ENGLISH 126A
THE COUNTRY AND THE CITY:
MAPPING NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH LITERATURE

COURSE DESCRIPTION

As the 2016 Presidential Election so powerfully demonstrated, the divide between urban and rural life remains fundamental to the contemporary American experience. This course traces the emergence of that contrast—both a geographic and economic reality and a construction of art and politics—in nineteenth-century Britain, as the widespread changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution redrew the social map along the dividing lines between the country and the city. Alongside key works of fiction by Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Arthur Conan Doyle, we will read a selection of short texts from a range of styles and genres. From Wordsworth’s pastoral idylls to the “nether world” of Gissing’s London slums, we will explore how writing about the country and the city responds to transformations across the century in social relationships and individual and collective identity, economic and political power, manners and morals, and conceptions of nature and the environment. The course will conclude with excerpts from two works of non-fiction that address recent political events, asking how the nineteenth-century tradition of the country and the city can help us to understand and navigate the difficult terrain of culture and politics today.

LEARNING GOALS

By the end of the quarter, students should be able to:
- Better understand the fundamental division between the country and the city, as both an historical and economic reality and a cultural construction;
- Better understand how this division structures nineteenth-century British art and literature;
- Think critically about the spatial organization of contemporary culture and society, and their position within it;
- Connect the form and content of literary texts through close reading.

READINGS

Primary texts, available at the Stanford bookstore:


[NB: Please try to get these editions, so we’re all on the same page!]
Supplementary texts, available on Canvas:

1. John Clare, selections from *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* (1820) & *The Rural Muse* (1835)
2. Charles Dickens, selections from *Sketches by Boz* (1833-36)
3. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, selections from *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1892)
4. Arlie Hochschild, selections from *Strangers in their Own Land* (2016)
5. Henry Mayhew, selections from *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851)
6. J.D. Vance, selections from *Hillbilly Elegy* (2016)
7. Raymond Williams, selections from *The Country and the City* (1973)
8. William Wordsworth, selections from *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) & *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807)

[NB: Most “selections” will be very short—no more than a few pages!]

**FORMAT AND ASSESSMENT**

This is a remote-learning class, consisting of four basic components in addition to the assigned readings:

1. **Online lectures.** Each week, I will upload a pre-recorded lecture to Canvas, for you to watch and take notes on in your own time.
2. **Zoom discussion groups.** There will then be an opportunity to discuss both the contents of these lectures and the assigned readings in a weekly Zoom meeting, which will take place on Mondays from 11:30 AM to 12:30 PM PST.
3. **Response posts.** Each week, starting in Week 2, students will write a short response to the assigned reading based on prompts from the instructor. These responses will consist of three parts:
   a. Written response to the weekly prompt (1-2 paragraphs)
   b. Key passage (1 short passage from the weekly reading that you feel is interesting to discuss in relation to your response)
   c. Discussion question (1 question about the weekly reading that you would like to discuss with your classmates)

   Responses must be posted to the “Discussions” forum on Canvas by 5:00 PM PST on Sunday night.
4. **Virtual office hours.** Each week, I will hold office hours via Zoom, on Wednesdays from 11:30 AM to 1:00 PM PST. This time will be dedicated to one-on-one conversations with me, and will provide an opportunity for you to raise any lingering questions you have about the lectures or readings, to bounce ideas around, or simply to chat about your literary interests!

Grading for the spring quarter is on a “S/NC” basis. An “S” is equivalent to a grade of C- or better. Your grade for the course will be determined according to the following breakdown:

- Participation — 50%
- Response posts — 50%
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