



*Victorian Studies:*

the culture of the  
review

English 40

Monday 1:15-4

taught by Professor Rachel Buurma

# *Victorian Studies:* the culture of the review

English 040 • Fall 2009 • M 1:15-4 • LPAC 301

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Office hours: M 12-1, W 12-2 and by appointment

This course offers a wide-ranging introduction to Victorian literature and culture through a focus on the review, a genre the Victorians both raised to an art form and used as a weapon in fighting the pettiest of personal battles. Often vilified as vampires who sucked their living out of other writers' works, reviewers nonetheless occupied – perhaps to us surprisingly – a central and defining role in Victorian culture. First locating ourselves by taking a quick look at our current 21<sup>st</sup>-century ideas about book, music, and movie reviewing, we will move on to examine some of the most important – and most reviewed – works of Victorian literature in their cultural contexts. We will spend time looking closely at the discourses which surrounded literary criticism and reviewing in the nineteenth century, discussing questions of puffing (the practice of "artificially inflating" a book through influencing its reviews), the anonymity of reviewers, and self-reviewing in order to explore larger questions about race and empire, gender and sexuality, ideas of investment and objectivity, genre, narrative voice, critical distance and engagement, authorship and intentionality, individuality, questions of personality and character, and theories of reading, writing, and reception. We will read as many American as British reviews of these texts, using them on one hand to help ourselves imagine a nineteenth-century literary culture that was truly transatlantic and to think, on the other hand, about ways in which American and British writers defined and distinguished themselves in specifically national terms. At the same time, we will read some representative literary critical essays written in the last forty years in order to briefly familiarize ourselves with new historicist, psychoanalytic, feminist, marxist, and other more mixed recent critical approaches to these texts. Comparing these current literary critical approaches to Victorian literature to the ways the Victorians themselves approached the interpretation and judgment of literature, we will ask what has changed what has remained the same about approaches to literature since the nineteenth century.

## **Week I**

January 19

### **Reviewing from *Fraser's Monthly Magazine* to *Television without Pity***

Welcome and Introduction

Season 2, episode 14 of "Gossip Girls"

Three reviews of GG from *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, and *Television without Pity*

*Jane Eyre*, p. 5-32

blog post #1: review of a review (your choice) due by Saturday midnight

## **Week II**

January 26

### **Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (1847)**

*Jane Eyre*, through page 226 (chapter 18)

Gilbert and Gubar, from *The Madwoman in the Attic*

reviews: *The Critic*, *Graham's Magazine*, *Fraser's Monthly Magazine* (by George

Henry Lewes), *The Spectator* (by Elizabeth Rigby), *The North American Review*, *Peterson's Ladies' National Magazine*, *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, *The Harbinger*

blog post #2: close reading of a JA passage due as usual by Saturday midnight

## **Week III**

February 2

### **Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (1847)**

*Jane Eyre*, finish

Elaine Freedgood, from *The Ideas in Things*

blog post #3: brief summary of Gilbert and Gubar OR Freedgood article

**paper assigned**

- Week IV**  
February 9
- Tennyson, *The Lady of Shalott* (1832) and *In Memoriam A.H.H.* (1850)**  
*The Lady of Shalott* (br)  
 from John Stuart Mill's review of Tennyson's *Poems*  
*In Memoriam A.H.H.* (br)  
 reviews: *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, *Fraser's Monthly Magazine*, *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, *The Examiner*, *Brownson's Quarterly Review*, *The Southern Literary Messenger*
- Week V**  
February 16
- Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh* (1857)**  
*Aurora Leigh*, first, second, and fifth books (br)  
 reviews: *Blackwood's* [W.E. Aytoun], *Athenaeum* [H.F. Chorley], *Westminster*, October 1857 [George Eliot], *Westminster*, October 1857 [John Nichol], *Saturday Review*, *Note and Queries*, *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, *The Spectator*, *The Southern Literary Messenger*, *Lady's Home Magazine*  
 Gilbert and Gubar, from *The Madwoman in the Attic*  
 Helen Vendler, "Feminism and Literature"  
 Responses by Gilbert and Gubar  
 blog post #4: tba
- Week VI**  
February 26
- Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* (1859)**  
 from *On the Origin of Species*  
 Thomas Henry Huxley's reviews of *Origin* (Broadview edition appendix B.6.),  
 four other reviews of your choice (bring copies to class)  
 Gillian Beer, from *Darwin's Plots*  
 blog post #5: tba
- Week VII**  
March 2
- Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (1860)**  
*The Mill on the Floss*, 53-270  
 reviews: *Atlantic Monthly*, *Blackwood's*, *London Review*, *Saturday Review*,  
*Macmillan's*, *Dublin University Magazine*, *Idler*, *The Dial*, *Arthur's Home Magazine*  
 Dorrit Cohn, from *Transparent Minds*  
 Nina Baym, from *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers*  
**Paper due**
- Week VIII**  
March 9
- Spring Break (finish reading *The Mill on the Floss*, 273-657)**  
 spring break
- Week IX**  
March 16
- The Mill on the Floss* (1860)**  
*The Mill on the Floss*, 273-657  
 George Eliot, "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists"  
 Mary Poovey, "Writing about Finance in Victorian England"  
 blog post #6: tba
- Week X**  
March 23
- John Stuart Mill, "On Liberty" (1859)**  
 "On Liberty"  
 reviews: *Atheneum*, *Saturday Review*, *The Rambler* (Thomas Arnold, Jr.), *British Quarterly Review*, *Bentley's Quarterly Review* (R.W. Church), "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" (James Fitzjames Stephen), *Fortnightly Review* (John Morley), *Revue des Deux Mondes* (Charles de Rémusat), *Southern Review* (A.T. Bledsoe)  
 blog post #7: tba
- Week XI**  
March 30
- Rossetti, "Goblin Market" (1862) and Meredith, "Modern Love" (1862)**  
 "Goblin Market" (br) and reviews  
 "Modern Love" (br) and reviews

Tucker, "Rosetti's Goblin Marketing"  
blog post #8:tba

**Week XII**

April 6

**Arnold, poetry and criticism**

"Dover Beach" (1867) (br) and "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" (1864) (br)  
from *Culture and Anarchy* (1869)

"Dover Bitch"

Amanda Anderson, from *The Powers of Distance*

**Week XIII**

April 13

**Browning, poems (1836-1864)**

"My Last Duchess," "Porphyria's Lover," "The Laboratory," "How it Strikes a  
Contemporary," "Caliban Upon Setebos" (br)

Walter Bagehot, "Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning" and other reviews  
Yopie Prins, "Voice Inverse"

blog post #9 : tba

**Week XIV**

April 20

**Pater, from *The Renaissance* (1873)**

Pater, "Preface" to *The Renaissance* (br)

reviews: *The Fortnightly Review*, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, *The London  
Quarterly Review*, *The Nation*, *The North American Review*, *The Atlantic Monthly*  
James, "The Figure in the Carpet," "The Death of the Lion"

**Week XV**

April 27

**Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890-1891)**

*The Picture of Dorian Gray*, all

"The Critic as Artist," (br) "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," and reviews: *The New York Times*,  
*The Pall Mall Gazette*, *St. James Gazette*, the *Daily Chronicle*, the *Scots Observer*, *The Bookman* [Walter  
Pater], Wilde's responses (Broadview edition and reader)  
conclusions

**Final exam date TBA**

## Assignments

### Blog and reviewing

<http://swarthmorevictorianstudiesblog.blogspot.com/>

We will write several short blog posts over the course of the semester; about half of them will respond to the course readings (in the form of close readings, article summaries, etc), and the other half will constitute our own experiments in reviewing. While some of these reviews will not be on Victorian topics, nevertheless the reviews are designed to give you an opportunity put to use the insights about reviewing and writing which we will arrive at via our study of Victorian literature and review culture. Your reviews need not be long (400-500 words is fine), but they must display a strong, focused perspective on the work under review and a distinctive "voice" or "tone." They must, in addition, be clearly distinguishable from the kind of literary analysis you usually do in an English class (and will be doing in the paper for this class). In order to complete these assignments, you need to look back at the reviews we have read, both contemporary and Victorian, and ask yourself the following questions: How would I describe this reviewer's "voice"? What is her attitude towards her subject? How much description does he engage in, as opposed to judgment or analysis? How does analysis in a review look? How does aesthetic or moral judgment look, and how is it communicated? Is the reviewer's attitude (positive, negative, or neutral) toward her subject communicated implicitly or explicitly? Through direct address of the reader, through word choice and sentence structure, or through pointed omissions? Once you have considered these kinds of questions (and any of your own you would like to add), you will be able to make conscious choices about your own reviewerly approach.

Please post your review to our class blog by **midnight Saturday** the week assigned. (For example, blog post #1, a review of a review, appears on January 19<sup>th</sup> on the syllabus and is thus due by midnight on January 24<sup>th</sup>.)

### **Class Format**

Format will vary, but in general we'll begin class with me giving you some background on the week's materials and highlighting key issues that we may wish to discuss further. We'll then move into a close reading mode – sometimes as a class, sometimes in workshop groups – until our break. After break we'll return via reviews we've read and will try to piece broader conclusions.

### **Short paper**

This is a 5-6 page paper, due to Blackboard by midnight of February 23rd. We will discuss specifics further in class.

### **Final exam**

This is a cumulative exam covering the entire semester's worth of reading; we will discuss specifics further in class.

## **Policies and Advice**

### **Grading**

20% class participation (includes quizzes)  
25% percent 5-6 page paper  
25% blog  
30% final exam

### **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is a very serious offence. It includes both the direct copying of the words of another person without crediting him or her and paraphrasing the ideas of another person without giving credit. If you have any questions about how to properly cite another person's work, please do not hesitate to ask me.

### **Attendance and due dates**

Because this is a discussion-oriented class, attendance is essential. Missing more than one class session will result in a lowered grade unless you have a valid excuse processed through the advising system. Late papers will not be accepted without a similarly valid excuse UNLESS you have contacted me 48 hours before the paper's due date and received an extension.

### **Books**

The main books you will need to buy are:

*Broadview Anthology of Victorian Poetry and Poetic Theory*, Concise Edition. 155111366X

Mill, John Stuart. *On Liberty*. Broadview. 1551111993

Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Broadview Press. 1551111268

Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre*. Penguin. 0142437204

Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* Broadview Press. 1551113376

George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*. Penguin. 0141439629

All other texts available on Blackboard.

The books are available at the bookstore. You are also welcome to buy the books online or at a different store. Be aware that you need to have your own copy of the **specific edition** of each of the books listed above. All other texts will be available on Blackboard. Please print out, read, mark up, and bring to class ALL of the texts assigned for each week.