

ENG 650
Spring 2014
Professor Pyle

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Hours: W 12-2, Th 2-3
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The Nineteenth-Century British Sensorium

By every measure the British nineteenth century witnessed an ongoing transformation in the philosophical, scientific, medical, theological, political, and literary discourses of the senses. One might call it a new sensibility of the senses. From the scientific debates over "vitalism" at the beginning of the century, through the Romantic fascination with synaesthesia and Victorian interest in characterization and on to the aestheticist to appeal to sensual impressions with which it concludes, the literature of the century is devoted to the working and organizations of the senses and, often, to its *disorganizations*. This seminar will be devoted to reading a range of nineteenth-century British literature which take up thematically, formally, rhetorically this new logic of sense. We will read poetry, prose fiction, drama, and critical essays by Blake, the Shelleys, Keats, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Eliot, Pater, Hopkins, the Rossettis, and Wilde. And we will engage these literary texts as they are informed by a range of converging discourses -- ethical, social, scientific, aesthetic, and theological. And we will examine how the sensorium of 19th century British literature becomes the nexus of the investments in feelings, judgments, identities, politics that have found a new constellation in our present and most vital critical concerns.

Assignments

Students will write three two-page single-spaced close readings of a brief but important passage from the assigned texts. These readings are due on the Monday before the seminar; and students will be expected to discuss the paper in the context of the relevant text. For the final term project, students will write a seminar paper of 12-15 pages on a topic you propose with me. Complete drafts of the paper are due Friday May 30th. Final versions of the paper are due June 12th. The close readings count 10% each and the final paper 70% of the final grade.