

Victorian Literature

Professor Jessica Pressman
ECL 510B | Spring 2025

Course Description:

The Victorian Age was a period of great transformation and global impact. Under the long reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901), Great Britain colonized much of the globe, pioneered industrialization, and experienced the effects of urbanization, Darwinism, class and gender conflicts, secularization, etc. This was a time of immense social change and contradiction, and it was captured in the literature and art of the period. In this class, we will explore the Victorian Age by reading works by such writers as Emily Brontë, Thomas Hardy, Christina Rossetti, Lord Alfred Tennyson, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Charles Darwin, H.G. Wells, and others. We will also explore the visual art of the Pre-Raphaelites and William Morris's Arts & Crafts movement in our quest to understand this pivotal and passionate period as well as its impact on our own.

Learning Outcomes

In this class, you will

- **Acquire** understanding of seminal texts and concepts of Victorian literature and culture
- **Gain** familiarity with a pivotal period in literary and cultural history
- **Learn** to close read a literary text for aesthetic and historical components.
- **Situate literature/art** in historical context so as to understand how cultural production constitutes and constructs history and society.
- **Hone** your skills as a critical thinker, listener, and writer by focusing on the development of a thesis statement and the ability to prove it through textual explication

Administrative Information

Class Meetings: T/Th 12:30-1:45 NE 278B	Course Website: https://spring2025-ecl510.jessicapressman.com/
Professor's Office: AL 261 Office hours: Th, 10-11 Additional times and dates by appointment; email me for an additional appointment (in-person or on Zoom) out of the regular office hours timeslot. Zoom meeting room: 943 624 7815 https://SDSU.zoom.us/my/jpressman	Email: jpressman@sdsu.edu <i>*Do not expect a response within 24 hours</i>
English Subject Librarian (for help with research, citations, bibliography, etc.)	Markel Tumlin mtumlin@rohan.sdsu.edu

Special Collections Librarian	Anna Culbertson aculbertson@sdsu.edu
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NOTE: This syllabus is subject to change... and probably will change!

ASSIGNMENTS:

The assignments for this class are low-stakes but plentiful so that you have a chance to practice writing regularly, get feedback on your work, and revise. Revision is an important part of our assignment requirements. All assignments build upon each other, so there is no “busy work”; you can use your blogs posts for the midterm or final, for example.

Participation 20%

Weekly Blog 25%

2 Short Essays 15% each, 30% total

Final Essay Proposal 1%

Final Essay 24%

Extra credit: up to 1%

Participation 20%

This is your class, and your participation is vital to its success. You must attend all class meetings in order to receive full credit for participation. Come to class prepared to discuss the text in depth; this means having read the entire text before class. I expect you to speak and listen.

- Your participation grade includes *engaging in dialogue* in class. This means speaking and listening actively, attentively, and respectfully. (If you have fear of speaking in public, this seminar is a good place to learn to address that fear. Please come see me early in the term to discuss strategies for dealing with this fear).
- Your participation grade includes a meeting with the professor.

Grading Rubric for Classroom Participation

A= attend class regularly, prepared to participate, and participate actively (generously and generatively) in class discussion

B= attend class regularly, prepared to participate

C=attend class regularly

Weekly Blog 25%

You will write (approx. 350-500 words) blog responses to the reading (any text and any idea/section from that text) and each provide a comment on a peer’s blog each week (due before the next week’s class meeting, so before Thursday). The goal of the blog posts is to extend the conversation and coverage of the course by allowing you to 1) express, share, and comment upon

interests, questions, and concerns related to the readings and also to 2) enable the professor to address and incorporate these topics in that week’s meeting. It is also a place to draft ideas and text for use in your essays.

–**Blog posts are due on Monday at 6pm weekly; late posts will not receive credit.**

- A comment on a peer’s blog each week is due before Thursday at 12:30

–You will be given an overall grade for blog posts, based on completion and content, not a grade for each post. Rubric for grading is available on our website and below.

Grading Rubric for Blog

Your Blog Grade is based on 2-parts:

1) a completion grade, and 2) a content grade

<p>The completion component of the blog grade requires you to have the following number of posts:</p>	<p>The content component of the blog grade is based on the following grading rubric</p>
<p>A= 11-13 posts B= 8-10 posts C= 6-7 posts D= 4-5 posts F= 3 or less</p>	<p>A= Post contains a focused thesis or question and close reading of a passage, B= Post contains a close reading of content but no focused question or thesis C= Post contains no analysis of text (no close reading), just summary and undirected ideas D=Post contains little substantive thinking as content</p>

2 Short Close Reading Essays: 15% each (30%)-

These short essays (approx. 1500 words= 3-4 pages) are an opportunity to focus on one passage from a single text or image from our syllabus, to provide an in-depth analysis and to practice close reading/ explication. This essay also intended as a scaffolding assignment, meaning it is there to support you in developing the thinking and writing skills to produce the final essay, to provide a *benchmark* for your writing (and grade). You can revise one of your blog posts or write new content that demonstrates your ability to 1) develop a [thesis](#), and 2) use a text to support, through textual [explication/analysis/close reading](#), your argument. The short essay is an exercise in diving into the formal operations of a text to see HOW it operates and develop an argument about WHY that matters. You will 1) select a single short text or passage of a text, and 2) pursue a focused argument about that passage: what you see in it and why that matters (WHAT, HOW, SO WHAT)

***YOU CAN REVISE these short assignments for a better grade, and you are encouraged to do so. Revision is due before next discovery is due** See the READING SCHEDULE for revision deadline.*

Final Project

Final Project Proposal 1%

This assignment helps ensure that you are on the right track for your final essay and enables me to give you feedback that can assist in your development. You will write a 150 word abstract of

your final project **explaining your argument, purpose, and proposed media format**. The abstract should contain a thesis statement, brief explanation of your purpose, and a description of the project (including proposed media format and rationale for that design).

Final Project (6-8 pages/1500-2000 words): 24%

The goal of this final project is to present the culmination of your learning by way of sharing your takeaway and passion from the class: what most interested and inspired you? You can write a critical essay that builds upon your previous writing for this class or produce a **creative-critical project** (webart, video, music, hypertext, etc), **but whatever format your project takes, it MUST contain the following:**

1. a thesis statement
2. close-reading explication of the primary text
3. engagement with (not just citation of) at least 2 secondary sources (they can be from our “suggested/additional reading” list)

If you make a creative artwork, you must include a short essay 3-4 pages (750-1000 words) that explains and close reads your work *in the context of the course* **and** includes the above listed elements: thesis, close reading (of your work), and framing of the work in the context of the course with secondary readings.

****For examples, see our website****

Grading Rubric for essays (similar to blog posts)

A= Essay contains a strong, focused thesis and close reading that supports it in a lucid, compelling manner

B= Essay contains a thesis and some close reading, demonstrating understanding and insight

C= Essay contains little analysis of the text (close reading) and/or lacks a coherent thesis, contains mostly summary, generalizations, and unconnected ideas

D=Essay contains little substantive thinking

Extra Credit: up to 1%

I offer extra credit throughout the term for attending events related to our learning. To receive credit, you need to attend the event AND write a short blog post about what you learned.

NOTE: *Late essays are docked 1/3 of a grade for each day late*****

REQUIRED READING

****NOTE: I prefer books in the class rather than computers or e-readers****

Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) [Oxford]

HG Wells, *Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896) [Broadview]

Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) [Oxford]

Suggested, but not required, Additional Textbooks:

The Broadview Anthology of British Literature, Volume 5: The Victorian Era – Third Edition

READING SCHEDULE

****NOTE: Schedule might change****

Week 1: introductions

January 21: intro to the class

January 23: intro to the class and each other

“Introduction: The Victorian Age” in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* (979-999)

Week 2: Victorian Contexts & Concepts

January 28: Lord Alfred Tennyson, [“The Lady of Shalott”](#); View paintings by [John Millais](#) (1888), [John William Waterhouse](#) (1888), his [1894 version](#), and his [1915 version](#); [William Holman Hunt](#) (1886)

January 30: excerpt from John Ruskin’s [Of Queens’ Gardens](#) (1864) (para. 68-70), *The Stones of Venice*, “The Nature of the Gothic” (1851-4)

-View William Morris art and design

Week 3: The Pre-Raphaelites

February 4: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, [“Jenny”](#) (1870); view Rossetti’s painting *Found* (1854-5)

-View [Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s paintings](#), especially [“The Blessed Damozel,”](#) [“Lady Lilith”](#),

February 6: Christina Rossetti: [“In an Artist’s Studio”](#), [“De Profundis”](#) and [“After Death”](#)

View [Julia Margaret Cameron’s photographs](#)

Week 4: *Wuthering Heights*

February 11: Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847), volume I

****Extra Credit: 2/11 at 4pm- Joanna Brooks talk in DH Center****

February 13: Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847), volume II – ch. I-IV

Week 5: Gothic Nature

February 18: Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847), volume II – ch. V-end

February 20 : Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847), discussion of the whole novel

Additional: Pressman on [Wuthering Heights and Quarantine “Brontë’s Cabin Fever”](#) at *Avidly* (May 2020)

Week 6: Archives & Artifacts

February 25: Special Collections visit with Anna Culbertson (Professor away)

February 27: Explore Victorian archives online

****Essay 1 Due Sunday, 3/2 at midnight, posted to the blog****

Week 7: Industrialization, Class & Labor

March 4: excerpt from Friedrich Engels, *The Great Towns: The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* (1845) <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/condition-working-class/ch04.htm>

March 6: excerpt from Friedrich Engels, *The Great Towns: The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* (1845)

-View [“Black Britons of Victorian Era”](#)

Week 8: The Sensation Novel

March 11: Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862), vol. I

March 13: Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862), vol. II, ch. I-V

****Extra credit event: attend any part of the March 13: Networked Narratives conference in the DH Center ****

Week 9: The Detective Novel

March 18: Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862), vol. II, ch. VI- end, vol. III, ch. I

March 20: Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862), vol. III-end, whole novel

****Revisions to Essay 1 Due Sunday 3/23 at midnight, email the professor ***

Week 10: Science & Evolution

****Extra Credit: Monday, March 24--N. Katherine Hayles and Rita Raley talk in DH Center, 4:30pm****

March 25: excerpt from Charles Darwin, [The Origin of the Species](#) (1859)

March 27: excerpt from Charles Darwin, [The Descent of Man](#) (1871)

****SPRING BREAK****

Week 11: Science & Science Fiction

April 8: H.G. Wells, *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896), intro- ch. 6

April 10: H.G. Wells, *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896), ch.7-11

****Essay 2 Due: Sunday at midnight, posted to the blog ****

Week 12: Species & Speculation

April 15: H.G. Wells, *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896), ch. 12-18

April 17: H.G. Wells, *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896), ch. 19-end

Week 13: Aestheticism

April 22: Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), preface, ch. 1-5

April 24: Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), ch. 6-10

****Revisions to Essay 2 Due: Sunday at midnight, email professor ****

Final Project Proposal Due

Week 14: The Wilde 90s

April 29: Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), ch. 11-15

May 1: Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), ch. 16-end

Week 15: Conclusion

May 6: Workshopping final projects

May 8: Concluding discussion

****May 9: DH Showcase= extra credit for attendance****

****Final Project Due, Wednesday, May 14 at midnight, posted to blog****

OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Communication

Students are provided with an SDSU Gmail account, and this SDSU email address will be used for all communications. University Senate policy notes that students are responsible for checking their official university email once per day during the academic term. For more information, please see Student Official Email Address Use Policy here.

Medical-related absences

University policy instructs students to contact their professor/instructor/coach in the event they need to miss class due to an illness, injury, or emergency. Please inform me as soon as possible if you are missing class due to an illness or a Covid-related situation.

Finding Help on Campus

Need help finding an advisor, tutor, counselor, or require emergency economic assistance? The SDSU Student Success Help Desk is here for you. Student assistants are available via Zoom Monday through Friday, 9:00 AM to 4:30 PM to help you find the office or service that can best assist with your particular questions or concerns.

Other important resources:

- CAL Student Success Center: <https://cal.sdsu.edu/student-resources/student-success>
- College of Education Student Success Center: <https://education.sdsu.edu/oss>
- Center for Student Success in Engineering: <https://csse.sdsu.edu/>
- CoS Student Success Center: <https://cossuccess.sdsu.edu/>
- FSB Student Success Center: <https://business.sdsu.edu/undergrad/advising>
- HHS Advisors: <https://chhs.sdsu.edu/student-resources/advising/>
- IVC Student Success and Retention: https://ivcampus.sdsu.edu/student_affairs/retention
- PSFA Advisors: https://psfa.sdsu.edu/resources/student_advisors

Accommodations

SDSU via the Student Ability Success Center (SASC) provides accommodations for students with documented disabilities or medical conditions covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). In keeping with current public health guidance, I cannot provide arrangements to students without an ADA-qualified disability or medical condition.

If you are a student with a disability and are in need of accommodations for this class, please contact the Student Ability Success Center at sascinfo@sdsu.edu (or go to sdsu.edu/sasc) as soon

as possible. Please know accommodations are not retroactive, and I cannot provide accommodations based upon disability until I have received an accommodation letter from the Student Ability Success Center. SASC registration and accommodation approvals may take up to 10-14 business days, so please plan accordingly.

SDSU as “safe space”

The CSU has affirmed its commitment to ‘protecting access, affordability, intellectual freedom, inclusivity, and diversity for all students . . . including supporting DACA students.’ Discrimination, harassment, or retaliation against students, faculty, and staff on the basis of race, religion, gender, sexuality, disability, nationality, immigration status and other categories of identity is prohibited. If you have concerns about your status at the university, please visit <http://studentaffairs.sdsu.edu/EOP/> for information or contact the Dean of Students or the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs in your College.”

Academic Honesty (especially in the age of AI & Chat GBT)

I take teaching seriously, and I expect you to take seriously your work as a student. That means that academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Academic dishonest includes, but is not limited to: (a) using assignments that you wrote for another class, (b) representing work done by someone else as your own (i.e., plagiarism), and (c) copying someone else’s work on an assignment, basic cheating. Plagiarism and Cheating of any kind will result at least in an "F" for that assignment (and may, depending on the severity of the case, lead to an "F" for the entire course) and may be referred to the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities for further action. If you have questions at all, you should consult me immediately.