

Veranstalter:	Prof. Dr. Ute Berns
Thema:	Nature and Culture in the 19th Century Novel [AA-M11, AA-M13, AA-W]
Art der Veranstaltung:	Seminar II
Veranstaltungsnummer:	53-556
Zeit:	2st., Do 12-14
Raum:	Phil 1250
Beginn:	20. Oktober 2011

Course description:

Taking its cue from today's debates about the relevance or irrelevance of the concept of 'nature', its various definitions, constructions and pitfalls, this seminar sets out to take these questions to an earlier setting. In the Victorian era of the nineteenth century, the Romantic idealizations of nature apparently belong to the past; 'progress' is the key-word of Victorian culture. Yet the concept of nature has not vanished; it has become enmeshed with social issues.

In this seminar you will dive deeply into the Victorian novel, studying two complex (and voluminous) examples – Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853) and George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1874). Whereas *Villette* presents us with a transnational panorama as the unmarried female protagonist sets out to France to secure a living, *Middlemarch* examines the life of an intelligent young woman caught in a disastrous marriage in a provincial town in Britain. Both novels unfold rich canvasses of nineteenth-century life – its social hierarchies, gender relations and racial discourse.

Attending to these issues, we will investigate how the two novels deploy the concept of nature in their representation of the social as well as in their conception of the characters' identity and psychology? How does the conception of nature affect the novels' perspectives on 'progress', and how are the 'natural' and the 'social' inscribed into the representation of landscapes and cityscapes? The significance of Darwin's publication *The Origin of the Species* (1859) for our topic will also be considered. In the last part of the seminar we will take the discussion back to our times and analyse Jane Campion's cinematic re-configuration of Victorianism with its opulent visual confrontation of 'nature' and 'society' in the film *The Piano* (1993).

Literature:

Charlotte Brontë, *Villette*, Penguin Classics 2004

George Eliot, *Middlemarch* Penguin Classics 2003

Credit requirements: Solid knowledge of texts, to be checked in class; regular attendance and continuous active participation; willingness to take on a presentation or comparable task accompanying the seminar; term paper.

Sprechstunde während der Vorlesungszeit:	Mi , 16.30-17.30 Uhr in Phil 105
Sprechstunden während der Semesterferien:	30.8. und 12.9.11, ab 11.30 Uhr in Phil 105