

Olli at American University

SYLLABUS for STUDY GROUP #630

Spring 2022

Study Group: Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and “The Root of All Evil”

Day: Eight Mondays (11:45 a.m. to 1:15 p.m.)

Dates: Mar. 7, 14, 21, 28, Apr. 4, 11, 18, 25

Leader: Dr. Linda R. Freeman

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Text: Charles Dickens: Great Expectations. Norton Critical Edition, Edgar Rosenberg, ed. W.W. Norton Co., NY. ISBN: 978-0-393-96069-3

Charles Dickens: A Christmas Carol. Any edition

George Eliot: Silas Marner. Penguin Classics. Q.D. Leavis, ed. Viking Penguin, Inc. NY. ISBN: 0-14-043030-X

Note: These books are paperbacks. The Norton Critical Edition is highly recommended, as it comes with bottom-of-the-page footnotes and a large section of background, contexts, and criticism in the back. However, you should feel free to use other versions, should you care to. Any edition of A Christmas Carol will be fine if it is a complete, uncut version (90-100 pages). We will be discussing Great Expectations first, so once you have your copy, you might want to get started on the reading ahead of time.

Goals:

We will read and discuss three masterworks from the 19th century, all of which deal with money in differing thematic ways: lack of it, hoarding it, and distortions of human relations caused by misuse of it. We will attempt not only to understand and enjoy these remarkable literary achievements, but also to consider the moral and psychological dimensions of each work. We will look at author biographical material and the larger historical context of these books, as well as their artistry and how they accomplish their powerful effects.

Format:

Study group meetings will be a mix of informal lectures with group discussions. Active participation by group members will be essential to the success of each meeting. Because the

amount of reading will be heavy, the reading assignments will run about 70-80 pages a week. This is by no means impossible for intrepid OLLI participants, but it should be planned for.

Schedule:

This part of the syllabus is subject to adjustment.

Mar. 7—Intros, syllabus, class policies, literary genres, elements of the novel, Dickens bio; 19th-century class structure, coinage; discussion of Great Expectations Chapter 1 (I) through Chapter 11 (XI)

Mar. 14—Discussion of Great Expectations, Chapter 12 (XII) through Chapter 22 (XXII); the Gothic novel; melodrama

Mar. 21—Discussion of Great Expectations, Chapter 23 (XXIII) through Chapter 34 (XXXIV); narration and narrators

Mar. 28—Discussion of Great Expectations, Chapter 35 (XXXV) through Chapter 46 (XLVI); Realism in literature; fairy tales; parables

Apr. 4—Discussion of Great Expectations, Chapter 47 (XLVII) through Chapter 59 (LIX); background for A Christmas Carol; Utilitarianism

Apr. 11—Discussion of A Christmas Carol all; Background for Silas Marner; Evangelicalism

Apr. 18—Discussion of Silas Marner, Chapter 1 through Chapter 12

Apr. 25—Discussion of Silas Marner, Chapter 13 through Conclusion; summing up; possible future courses; evaluations, etc.