

## Brontë and Eliot: Romanticism vs. Realism

We'll discuss two great Victorian novels: Emily Brontë's masterpiece, *Wuthering Heights* (1847), and George Eliot's much-loved, semi-autobiographical *The Mill on the Floss* (1860). We can address whatever topics happen to interest class participants, but we'll pay particular attention to a clash in these novels between two major nineteenth-century literary traditions: romanticism and realism. The "classic" age of the novel, which saw the rise of many of Britain's most celebrated novelists—Dickens, Trollope, Thackeray, Gaskell, Hardy, the three Brontë sisters, and Eliot—was fueled in large part by this productive conflict. Romanticism, with its emphasis on imaginative vision and subjective depth, affirmed the triumph of individual self-realization over worldly limits and constraints. But realism, with its objective analysis of the ways class, economics, gender, politics, imperialism, and other forces shape personal identity, tried to document what it saw as the inevitable submission of individuals to society. Brontë's and Eliot's novels pit romantic and realistic world views against one another, trying to resolve the ensuing ethical, political, psychological, and aesthetic conflicts in uniquely creative ways.

Focusing on only two novels will give us time to "close read" the dynamic tensions between these competing world-views in theme, plot, character, and form. We'll also read a few short essays, which will clarify romantic and realistic ways of thinking as well as other issues that class members might want to pursue. These could include: the pressures Victorian women faced in both the social and the literary world; the social and personal stakes of romantic love; the brutalizing effects of the British class system; the psychological insights achieved by British novelists, in the age before Freud and professional psychology; the deployment of racial tropes to stigmatize certain characters; and much more.

Class will be discussion based, except for a few extended remarks by the instructor.

Please buy the editions listed below. It's important that we all have books with the same page numbers, since we'll want to move rapidly from passage to passage in discussion, while yet remaining "on the same page." Both are available at Labyrinth Books in Princeton:

Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, ed. John Bugg, Oxford World Classics, 2020

ISBN 9780-198834786

George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, ed. Gordon S. Haight, 2015

ISBN 9780-198707530

**Please read pages 1-44 from *Wuthering Heights* (Ch. 1-6) before our first class meeting.**

Week 1: *Wuthering Heights*, Vol 1, Ch. 1-6

Week 2: *Wuthering Heights*, Vol. 1, Ch. 7-14; Vol. 2, Ch. 1-2; Nussbaum, "*Wuthering Heights: The Romantic Ascent*"

Week 3: *Wuthering Heights*, Vol. 2, Ch. 3-20; Armstrong, "Emily Brontë In and Out of Her Time"

Week 4: *The Mill on the Floss*, Book First, Ch. 1-7

- Week 5: *The Mill on the Floss*, Book First, Ch. 8-13; Book Second; Eliot, "Chapter 17"  
and the excerpt from "The Natural History of German Life"
- Week 6: *The Mill on the Floss*, Book Third; Book Fourth
- Week 7: *The Mill on the Floss*, Book Fifth; Book Sixth, Ch. 1-6; Auerbach, "The Power of  
Hunger: Demonism and Maggie Tulliver"
- Week 8: *The Mill on the Floss*, Book Sixth, Ch. 7-14; Book Seventh

John Kucich is distinguished professor emeritus at Rutgers and professor emeritus at the University of Michigan. He has written several books and many essays on Victorian literature and culture.

**Wednesdays from 10:00 a.m.–noon starting March 1 through April 19 for 8 sessions**

Virtual — Discussion — Max 18