

EN 6424: Victorian Sexualities

Dr. Tina Y. Choi

Course Description

Recasting what we think we know about the “monotonous nights of the Victorian bourgeoisie,” Foucault argues that the Victorians were in fact preoccupied with sex – that sex and sexuality lay at the centre of nineteenth-century life and writing. There was, he contends, “an institutional incitement to speak about *it*, and to do so more and more,” with “explicit articulation and endlessly accumulated detail.” In this course we will begin with Foucault’s thesis, before turning to some instantiations of that “accumulated detail” in nineteenth-century writings; among these, we will examine journalistic exposés of sexual underworlds, medical and psychological investigations into sexuality and sexual conditions, and literary works (both canonical and pornographic). By reading these alongside a selection of both foundational and recent theoretical works, we will explore the period’s representations of sexual pleasure and anxiety, Victorian sexual attitudes and theories, their sites of transgression and prohibition, and their fears, scandals, and excitements, as we also ask how emergent forms of sexual knowledge intersected with contemporaneous concerns about gender roles and same-sex desire, social class, and Empire.

Evaluation

Two short reading response papers (300-400 words each) (10%)

One 20-minute oral presentation of the week’s reading (20%)

Active, informed participation in discussion (15%)

Final essay, approximately 4500 words (55%)

Reading List (provisional)

Acton, William, *Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs* (selections)

[Anonymous], *The Pearl* (selections)

Barrie, J. M., *Peter Pan*

Brontë, Emily, *Wuthering Heights*

Darwin, Charles, *The Descent of Man* (selections)

Eliot, George, *Adam Bede*

Ellis, Havelock, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (selections)

Foucault, Michel, *The History of Sexuality, Part I*

Haggard, H. Rider, *She*

Hardy, Thomas, *Jude the Obscure*

Le Fanu, Sheridan, *Carmilla*

Rossetti, Christina, “Goblin Market”

Wilde, Oscar, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

+ selections from critical, theoretical, and historical works by Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, James Kincaid, Anne McClintock, Sharon Marcus, Eve K. Sedgwick, Judith Walkowitz, and others