

**ENGL208: INTRODUCTION TO VICTORIAN LITERATURE
AESTHETICS AND POLITICS IN THE LONG NINETEENTH CENTURY**

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

SEMESTER

INSTRUCTOR: ERIN CHESLOW

MWF, TIME

LOCATION

OFFICE HOURS: BY APPOINTMENT

OFFICE LOCATION: EB 220

Throughout the literature of the Victorian period (1837-1901), authors, poets, and artists faced many of the social issues we continue to contend with today. From industrialism, environmentalism, and labor to racism and colonialism to the New Women, free love, and aesthetics, Victorians were fascinated with characterizing their age, as well as *how* they characterized it. We will continue that work by defining and analyzing many of these themes through an aesthetic or formal approach to the period. Not only will we discuss and question the political and personal content of the literature of the long nineteenth century, but we will also explore the different genres and forms that emerged alongside that content.

Starting with the lyric and gothic poetry of the Romantic period, which immediately preceded Victoria's reign, we will use their introspective exploration of the self and the sublime as a foundation for understanding how Victorians dealt with the rapid change that defined the rest of the century. As we proceed, we will engage with the major forms that marked the period, including realism, sensationalism, sonnet sequences, and the early musical. We will engage with a number of questions about form and the political and social change it reflected: How does Victorian poetry stem from but also reimagine earlier poetic forms and why? How does the realistic, journalistic form of the social problem novel help or hinder the reader's understanding of working-class conditions? Why realism? How might other forms be responding to realism? What role does drama play toward the end of the century?

Because the Victorian period is so complex, there are a number of terms and concepts with which you may not be familiar. Don't worry! I will spend some of each class defining terms and inviting questions about the period and the literature we are reading. That said, this is a discussion-based class, and I expect you to participate enthusiastically in those discussions and come to class prepared.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

TEXTS

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (Dover Thrift: 978-1420925753)

Wilkie Collins, *Heart and Science* (Broadview: 978-1420925753)

Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton* (Broadview: 978-1551111698)

Olive Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm* (Broadview: 978-1551112862)

All other texts will be made available on Canvas as PDFs.

GRADING (out of 300 possible points)

Annotation Notebook: 50 points
Close Reading: 40 points
Research Question/Bibliography: 10 points

Research Paper: 100 points
Participation: 100 point

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Annotation Notebook: For each reading assigned, you will be responsible for one entry in an Annotation Notebook, which you will share with me via Google Docs. In each entry, you will respond to the following prompts:

For primary texts:

- a. Note down your initial reactions. How does the text make you feel? Does it affect the way you think about yourself and the world?
- b. What are some cultural contexts you recognize? How might the reading help you better understand the Victorian period?
- c. What formal qualities do you notice? Is the writer using a lot of dialogue? Are there patterns or repetitions? Does the text seem more realistic or more fantastical? How might it relate formally to other texts we've read for the class?
- d. What questions do you have? List at least one.
- e. Pick one interesting passage to close read and bring it to class for discussion.

For secondary texts:

- a. List and define key terms, especially if they are new to you.
- b. Who or what is the subject of the text? In other words, who or what is the writer writing about? What is the writer's relationship to that subject?
- c. What is the main question or argument that the writer is exploring? Explain it in two sentences or less.
- d. What are key points of evidence that the writer uses to explore that question or argument?
- e. Pick one interesting passage that you do not understand and bring it to class for discussion.

Your responses will be used for class discussion and to fuel your writing assignments. They should not take long, but they should be well thought out and relevant to the reading.

2. Close Reading: Due Friday, Week 5, 2-3 pages, double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12 pt. font. Using one of the novels or poems we have already read, choose a word or key passage that helps you to better understand the text, then make an argument about the text based on your reading. Be sure to quote directly from the text to provide evidence for your argument. This assignment requires no additional research.
3. Research Question & Bibliography: Due Monday, Week 8, double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12 pt. font. As we prepare for the final research paper, I will ask you to come up with a research question that you would like to explore. Based on one of our readings for the

class, what would you like to explore further? How might that reading help you to better understand a larger issue? Specifically, think about the form of the text you have chosen and ask a question that allows you to talk about that form's relationship to content. Also include a bibliography of 5 sources that might help you explore that question. We will spend some time talking about research and library resources before this assignment is due.

4. Final Research Paper: Due Wednesday, Finals Week, 5-7 pages, double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12 pt. font. The final paper will incorporate the methods and skills you have practiced throughout the semester. Based on your research question, you will incorporate evidence from the text, as well as outside research, to try to answer the question you asked. Remember, your answer may be different than you expected. That is a good thing! It means you are really engaging with the text and the research.

Each of you will schedule a one-on-one meeting with me *after* you have formulated your research question for the final research paper. At that time, we will discuss your final project and other work in the class so far. We can also discuss writing in general or anything else on your mind.

LATE WORK: I will accept work within 24 hours of the day and time that each assignment is due, but you will lose 10% of your final grade on that assignment. I will not accept work more than 24 hours late.

PARTICIPATION

Participation points will be counted each day based on your attention to your fellow students and your engagement with them and with class material in class discussions.

Students are allowed 3 unexcused absences over the course of the semester. Being more than 15 minutes late for class or being late 3 times will count as an absence.

It is your responsibility to obtain notes and other materials from a classmate for any class period missed.

EXCUSED ABSENCES: For an absence to be considered "excused," you will need a signed document explaining your absence (example: a doctor's note) for it to be considered an excused absence. Otherwise, 15/300 points will be deducted from your final grade.

Excused absences include family emergencies, illness of the student or of a dependent, religious observance, and participation in university events at the request of university authorities. If you feel that an absence should be excused for any other reason, schedule a meeting with me to discuss the circumstances and provide signed documentation recording the reason for your absence.

I will not accept an email in lieu of a written explanation of an excused absence.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this class, students should be able to do the following:

- Engage critically and dialogically with primary and secondary texts
- Understand the most significant historical, political, and literary developments of the nineteenth century in Britain
- Think critically about the intersection of form and content in Victorian literature
- Develop a working vocabulary of literary terms and close reading skills
- Collaborate with texts and peers through careful reading and discussion to produce effective and engaging writing

ETIQUETTE AND EXPECTATIONS

- You are required to bring the readings for class, along with your Annotation Notebook, to class, along with any other assigned materials, each day. It is important that you be able to refer back to the text and pull out key ideas directly in our discussions.
- I do allow laptops and tablets but only for school work. If I feel that you are not paying adequate attention and participating fully in class discussions, I will dock participation points.
- Cellphones must be turned off during class. Use of a cellphone for *any* purpose will result in a lower participation grade.
- You are expected to be *active listeners* in this class. Show your engagement with the course material and in class discussions by looking interested, taking notes, and asking questions.
- Please be in your seats and ready for class on time. I will make sure to end class on time each day, so do not start packing up or shuffling papers before class ends. It can be disruptive to your fellow students and to me.
- Consider all communication directed to me – or any professor – as a professional correspondence. Compose them accordingly:
 - Write in complete sentences with appropriate punctuation. They should not look like text messages or informal emails to friends.
 - Proofread.
 - Be mindful of tone. Written correspondence often comes off as more brusque than intended. Adjust your writing to assure professionalism and politeness.
 - Do not ask questions about information you can easily find on your own. In particular, there is no need for any teacher to repeat information from the syllabus.

PLAGIARISM

Through imitation, you can learn the forms, methods, and conventions utilized by writers and their discourse communities. The words and phrases used by the writer, however, are their own. Any copied wording or phrasing or any repeated passages that are not properly quoted and cited will be considered plagiarism, resulting in a 0 on the paper in question. Do not hesitate to speak with me if you have any questions regarding this matter. Please keep in mind:

- Any source consulted must be included on your Works Cited page, even if you have not quoted it directly.
- All paraphrased and summarized information must be distinct from the material paraphrased or summarized and must be cited correctly, including an in-text citation.
- Most of what can be found directly online will not qualify as a reputable sources. We will discuss source viability further in class.

Please consult the university policy on academic dishonesty for more information.

PROVISIONS FOR DISABILITIES

If you have or think that you may have a disability and therefore need some support, you are encouraged to contact Disability Services, which is for students with all disabilities including learning, mental health, and physical disabilities. Services are confidential and there is no charge to students.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE

Sexual harassment is one type of sex discrimination under Title IX, United States Education Amendments of 1972. The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) states that sexual harassment is any unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature. Sexual Violence is a severe form of sexual harassment. Some examples of sexual violence include threatening someone into unwanted sexual activity; sexual contact with someone who is drunk, drugged, unconscious, or otherwise unable to give a clear, informed "yes" or "no"; and rape or attempted rape. For more examples, visit the Office of Gender Equity website. Under Title IX, responsible employees cannot ensure confidentiality. Responsible employees must report any instance or disclosure of alleged sexual harassment. If you would like to speak to someone confidentially about your options regarding something you have experienced or witnessed, please contact: The Office of Gender Equity, confidential resource that provides information about options regarding University policies and procedures to potential complainants of gender--based discrimination, sexual violence, stalking, dating, violence, or intimate partner violence.