

# MELISSA M. DONEGAN

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## EDUCATION

Ph.D. in English, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA, December 2008

M.A. in English, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA, May 2001

B.A. in English, Bates College, Lewiston, ME, June 1995, magna cum laude

Study Abroad in English, Bristol University, Bristol, England, 1993-1994

## DISSERTATION

*Writing for Their Lives: British Women's Survival Narratives, 1848-1900*

Director: Professor Florence S. Boos

My dissertation examines representations of domestic violence in George Eliot's *Janet's Repentance*, Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, New Woman fiction of the 1890s with a focus on Sarah Grand's *The Beth Book*, letters from the Women's Co-operative Guild, and Elizabeth Dobb's *The Autobiography of a Charwoman, As Chronicled by Annie Wakeman*. I explore the ways in which the women writers and their writing heroines employ storytelling to describe and survive abuse and to make meaning out of loss. Using Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, I reconfigure the creation of domestic space in terms of negotiating safety, planning escape, and making room to write. I conclude that nineteenth-century British women of all classes learned to use narrative construction to survive domestic abuse, find meaning in their pain, and begin to establish a sense of community with their sister sufferers.

## HONORS

### University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA

Council on Teaching Outstanding Teaching Award Nominee, 2006

Jane A. Weiss Memorial Dissertation Scholarship, 2004-2005

Edwin Ford Piper Memorial Dissertation Scholarship, 2004-2005

Graduate Representative to the Dickens Project, Santa Cruz, CA, Summer 2003

Foreign Language Scholarship, Summer 1997

### Bates College, Lewiston, ME

High Honors in English for Senior Thesis, 1995

Phi Beta Kappa, Gamma Chapter, 1995

Senior Thesis Research Grant, 1994-1995

## PUBLICATION

“From Epitaph to Epigraph: Memory and Memorial in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton*,” forthcoming in the *Gaskell Society Journal*, 2010.

## CONFERENCE PAPER

“From Epigraph to Epitaph: Memory and Memorial in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton*,” British Women Writers Conference, April 2009.

## RESEARCH AND TEACHING INTERESTS

British Literature 1830-1950; British Women Writers; Social Issues in Nineteenth-Century Literature; Literature and Domestic Violence; New Woman Fiction; Working-Class Autobiography; Life Writing; Eating Disorders and Substance Abuse; Victorian Women’s Poetry; The Novel; The Short Story; Introduction to Literature; Rhetoric and Composition.

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

### Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Iowa. 2009-2010.

I am currently teaching courses in nineteenth-century British literature and culture to undergraduate English majors.

#### Courses for English Majors

#### **Literature and Culture of Nineteenth-Century Britain: Domestic Geographies. Spring 2010.**

This course examines nineteenth-century British literature and culture with a focus on domestic geographies. We explore such issues as women’s access to and control of domestic space, poverty and crime, architecture and the decorative arts, domestic imprisonment and freedom of movement, and the difficulties of finding room to write. Texts for the course include Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), Anne Brontë’s *Agnes Grey* (1847), Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House* (1852-3), William Morris’s “The Decorative Arts” (1877), Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), Rudyard Kipling’s “The Record of Badalia Herodsfoot” (1890), Arthur Morrison’s “Lizerunt” from *Tales of Mean Streets* (1894), Netta Syrett’s “Thy Heart’s Desire” (1894), Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), and E. M. Forster’s *Howards End* (1910).

#### **Selected British Authors Before 1900: Wilkie Collins and Mary Elizabeth Braddon. Spring 2010.**

This course examines the lives and works of two sensation fiction writers, Wilkie Collins and Mary Elizabeth Braddon. We explore the ways in which these writers use fiction to address such social issues as the science of criminality, gender relationships, domestic violence, standards of value and morality, and the art of detection. The novels are chock full of sexual intrigue, bigamous marriages, perilous journeys, drugs and poisons, disguises, fires, horror, and suspense. Texts for the course include Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White* (1860), *Armadale* (1866), and

*The Moonstone* (1868) and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), *Aurora Floyd* (1863), and *Wyllard's Weird* (1885). Using electronic databases, we also examine reviews of and responses to these texts and their writers.

**Victorian Literature: Crime and Passion (or The Naughty Nineteenth Century). Fall 2009.**

In an era largely characterized by strict moral rules and an insistence on social propriety, Victorian writers produced a wealth of literature detailing violent crimes and social deviance within familiar domestic settings. This course investigates the growing nineteenth-century fascination with criminality. What happens, we ask, when the Victorian "angel in the house" becomes a murderer, adulterer, or prostitute, when the face does not reflect the crimes of the soul within? Texts include Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, George Eliot's *Silas Marner*, Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* stories, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, and George Bernard Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession*.

**Adjunct Faculty, Department of English, Kirkwood Community College. Fall 2009-present.**

**Composition II: Technical Writing. Spring 2010.**

This course teaches students to communicate effectively in a variety of professional, workplace, and public situations. Students learn to understand the elements of effective technical communication; to identify the message, audience, purpose, and occasion of a piece of writing; to analyze a variety of kinds of texts; to research subject matter relevant to the writing task; to write technical documents using appropriate content, form, and language; and to present information that is clear, concise, accurate, and vivid. Texts for this course include Mike Markel's *Technical Communication* and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*.

**Elements of Writing, two sections. Fall 2009.**

This course helps students to improve their ability to write effectively, think critically, and express themselves clearly and intelligently on a wide range of subjects. Over the course of the semester, students write four formal essays in addition to completing reading and informal writing assignments. This course is designed around the theme of "Room to Write." Thus, the reading and writing assignments consider such topics as the influence of educational experiences; the journey to college; our physical, emotional, and intellectual relationships to space; the impact of race, class, and gender on the evolution of our ideas and understanding; and writing as both a theme and a process. *Models for Writers: Short Essays for Composition* (2010) is our primary text.

**Graduate Instructor, University of Iowa. Fall 1997-December 2008.**

I designed and taught each course independently.

Courses for English Majors

**Women in Literature. Spring 2005.**

"Education Matters" considers the ways in which women learn, both in and outside the classroom, and the challenges women face in forming racial, ethnic, political, geographical, and sexual identities, with a special emphasis on the impact of women's access to various kinds of education. Texts include Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*, Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, Margaret Edson's *W;t*, and Nawal El Saadawi's *A Daughter of Isis*.

**Selected British Authors: Elizabeth Gaskell and George Gissing. Fall 2005.**

This course offers a comparative study of the life and works of Elizabeth Gaskell and George Gissing, emphasizing their focus on the hardships of lower-middle- and working-class life in Manchester and London, and paying close attention to the British laws and social mores that influenced and restricted the behavior of and options available to each character. Texts include Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* and *Ruth* and George Gissing's *The Nether World* and *The Odd Women*, in addition to a selection of critical texts.

**Selected British Authors: Anne and Charlotte Brontë. Spring 2006.**

This course examines the lives and works of Anne and Charlotte Brontë, exploring both formal and thematic issues, and focusing on the vivid portraits of Victorian society presented in each text. Texts include Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* and *Villette*, Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*; Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, selections from Juliet Barker's *The Brontës* and *The Brontës: A Life in Letters*, as well as poetry and supplementary critical and historical texts.

General Education Literature Courses**Interpretation of Literature, nine sections. Fall 1999, Spring 2000, Fall 2000, Spring 2001, Fall 2001, Summer 2002.**

These introductory courses take as their focus Ways of Reading: ways we choose, approach, read, interpret, write about, and discuss literature. I designed these courses around such themes as "Lies and Secrets, Myths and Storytellers," "Identity Formation and Life's Many Teachers," "Reading Matters: A Method in the Madness," "Imprisonment, Madness, and Marriage," and "Difference and Power." I have used a range of texts, including William Faulkner's *Light in August*, Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jane Austen's *Emma*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, John Irving's *The Cider House Rules*, Nella Larsen's *Passing*, Toni Morrison's *Sula*, Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*, Margaret Edson's *W;t*, Tom Stoppard's *The Real Thing*, and selections of poetry, short fiction, and drama.

**Women and Literature. Spring 2002.**

"Daughters, Sisters, Mothers, and Wives: Family Matters for Women in Literature" focuses on the positions of women in literature, both as writers and as characters. Organized both chronologically and thematically, the course considers how women learn to define themselves in their various family roles and what challenges women face in forming racial, ethnic, political, geographical, and sexual identities within the confines of the family. Texts include Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, Dorothy Allison's *Bastard out of Carolina*, and a wide range of selections from Gilbert and Gubar's *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*.

**Narrative Literature. Spring 2004.**

"Keeping Secrets and Telling Stories" offers an introduction to the genre of narrative literature with a focus on narratives of secrecy: stories in which secrecy is used as a theme as well as a tool to restrict and develop plot. By placing each text in its social and historical contexts, we work to understand the complexity of narrative construction. Texts include Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier*, Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, and Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*.

## Speech and Composition Courses

### **Rhetoric One, Two, Three, and Four, 21 sections. Fall 1997-Spring 1999; Fall 2002-Fall 2008.**

Rhetoric courses examine in depth the elements of content, organization, expression, delivery, and mechanics, considering the ways in which we employ these elements to develop a message with a purpose directed toward a specific audience on a designated occasion. The goals of each Rhetoric course include learning to use flexible, appropriate processes for writing, speaking, and reading; learning to write and speak analytically about the rhetorical aspects of controversies; learning to understand and describe the complex variety of perspectives comprising controversies; and finally joining controversies by advocating positions responsibly. We also explore research as a means to question and affirm our own ideas and to evaluate and challenge the advocacy of others. Rhetoric Three, Accelerated Rhetoric, combines the curriculum of One and Two into a single semester-length course. In Rhetoric Four, students focus on reading and writing without the formal speech component. I have designed these courses around such themes as “Journeys,” “The American Dream and the Burden of Responsibility,” and “Private Lives, Public Spaces.” Texts have included *Now and Then: Current Issues in Historical Context*, *In Context: Reading and Writing in Cultural Conversations*, *Conversations: Readings for Writing*, *The Nuts and Bolts of College Writing*, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*, *Cold New World*, *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*, *Refuge*, and *Beer and Circus: How Big-Time College Sports Is Crippling Undergraduate Education*.

## **ACADEMIC SERVICE**

### **Secretary, General Education Literature Textbook Committee, University of Iowa. Academic Year 2001-2002.**

I served as secretary to the Textbook Committee for Interpretation of Literature. My responsibilities included reviewing all approved texts, researching department needs, reviewing new acquisitions, meeting with publishing representatives, keeping minutes of regular committee meetings, and discussing textbook choices and course design with new GEL instructors.

## **PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS**

Modern Language Association (MLA)

British Women Writers Association (BWWA)

## **VOLUNTEER WORK**

### **Youth Services Volunteer, DVIP, Iowa City, IA. August 1998-April 2003.**

I designed and supervised weekly arts and crafts activities for the children who stay at the Domestic Violence Intervention Program. I provided supplies and snacks and offered encouragement in a creative, non-violent, non-threatening environment in which the children could play together and explore a variety of artistic opportunities. In 2000 I received a Gold Seal Award from the Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence for my volunteer services at the shelter. I served as an Americorps Volunteer at the shelter for two years during which time I held weekly movie nights, helped supervise out-of-shelter activities like swimming, movies, and field trips, and assisted in the design and direction of the youth summer program. June 1999-May 2001.

**REFERENCES**

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