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## ENG 333 (19<sup>th</sup> Century British Literature): Reading *Bleak House* in London

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**Credits:** 3

**Contact Hours:** 37.5

**Pre-Requisites:** Any English DL class; or instructor's permission

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

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This course introduces students to Victorian literature and London's history by reading one of its great masterpieces, Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852-3). Given Dickens's detailed portrayal of Victorian social life, from London's courts to its slums, this course will give students a historical perspective of London and the major social issues of nineteenth-century England. Alongside *Bleak House*, students will read a variety of shorter pieces (such as non-fiction texts, excerpts from longer novels, poetry, and prose) to help them understand the novel's themes and its engagement with the major social issues of Victorian London, and especially London as the center of England's empire. We will address issues of industrialization, poverty, class, the law, gender, marriage, slavery and empire, paying special attention to what they tell us about Imperial London in the nineteenth century, and how they inform our understanding of Imperial London today.

Students will augment their understanding of Victorian literature by engaging heavily with the city of London and its history and putting our readings in dialogue with their experiences exploring London. As such, this class will require students engage in "on site" research in relation to historical and contemporary British culture and society. For example, one assignment will ask students to visit a museum and find a piece of art or other artifact that relates to our course themes, while another will ask them to write a reflection on the Dickens Museum and Tour. We will have a series of group outings that will enrich students' understandings of Victorian London and London today, including a visit to the British Library's special collections. Course readings in combination with students' immersion in London life and history will deepen cross-cultural understandings, as well as their respect and tolerance for differences. As such, the work of the class will be directed towards fulfilling the Study Abroad Learning Outcomes to:

- Demonstrate awareness of your own cultural values and biases, especially those related to class, race, and gender;
- Demonstrate knowledge of diversity with a focus on how class, race, and gender differences are historically variable and context-specific;
- Communicate appropriately and effectively with diverse individuals and groups particularly in a way that allows for respect and tolerance for a range of views towards class, race, and gender;
- Demonstrate an increased capacity to analyze issues, especially those that pertain to topics of class, race, and gender, with appreciation for disparate viewpoints.
- Become familiar with some of the major issues of 19<sup>th</sup> century England, and how they are represented in its literature
- Read a text critically and actively, through performing close readings, textual analysis, and the historical contexts in which it was produced.
- Understand the relationship between literature, culture, and history through situating texts within their historical and cultural contexts

**Required Texts:**

Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (1852-3)

Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince* (1831)

Course reader with selected primary and secondary sources

**Requirements:**

- Reading Quizzes: 20%
- Reading, Class Notes + Travel Journal: 25%
- Museum Analysis + Presentation: 25%
- Critical Autobiography of Reading Dickens in London: 30%

**ASSIGNMENTS:**

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**Reading Quizzes (20%):**

These short (10 questions), multiple choice quizzes will be given during every class, and will cover the reading for the day. The goal of these quizzes is mainly to ensure that all students are keeping up with the reading and encourage them to read closely. Students may not make up these quizzes for any reason; however, I will drop your two lowest scores at the end of the semester. In an effort to ensure students arrive to class on time, late students will not be able to take the quiz once class discussion has started.

**Class Notes + Journal Entries (25%)** Following the practice of 19<sup>th</sup>-century readers who kept “commonplace books” – scrapbooks and journals full of quotes and ideas from the texts they encountered – throughout the semester you will keep an analogue-style journal to document your learning and engage with the ideas in our readings and class discussions. Studies show that we retain more information, have better focus, and are more creative when we write by hand, so this is also intended to give you a different kind of engagement with the class. I am asking you to do three things with your class notebook:

- Before coming to class, please transcribe two passages that interest you, and jot down just a few notes about why; or practice annotating your passage by highlighting the words, phrases, or images that struck you.
- During class, record notes about our class discussions. These should not be exhaustive; instead of trying to transcribe every word said, jot down some of our main ideas, or key insights and ideas that really struck with you. Aim to fill one page per class period.
- Each week, write a two-page journal entry that reflects on your experience in London, and how your experience relates to some of the ideas we’ve discussed in class.

**Museum Analysis + Presentation (20%)**

This semester-long project asks students to visit The Victoria and Albert Museum, the British Museum, and the National Maritime Museum and write a 7-8 page essay about their relationships with empire. How do the museums display empire? What do the large number of imperial products tell us about the British relationship with empire, and the legacy of empire today? You will analyze the presentation of empire from a critical viewpoint, then focus specifically on two exhibits (each from a different museum). You should do research on one or more of the artifacts in the exhibit, and pay special attention to how they are presented to the audience (such as an analysis of the

placard(s), or location in relation to other artifacts and/or exhibits). You will also present your analysis to the class in a 10-minute presentation.

**Critical Autobiography of Reading Dickens in London (25%):** At the end of the semester, you will submit a more creative and personal autobiography of reading essay. While more details will be given out in class, this essay will ask you to reflect, critically, on your experience in London and with the texts and topics we've discussed. For this assignment, students will be invited to experiment with form and genre, and will work toward cultivating their unique voice.

**Assessment:** All assignments (other than reading quizzes, which are five points each) will be graded on the 100-point scale:

100 – 97 = A+	96 – 93 = A	92 – 90 = A-
89 – 87 = B+	86 – 84 = B	83 – 80 = B-
79 – 77 = C+	76 – 74 = C	73 – 70 = C-
69 – 67 = D+	66 – 64 = D	63 – 60 = D-
59 and below = F		

## COURSE SCHEDULE

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### Week One

- *Bleak House*, Appendix 1 on “Chancery” (990)
- *Bleak House*, chapters 1 and 2
- “The Victorian Age” from *Norton Anthology*
- Judith Flanders, “Introduction,” from *The Victorian City: Everyday Life in Dickens’ London*

### Week Two

- *Bleak House*, Books I and II (chapters 3-7)
- Sarah Ellis, Coventry Patmore, and John Ruskin on gender (1839, 1854-1862, 1864)
- Thomas Carlyle, from *The Condition of England* (1843)

### Week Three

- *Bleak House*, Books III and IV (chapters 8-13)
- *Bleak House*, Appendix 3: “A Note on the Title” (993)
- Frederick Engels, selections from *Condition of the Working Class of England* (1845)
- Corton, “Dickensian Gloom,” from *London Fog: The Biography*
- Selections from *Billy Waters is Dancing*

### Week Four

- *Bleak House*, Books V and VI (chapters 14-19)
- Henry Mayhew, “The Crossing Sweeper,” from *London Labor and the London Poor* (1851)
- Elizabeth Barrett Browning, “The Cry of the Children” (1843)
- Letitia Elizabeth Landon, “The Factory” (1835)
- Judith Flanders, “Slumming,” from *The Victorian City*

### Week Five

- *Bleak House*, Books VII and VIII (chapters 20-25)
- Charles Dickens, “The Noble Savage” (1853)
- G.W.F. Hegel, “On Africa” (1822) and Scramble maps
- Thomas Macaulay, “Minute on Indian Education” (1835)
- Selected sources on The Paulet Affair (1843)

### Week Six

- *Bleak House* Books IX and X (chapters 26-32)
- John Stuart Mill, from *On Liberty* (1859)
- John Stuart Mill on Empire
- The People’s Charter (1838)

### Week Seven                      Independent study week

- Get caught up on reading

### Week Eight

- *Bleak House*, Books XI and XII (chapters 33-38)
- Michelle Allen, “Thames Fever” from *Cleansing the City*
- Selected sources from Coll Thrush, *Indigenous London*

### Week Nine

- *Bleak House*, Books XIII and XIV (chapters 39-46)
- Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*

### Week Ten

- *Bleak House*, Books XV and XVI (chapters 47-53)
- Selections Alexander Liholiho’s journals
- Selections from Lili‘uokalani *Hawai‘i’s Story by Hawai‘i’s Queen*

### Week 11

- *Bleak House*, Books XVII and XVIII (chapters 54-59)

### Week 12

- *Bleak House*, Books XIX and XX (chapters 60-67)

### **RELATION TO OVERSEAS SETTING:**

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The discussion of our course readings will be heavily influenced by our location in London. I have chosen to focus the course on *Bleak House* due to its rich representations of London and its detailed portrayal of the intersections between race, class, and gender in the city. While we won’t be able to see London as it was in the nineteenth century, we will be able to visit areas that were written about in the novel, and see older aspects of the city more generally. Further, we will be able to explore extra-textual aspects of the novels through field trips to relevant neighborhoods of the city, (such as Chancery Lane) museums (British Museum and Victoria and Albert Museum), historical buildings,

archives, and various cultural events and historical programs (such as the Dickens Tour and the Dickens Museum). Students will also pay attention to how the social issues Dickens raises in his novel (such as racism, poverty/income inequality, and patriarchy) are still seen today, and how they have morphed from their Victorian manifestations. Student experiences in London will help them better understand the novel and the history it details, and further result in greater respect for and tolerance of those whose cultural, racial, class, and/or genders differ from their own. Students will thus make full use of London through readings, assignments, and outside activities. To assist with their assignments and experiential learning, I will provide students with lists of suggested activities, some of which we will undertake as a class and some of which they will pursue independently. I'll add that when I did the London study abroad in 2019, I taught this course and was amazed at how receptive students were to reading *Bleak House*, especially non-English majors. Students continually expressed how much they were about to learn about London by reading this novel.