

Preliminary Syllabus

ENGL W3952y

SECRECY AND SCANDAL IN VICTORIAN LITERATURE

Spring 2010 W 11-12:50

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Philosophy 404

W 1-2 and Th 2-3:30 & by appt

To Mr. Collins belongs the credit of having introduced into fiction those most mysterious of mysteries, the mysteries which are at our own doors.

– Henry James (1865)

This course aims to follow up on James's sense that English literature and society in the latter half of the nineteenth century had become newly preoccupied with secrecy, which nurtured habits of reading that we've come to call hermeneutics of suspicion. One broad explanation is the rise of "information culture": an ever-increasing accumulation of overlooked or unattended knowledge which became valuable through publication. The exposure of hidden or secret knowledge had especially pointed implications for personal identity: in a world of ever-increasing social mobility, efforts at self-fashioning were met by newly keen modes of scrutiny and surveillance, which sought out "deep" or compromising components of the self, the material of scandal. In this seminar we'll explore this preoccupation with secrecy and scandal in two major Victorian cultural developments, sensation fiction and the rise of aestheticism. In sensation fiction, blackmail and exposure narratives underscored the alienation of personal identity into information—legal records, correspondence, handwriting, even a birthmark—whose appropriation by observers confounded the effort to escape from one's past. In aestheticism, art frequently was presented as an initiation into arcane or forbidden experience, in which the appeal to secrecy could be both a defensive mechanism and a means of soliciting and communicating with a like-minded but guarded audience. In connecting these two phenomena, we'll try to relate literary strategies of obliquity or indirection with social dynamics of secrecy and exposure. Following the lead of anthropologists and historical sociologists, we'll try to avoid equating secrecy with privacy, and explore its uses as a social structure (a badge of distinction, a bond of initiates) that may actually solicit public attention. Rather than treating scandal as a synonym for "transgression," we'll explore scandal as a rhetorical transaction or dynamic of information, thinking through its dependence on various audiences and channels of communication—detection, gossip, the press.

No formal prerequisites, but the seminar presupposes some confidence in reading and analyzing both narrative and lyric.

REQUIRED TEXTS (editions on order at Book Culture):

Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret* (Penguin)
 Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White* (Penguin)
 Henry James, *The Figure in the Carpet and Other Stories* (Penguin)
 Henry James, *Turn of the Screw*
 Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, ed Hill (California)
 Anthony Trollope, *The Eustace Diamonds* (Penguin)
 R. L. Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Dover)
 Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Norton)
 Course packet (available from Village Copier on Amsterdam)

WEEKLY SCHEDULE (optional reading in brackets):

- Week 1 Introduction: Secrecy and Privacy, Transgression and Scandal
 (Jan 20) Simmel 317-344, "Types of Social Relationships" and "Secrecy"
 Warren and Laslett, "Privacy and Secrecy: A Conceptual Comparison"
- Week 2 "The Enigma Novel":
 (Jan 27) Collins, *The Woman in White*
- Week 3 *The Woman in White* (con.)
 (Feb 3) Welsh, "Circumstantial Evidence"; Miller, "Cage Aux Folles"
- Week 4 Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*
 (Feb 10) [Shils, "Privacy: Its Constitution and Vicissitudes"]
 Brantlinger, "What Is 'Sensational' about Sensation Fiction?"
- Week 5 *Lady Audley's Secret* (con.)
 (Feb 17) Sennett, "Personality in Public"
 [M. Oliphant], "Sensation Novels"; [H. L. Mansel], "Sensation Novels"
- Week 6 "Gossip Etherealized":
 (Feb 24) Trollope, *The Eustace Diamonds*
- Week 7 *The Eustace Diamonds* (con.)
 (Mar 3) Gluckman, "Gossip and Scandal"
- Week 8: Poetry and (Sex) Scandal:
 (Mar 10) Tennyson, "Guinevere"; Morris, "The Defense of Guenevere"
 Meredith, *Modern Love*
- Week 9: Art for Art's Sake: The Rise of Aestheticism
 (Mar 24) Swinburne, "The Leper," "Ave Atque Vale," prose selections
 Rossetti, "The Blessed Damozel," "The Woodspurge"
- Week 10: The "Golden Book" of Decadence
 (Mar 31) Pater, *The Renaissance*; "Poems by William Morris"
 [Bellman, "The Paradox of Secrecy"]; [Adams, "Gentleman, Dandy, Priest"]

- Week 11: The Scandal of Decadence: Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*
(April 14) Sedgwick, from *Epistemology of the Closet*
- Week 12: Secrecy, Scandal, and Science: Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Hyde*
(April 7)
- Week 13: Symptomatic Reading: Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw*
(April 21)
- Week 14: Secrecy, Scandal, and the Way We Read Now:
(April 28) James, "The Lesson of the Master," "The Figure in the Carpet"

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

2 short (4-5 pp) papers: 35%

1 seminar paper, which may develop one of the short papers (10-12 pp): 40%

Participation (including reading journal and on-line postings): 25%

LIBRARY RESERVE LIST (tentative)

Adams, James Eli	<i>Dandies and Desert Saints</i>	PR 468.M38A33 1995
Cohen, William	<i>Sex Scandal: The Private Parts of Victorian Fiction</i>	PR878.S317 C64
Cvetokovich, Anne	<i>Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass Culture, and Victorian Sensationalism</i>	PR 878. F45 C85
Goffman, Erving	<i>The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life</i>	HM 261 .G61 1959
Hughes, Winifred	<i>The Maniac in the Cellar</i>	PR 878 .S44 H8
Miller, D. A.	<i>The Novel and the Police</i>	PR 878 .P 59 M55
Schoeman, Ferdinand (ed.)	<i>Philosophical Dimensions of Privacy</i>	JC 596 .P 47
Sennett, Richard	<i>The Fall of Public Man</i>	HN 13 .S45
Shaw, W. David	<i>The Victorians and Mystery</i>	PR 468 .M87 S53
Simmel, Georg	<i>The Sociology of Georg Simmel</i>	HM 57 .S52
Spacks, Patricia Meyer	<i>Gossip</i>	PR 408 .G66 S6
Swinburne, Algernon	<i>The Complete Works, vols 15 and 16</i>	PR 5500 .F 25
Taylor, Jenny Bourne	<i>In the Secret Theatre of Home</i>	PR 4498 .P8 T 39
Welsh, Alexander	<i>George Eliot and Blackmail</i>	PR 4692 .E92 W4 1985
White, Allon	<i>The Uses of Obscurity</i>	PR 830 .O2 W5

Photocopies on reserve:

Patrick Brantlinger, "What is 'Sensational' about the Sensation Novel?" *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 37 (June 1982), 1-28. (15 pp)

Beryl Bellman, "The Paradox of Secrecy," *Human Studies* 4 (1981), 1-24 (13 pp)

Max Gluckman, "Gossip and Scandal," *Current Anthropology*, vol 4 (1963), 307-315 (9 pp)

[H.L. Mansel], Review of sensation novels, from *Quarterly Review* (1863) (18 pp)

[M. Oliphant], "Sensation Novels," from *Blackwood's* (1862) (9 pp.)

Richard Sennett, "Personality in Public," *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: Vintage, 1978), 150-194. (23 pp.)

Edward Shils, "Privacy: Its Constitution and Vicissitudes," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 31 (1966), 281-306

Georg Simmel, from *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (New York: Free Press, 1950), 317-61 (23 pp)

Alfred Tennyson, "Guinevere," from *Idylls of the King* (1859) (8 pp)

Carol Warren and Barbara Laslett, "Privacy and Secrecy: A Conceptual Comparison," *Journal of Social Issues* 33, #3 (1977), 43-51. (5 pp.)

Alexander Welsh, "Circumstantial Evidence," from *George Eliot and Blackmail* (Harvard Univ. Press, 1985), 85-109 (13 pp.)