with the endings of other nineteenth century novels?
- 15:15 Tea
- 15:30 – 16:45 **Session 4: 'How to live well on nothing a year': commerce, work and 'things' in *Vanity Fair***

In our final session, we will examine some of the major critical debates around *Vanity Fair*, with particular reference to the novel's discussion of economics and power. We will discuss the significance of specific objects in the novel: Becky's jewels, the furnishings and accoutrements of the Sedley and Osbourne homes and the endless circulation of money, goods and services between the characters.

Preparation: Please look closely at Chapter 36, 'How to live well on nothing a year'. How does Thackeray make the story of the Crawleys' wheeling and dealing more widely applicable to the rest of society? What is the role of plotting in demonstrating how all the levels of society are interconnected and dependent on each other?

16:45

Day-school ends

Course syllabus

Aims:

- to introduce students to *Vanity Fair* and to encourage depth of reading and critical attention to the novel
- to investigate questions about literary style, form and content
- to encourage an enjoyable atmosphere in which to discuss and debate
- to place students' own reading and knowledge of the novel in a broad context of literary, historical and critical contexts

Content

Charlotte Brontë described Thackeray's writing as being marked by carefully restrained power and energy: 'his is never the energy of delirium' she wrote, 'his energy is sane energy, deliberate energy, thoughtful energy.' This day school will allow us to spend a day immersed in the energetic world of *Vanity Fair*, enjoying our time with the lowlife and the high society of Regency London, and examining how Thackeray uses the capacious form of the novel to cover vast swathes of society and history. *Vanity Fair* shows us the consequences of small but significant acts such as Becky's dictionary-hurling alongside vast, world-changing events such as Waterloo and sets the petty personal squabbles and struggles of one group of attendees of Vanity Fair against the backdrop of nineteenth century empire-building and the circulation of money and power. Through this world, strides Becky Sharpe, an entirely original character, equal parts anti-hero, villain and, perhaps, victim. The mood and tone of *Vanity Fair* is carefully controlled, but also restless, shifting between melodrama, slapstick comedy and angry satire. Thackeray shows us a dense set of social networks, with the 'top' layer of society teetering on a pyramid constructed by the labour and deals of the lower classes. We'll think about Thackeray presents this complex world of commercial, romantic and political interests and explore some points of comparison and contrast with other writers of the period.

Presentation of the course:

The course will be taught through a series of short, informal lectures and class discussions. Please come ready to discuss, debate and argue! Students will be encouraged to close-read sections of the novel, paying attention to details of style and form. *Vanity Fair* is a fairly long and densely plotted novel but we will aim to cover as much as possible and to understand the nature of the detail with which Thackeray depicts his world. The course will be taught with the expectation that all attendees have read the novel in full.

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

- to understand *Vanity Fair* in its literary and historical context
- to be able to employ appropriate critical vocabulary to describe the style and form of *Vanity Fair*
- feel confident in their discussions of the themes and ideas explored in the novel

Reading and resources list

Please read the novel in full before the course and please bring a copy with you to the class. Any edition will do but scholarly editions with explanatory notes such as Oxford World's Classics or the Norton edition are particularly recommended (the Penguin Classics edition is good too). The tutor will be using the Oxford World's Classics 2015 (ed. Helen Small) edition.

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
Carey, John.	<i>Thackeray: Prodigal Genius</i>	Faber, 1977.
Kate Flint, ed.,	<i>The Cambridge History of Victorian Literature</i>	CUP, 2012
Kucich, John Jenny Bourne Taylor	<i>The Nineteenth-Century Novel, 1820-1880</i>	OUP, 2012
Milne, Kirsty	<i>At Vanity Fair: From Bunyan to Thackeray</i>	CUP, 2015
O'Gorman, Francis	<i>The Victorian Novel</i>	Blackwell, 2002
Shillingsburg, Peter	<i>William Makepeace Thackeray: A Literary Life.</i>	Palgrave, 2001

Website addresses

Thackeray drew his own series of illustrations for *Vanity Fair* which you can see here:
<http://www.victorianweb.org/victorian/art/illustration/thackeray/gallery1.html>

The Victorian Web has several articles on Thackeray and the contexts of *Vanity Fair*:
<http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/wmt/index.html>

You might find the section on how currency values equate to modern values particularly useful:
<http://www.victorianweb.org/economics/wages.html>

- and there's a currency converter here which will convert the currency of any given year to the 2005 rate: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency>

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 acceptance on to a current Institute course should be taken as evidence of enrolment.

Information correct as of: 16 February 2017