

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

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN  
SPRING 2022

INSTRUCTOR: ERIN CHESLOW

MWF, 12:00 – 12:50 PM

LOCATION: HAB 143

OFFICE HOURS: MWF 11:00 – 11:50 AM

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 movements, Victorians were fascinated with characterizing their age, as well as *how* they could characterize 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

Wilkie Collins, *Heart and Science* (Broadview: 978-1551111247)

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

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

Oscar Wilde, *Salomé* (Broadview: 978-1554811892)

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

## GRADING

Annotation Notebook: 20%  
Artwork Presentation: 15%  
Close Reading: 15%  
Peer Review: 5%

Research Question/Bibliography: 10%  
Research Paper: 25%  
Participation: 15%

## WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Annotation Notebook: For each reading assigned, you will be responsible for one entry in an Annotation Notebook, which I will collect periodically throughout the semester. 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. Ask at least one question or 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. Artwork Presentation: See sign-up sheet for individual due date. 5-10 minutes, with notes or script and sources demonstrating preparation. Throughout the semester, I will provide artwork, music, or a multimedia website related to the period, country, and culture we are studying. Choose one piece of art to research more thoroughly, providing background on the creator, their relationship to the period, and what the piece represents to you and to society more broadly. At the end of your presentation, provide a connection to our reading for that day that might help us start discussion.

3. 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.
4. 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.
5. 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 unless you contact me in advance of the due date.

### 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.

### 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
- Develop understanding of some 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, along with your Annotation Notebook and any other assigned materials, to class 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 schoolwork. 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.

## COVID-19 POLICIES

**GENERAL:** Following University policy, all students are required to engage in appropriate behavior to protect the health and safety of the community. Students are also required to follow the campus COVID-19 protocols.

Students who feel ill must not come to class. In addition, students who test positive for COVID-19 or have had an exposure that requires testing and/or quarantine must not attend class. The University will provide information to the instructor, in a manner that complies with privacy laws, about students in these latter categories. These students are judged to have excused absences for the class period and should contact the instructor via email about making up the work.

Students who fail to abide by these rules will first be asked to comply; if they refuse, they will be required to leave the classroom immediately. If a student is asked to leave the classroom, the non-compliant student will be judged to have an unexcused absence and reported to the Office for Student Conflict Resolution for disciplinary action. Accumulation of non-compliance complaints against a student may result in dismissal from the University.

**FACE COVERINGS:** All students, faculty, staff, and visitors are required to wear face coverings in classrooms and university spaces. This is in accordance with CDC guidance and University policy and expected in this class.

Please refer to the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign's COVID-19 website for [further information on face coverings](#). Thank you for respecting all of our well-being so we can learn and interact together productively.

**BUILDING ACCESS:** In order to implement COVID-19-related guidelines and policies affecting university operations, instructional faculty members may ask students in the classroom to show

their Building Access Status in the Safer Illinois app or the Boarding Pass. Staff members may ask students in university offices to show their Building Access Status in the Safer Illinois app or the Boarding Pass. If the Building Access Status says “Granted,” that means the individual is compliant with the university’s COVID-19 policies—either with a university-approved COVID-19 vaccine or with the on-campus COVID-19 testing program for unvaccinated students.

Students are required to show only the Building Access Screen, which shows compliance without specifying whether it was through COVID-19 vaccination or regular on-campus testing. To protect personal health information, this screen does not say if a person is vaccinated or not. Students are not required to show anyone the screen that displays their vaccination status. No university official, including faculty members, may ask students why they are not vaccinated or any other questions seeking personal health information.

### **STUDENTS AND ACCOMMODATION**

To obtain disability-related academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact me and the Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES) as soon as possible. To contact DRES, you may visit 1207 S. Oak St., Champaign, call 333-1970, e-mail [disability@illinois.edu](mailto:disability@illinois.edu) or go to the [DRES website](#). If you are concerned you have a disability-related condition that is impacting your academic progress, there are academic screening appointments available on campus that can help diagnosis a previously undiagnosed disability by visiting the DRES website and selecting “Sign-Up for an Academic Screening” at the bottom of the page.

### **EMERGENCY RESPONSE RECOMMENDATIONS**

Emergency response recommendations can be found at the following website: <https://police.illinois.edu/emergency-preparedness/>. I encourage you to review this website and the campus building floor plans website within the first 10 days of class. <https://police.illinois.edu/emergency-preparedness/building-emergency-action-plans/>.

### **FAMILY EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS AND PRIVACY ACT (FERPA)**

Any student who has suppressed their directory information pursuant to Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) should self-identify themselves to me to ensure protection of the privacy of your attendance in this course. See <https://registrar.illinois.edu/academic-records/ferpa/> for more information on FERPA.

### **SEXUAL MISCONDUCT POLICY AND REPORTING**

The University of Illinois is committed to combating sexual misconduct. I am required to report any instances of sexual misconduct to the University’s Title IX and Disability Office. In turn, an individual with the Title IX and Disability Office will provide information about rights and options, including accommodations, support services, the campus disciplinary process, and law enforcement options. A list of the designated University employees who, as counselors, confidential advisors, and medical professionals, do not have this reporting responsibility and can maintain confidentiality, can be found here:

<https://wecare.illinois.edu/resources/students/#confidential>. Other information about resources and reporting is available here: [wecare.illinois.edu](https://wecare.illinois.edu).

## **INCLUSIVITY**

The effectiveness of this course is dependent upon the creation of an encouraging and safe environment. Exclusionary, offensive or harmful speech (such as racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, etc.) will not be tolerated and in some cases subject to University harassment procedures. We are all responsible for creating a positive and safe environment that allows all students equal respect and comfort. I expect each of you to help establish and maintain an environment where you and your peers can contribute without fear of ridicule or intolerant or offensive language.

## **STUDENT RESOURCES (COMMUNITY OF CARE)**

As members of the Illinois community, we each have a responsibility to express care and concern for one another. If you come across a classmate whose behavior concerns you, whether in regards to their well-being or yours, we encourage you to refer this behavior to the Student Assistance Center (1-217-333-0050) or online at <https://odos.illinois.edu/community-of-care/referral/>. Based upon your report, staff in the Student Assistance Center reaches out to students to make sure they have the support they need to be healthy and safe. Further, as a Community of Care, we want to support you in your overall wellness. We know that students sometimes face challenges that can impact academic performance (examples include mental health concerns, food insecurity, homelessness, personal emergencies). Should you find that you are managing such a challenge and that it is interfering with your coursework, you are encouraged to contact the Student Assistance Center (SAC) in the Office of the Dean of Students for support and referrals to campus and/or community resources. The SAC has a Dean on Duty available to see students who walk in, call, or email the office during business hours. For mental health emergencies, you can call 911 or contact the Counseling Center.