

PAPER ASSIGNMENTS

(c) Third Paper:

21L002

Spring 2003

Papers are due at the end of Lecture #25 and should consist of at least eight pages (figure 320 words/page). The questions below are not meant to be answered directly (although, of course, you may answer them during the course of your essay); you don't have to answer all or even any of them. They are meant to be suggestive, to get you thinking about the materials. If you wish to modify them or invent a topic of your own, you may do so. However, it remains the case that at least half the paper should be devoted to one (or more) of the texts read and discussed during the last third of this term, covering the readings from Jane Austen onwards.

SUGGESTED TOPICS

Discuss the notion of self-awareness in *Pride and Prejudice*. The characters exist on a kind of spectrum (what it calibrates is the notion of being "sensible" as opposed to absurd), with Mr Collins at one end and Elizabeth at the other. Somewhere in between are Darcy, Mr Bennet, Wickham, Jane. Elizabeth's self-awareness is clearly connected with her lively sense of the absurdities of others, their lack of awareness of how they reveal themselves in all their limitations to an astute social observer. Self-awareness goes with awareness of how one is seen through the eyes of others, then. Yet Elizabeth is often deceived about others--Bingley, Charlotte Lucas, most of all Darcy. Discovering the extent of her misconceptions, she regards them as a failure of self-awareness. "Until this moment I had never fully known myself." Is the most self-aware character the most self-deceived?

Yet Elizabeth does know her self--she can be ironic about her capacity for irony (p. 189) when speaking with Jane, see around herself, so to speak, as can her father's sad ironies about his own sense of repentance, when he rejects the comfort that Elizabeth offers him. The way in which Elizabeth tries to comfort Mr Bennet here is a good example of what the text might mean by "happy manners", using the phrase that is used of Bingley early on. It also shows the limitation of manners, for manners deal with social roles and a decent regard for the feelings of others, not with truth. It is important to the text that access to the truth about oneself be available; happy manners are necessary but not sufficient for this, and (as in the case of Wickham), happy manners can pose a positive danger. Manners produce some distance from one's social role, because they take into account the viewpoints of others, the interests of others, and a regard for the judgments that others make (including their judgments of oneself) on the basis of those interests. Characters who are not "sensible" have unhappy manners. They are unaware of the judgments of others (or wilfully ignore them) and this cannot help but foster a total occupation with their social role and the interests that go with it. But manners are based upon fostering an undisturbed surface--they are not to be trusted so far as access to one's "true self" is concerned.

Elizabeth is prejudiced against Darcy because he is apparently disdainful at the ball of Netherfield society where Elizabeth and her family have a measure of social importance. Here is *Pride and Prejudice*--the title justified--at one blow! What exactly is the nature of Elizabeth's prejudice and can it be justified? What is the nature of Darcy's pride (in relation to Elizabeth) and can it be justified? Could the story have been written the other way about, with the woman proud and the man prejudiced?

"Lydia is lost, lost forever!" The attitude towards Lydia was not the just expression of sexual prurience. It had to do with the position of women in society at the Bennet's level; in marriage, a woman became

mistress of a household but she also came legally under her husband's tutelage and direction. She *submitted* herself to her husband in marriage. But woman who shows herself publicly willing to bestow sexual favors upon someone not her husband before marriage gives promise of not submitting to her husband's authority after marriage. Mr Collin's letter is absurd as an expression of condolence but it faithfully conveys the attitude of society. Unless Lydia and Wickham marry, Mr Bennet confronts two alternatives--either close the possibility of his remaining daughters finding suitable husbands or disown Lydia entirely, give up their position in Netherfield society and move somewhere where they are not known, and make a fresh start at gaining social reputation late in life.

Consider Elizabeth's thoughts about conventional morality when she learns that Lydia is to marry Wickham, after all. "And they *must* marry! Yet he is such a man! . . . How strange this is! And for *this* we must be thankful." How closely does she identify with the values of her society?

It is often the response of readers making their first acquaintance with Jane Austen that her subject matter is so limited--limited to the manners of a small section of English country gentry who never worry intently about deep matters of the spirit but largely accept the surface of things--that it can offer little to interest them. Discuss.

Discuss the ethical issues raised by "the problem of the mandarin" in *Père Goriot* in relation to the plot.

The Marquis d'Ajuda-Pinto is about to marry Mlle de Rochefilde, but Eugène's cousin, Madame de Beauséant, only suspects this is the last person in the world of fashion to know. When Eugène first visits her, the Marquis makes a slight movement when he hears the footman announce that a third party is about to make an appearance, and Madame de Beauséant guesses at the truth. "And so it must be recorded that Madame de Beauséant had observed her lover's involuntary movement--slight, but so simple as to be frightening". (p. 71.) Much of the book is concerned with the way in which Eugène learns to interpret such trifles--small gestures, subtle alterations of tones, a second meaning lurking beneath the apparent meaning of a phrase. Balzac takes it for granted that the reader will understand perfectly why a tiny gesture in these particular circumstances may provide evidence for the vicontesse's conclusion. In part, the book is a chronicle of a young man's education in the ways of fashionable society, penetrating appearances and learning how to conceal his own feelings. ("Never let anyone suspect your real feelings," says the Vicontesse to him, "or you'll be lost." [p.82]). Take any instance of subtlety in verbal exchange or observation by Eugène and show how it works and what Balzac expects his reader to understand.

Mme de Beauséant says to Eugène that she will lend him her name, which she asks him not to disgrace, and then he appeals to his mother and daughters for the means to acquire "the weapons" (suitable clothing and transportation). It sounds a bit like a knight-errant starting out on his career. The comparison becomes explicit when Delphine sets him up in his own apartment. (p. 207) "Success is everything in Paris; it's the key to power." What is meant by "career" and "success" in the context of this book?

Why can women be exploited? They crave respectability, while the respectable aristocracy craves money. All is appearance--but only in Paris; the countryside remains a possibility. The passage on p. 217 that declares this speaks of the "strength to dominate but how or to what end he did not know". A remarkable idea. Compare Don Quixote with the sentiment that follows: in the absence of a pure love, power can be a fine thing in itself if pursued for the glory of country.

The mutual courtship of male and female in Balzac's high society is a zero-sum game: there's a winner and a loser. In the text, women are largely manipulated by men--they are weaker. This is a feature of Balzac's fiction--women who can love at all wind up as victims, because sooner or later their beloved exploits or betrays them. Women are constant in love, men love and then fall out of love--that is the Balzacian general rule. Eugène's story is one version of this. Discuss the role of women of fashion in

Père Goriot--the ability to patronize young men such as Eugène, their susceptibility to being victimized by husbands and/or lovers.

After their confrontation in the garden, Eugène thinks of Vautrin: "That man must have a brain of iron! he told me bluntly exactly what Madame de Beauséant told me in polite phrases. He told me more about virtue than I've ever learned from men or books." What are the teachings of Vautrin? How would you elucidate his character and the kind of temptation that he represents? Are his views, indeed, endorsed by Mme de Beauséant in the speech to which Eugène refers?

At one point, Balzac announces the theme of his book as tracing "the devious ways by which an ambitious man of the world gets the better of his conscience as he tries to skirt round evil, so as to achieve his aim while preserving appearances . . ." (pp. 129-30.) Is this the theme? Elucidate.

Vautrin: Virtue is indivisible--hence go all the way to crime. True? Goriot: they are committing all crimes in this one. True?

Balzac pretty clearly had *King Lear* in mind when writing *Père Goriot*, but even if he didn't, the comparison forces itself upon one's attention. Discuss it in any way that seems useful, perhaps by starting from the sentiment just cited by Goriot, which was made on his death-bed.

Discuss the idea of heroism in any text read so far this term. (Don't ask: what do you mean by "heroism"? Or: do you mean the hero of a book or heroics in life? Resolving ambiguities is your job.)

Nietzsche says that you need a history of morality to understand it. What does he think you learn about morality from its history? Outline the history that he offers in as much detail as possible. (You can derive some clues about this in the next paragraph.) Later he apparently says that knowing the origin of a thing and understanding its current purpose are world's apart--the former has no bearing on the latter and vice-versa. A careful reading shows that the apparent contradiction here does not run deep. How would you account for it?

Nietzsche is scornful of the "scientific" moralists of his day--he sometimes calls them "psychologists". He sees them as unwittingly projecting upon nature characteristics that are late development of social existence. This, in turn, leads him also to refuse to take certain things for granted and to insist that they be posed as problems--something whose existence calls for explanation, even where it looks unlikely that we could ever supply any. Nietzsche wants to take the ability to promise--to go surety for oneself--as such a puzzle, also the wish to take revenge, the feelings of bad conscience or guilt, above all, as he puts it, "the existence on earth of an animal soul turned against itself, taking sides against itself." In the latter, particularly, we can see that he will not accept explanations such as Hobbes offers, which depend upon the notion that being moral is "at bottom" or "really" a matter of enlightened self-interest. Comment.

Nietzsche sees the pre-reactive man (the blond beast) as affirming himself, deriving his values from his sense of his own worth, and the (modern) reactive man as deriving his sense of his self from his denial of the value of another. At the same time, Nietzsche says the reactive man not only hates what is not himself but he hates himself as well, "takes sides against himself." Is there a contradiction here?

Does Nietzsche's project of examining the value of values make sense? Is it like asking why some accepted value or other is *really* valuable? Or is Nietzsche trying to examine the value of the idea of "value" itself? In that case, how is this possible? (In the realm of morality, it may be like asking why we *ought* to do what we ought to do.) Other writers after Nietzsche raised this question by way of introducing a general skepticism about moral values--i.e., if values could always be questioned in the name of other values, then perhaps there were no universal values, but only particulars masquerading as

universal values. Is this Nietzsche's position? In other hands, the skeptical version of the question "What's the good of being good?" implied straightaway that there was much to be gained from being bad and no reason not to be bad except the risk of being found out by one's fellows. (Hobbes puts the matter in this way.) Nietzsche has often been accused of licensing this kind of thinking. Does the accusation stick?

Outline the general character of Nietzsche's argument by elucidating the distinction between "bad" and "evil" as Nietzsche presents it. Try to explain where the idea of "innocence" (unlike "guilt" not a central theme in Nietzsche, but certain present in the text) might fit into his view of things.

Hobbes believes in equality as a value; Nietzsche believes deeply in inequality. Compare Nietzsche's views with those of Hobbes and/or Machiavelli on this point.

He is *aut* Nietzsche looks forward to the coming of a kind of human being who does not follow the morality of custom--that is to say, the dictates of accepted morality--but obeys only his own rules. *onomous*--that is to say, he is free but he is truly responsible, as those who are follow customary morality are not, because he can bind himself to his own rules. "Autonomous" and "moral" are mutually exclusive, says Nietzsche. Does this idea of "true" responsibility make sense? How close is Nietzsche-ism to the views that Vautrin expounded to Eugène in *Père Goriot*?

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Nietzsche offers a genealogy--that is, an account of the origin and transmission--of certain values: in the case of Nietzsche, what he takes to be the essence of morality--namely, a set of principles whose fundamental premise is that you ought to be a different sort of person. Genealogies normally are offered in connection with notion bearing upon honor--namely, one's membership in a group (usually, a family) of whose position and accomplishments one is proud and whose values are adopted as an ideal to live up to. In the case of Nietzsche, the genealogy is of values that the writer means to discredit, and the genealogy is offered in order to discredit them. Nietzsche sees the present as a time at which individuals typically derive their sense of themselves reactively--that is, in response to the attitudes taken towards them by others. And he sees the time before the present stage of humanity as one at which (to a lesser or greater degree as one moves backwards from the present) human beings were not particularly regardful of others, either positively or negatively. Nietzsche also sees the present as a stage in the development of a new sort of human being, a supra-moral person, who measures up only to himself. Comment.

Nietzsche's project resembles Rousseau's in another sense. Both regard most accounts of human nature as unwittingly projecting upon nature characteristics that are actually not natural but late developments of social existence. This leads them each to regard these characteristics as puzzles--things whose existence calls for explanation, even where it looks unlikely that we could ever supply one. (Rousseau's instances were language, property, metallurgy and farming.) Nietzsche wants to take the ability to promise--to go surety for oneself--as such a puzzle; also the wish to take revenge, the feelings of bad conscience or guilt, above all, as he puts it, "the existence on earth of an animal soul turned against itself, taking sides against itself." (p. 1272.) In the latter, particularly, we can see that he will not accept explanations such as Hobbes offers, which depend upon the notion that being moral is "at bottom" or "really" a matter of enlightened self-interest. Comment.

Nietzsche sees the pre-reactive man (the blond beast) as affirming himself, deriving his values from his sense of his own worth, and the (modern) reactive man as deriving his sense of his self from his denial of the value of another. At the same time, Nietzsche says the reactive man not only hates what is not himself

but he hates himself as well, "takes sides against himself." Is there a contradiction here?

Discuss the main themes of *Major Barbara* as you see them. Undershaft says that religion is the only interesting subject for intelligent people. Lady Britomart says that it is not a proper subject for discussion. What does each mean by this? What does Undershaft mean when he says that his religion is being a millionaire? Or, to put it another way, Undershaft, like Barbara, believes in the need for salvation, but what one has to be saved from is different for each of them.

Undershaft says that each person has his own true morality--that one person's meat is another's person's poison morally as well as physically. Lomax simply agrees, as if everyone knows this, but Stephen objects--there is, he says, only one true morality and anyone who believes otherwise is a scoundrel. Who is right, in the view of the play? How does this issue reflect the concerns of the play as a whole?

Undershaft rejects the values of Christianity--poverty, humility, and turning the other cheek. The play shows that these are powerful values; Bill Walker has a hard time standing out against them. Does Undershaft represent a superior sort of man?

Undershaft makes armaments--weapons. This catches a metaphor that runs deep in the Western tradition, as when we say that truth is our best weapon. Why do we need weapons? What justifies the metaphor? Shaw wrote this play before it became clear that weapons of mass destruction would be normally used in warfare against civilian personnel; he still believed that they would be used against other military forces, who were also armed to the teeth and prepared to use their weapons. This fact apart, why is it appropriate to the play's concerns that he is a manufacturer of weapons? Why not (like Bodger) a manufacturer of something else that might be regarded as evil, like whiskey or tobacco? Would that do as well?

Cusins nicknames Undershaft "Machiavelli". Why? Lady Britomart says that she couldn't bear the fact that he practiced morality while preaching immorality. What she means is also put by saying that he always gives a bad reason for doing something good--as when he insists that his charitable contribution to the Salvation Army remain anonymous. Practicing morality while preaching immorality sounds the dead opposite of Machiavelli's advice to the Prince. Discuss.

Discuss or compare the idea of vocation, calling, or career in one or more of the following (at least one chosen from the last third of the term): Wordsworth's *Prelude*, Balzac's *Père Goriot*, Shaw's *Major Barbara*.