

English 351, Spring 1999
TTH Palmer 208
Off. Hrs. MW 3-4, TH 2-3

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Victorian Poetry and Prose

Every period in European history or the history of the Americas can be said in some way to be a direct ancestor of our own. But while every period can make some claim of this kind, the nineteenth century can in a more powerful and far-reaching way be seen as the creator of the present. The pervasive influence of the industrial system of production and relatively rapid global transport, the economy of commodities and consumers it created, the instability of social systems based on such an economy – all these elements of life in the 1990s were new in the period 1837-1901, Victoria's reign and the period we consider in this course.

In response to and alongside huge changes in the shape of human life, nineteenth century people invented ways of coping, ways of thinking about themselves and other people in world, that helped things make a tiny bit of sense. These strategies for coping with modernity (a good word for summing up the weirdness of what was new in the nineteenth century) include a different sense of "the self," of human subjectivity; a changing set of ideas about gender and sexuality; a set of positions – for and against – the new industrial economy; a set of positions about global relations, about England's "identity" as a nation and the meaning of its conquest of a worldwide chain of colonies. These concepts and strategies, in many ways, still form the foundation of the dominant cultures in Europe and the U.S. I don't mean that everyone believes now the same things people believed 150 years ago. There's rarely any one unified "Victorian" belief on a given issue anyway. Rather, we inherited assumptions, concepts, norms, which are the tools of contemporary action and analysis.

Concepts and strategies like these aren't created overnight; they emerge with a kind of geologic slowness, layer on layer, out of all manner of cultural discourse: journalism, professional and academic writing, political reportage, and literature. To highlight particularly sensitive ideas in British cultures in this era, I've grouped prose texts into four clusters, each considering a particular topic. Around these clusters, we will survey the work of 6 poets. Not every issue in the prose clusters will illuminate every poem we read, but the context of these prose readings will help us see how poems speak to, respond to, create, or theorize common, everyday questions in different form.

Course Texts:

William E. Buckler, ed. - *The Major Victorian Poets: Tennyson, Browning, Arnold*

John Stuart Mill - *Autobiography*

A rather large course reader, available at the bookstore

Course Requirements:

Readings: To prepare readings for class, whether prose selections or poetry, make some note of passages or ideas or formal features that you're interested in or have questions about. It's your responsibility to raise questions you're interested in, and to direct our discussion to issues you feel are important.

Papers: All written work must be typed or printed, double-spaced with standard margins, and carefully proofread. I will provide a range of topics for papers, but I will encourage you to write about the ideas that you care most about, if necessary at the expense of my suggested topics.

When grading your essays, I will be looking at a number of things. Most centrally, I will be concerned with your ability to provide detailed and thoughtful "close readings" of quoted passages--both long and short--from the texts you're writing about. If the concept of "close reading" is unfamiliar to you, don't worry; we'll spend a good deal of time on this in class. Secondly, I'll want to see that you can link a number of individual quoted passages together, using your readings as evidence to support a single overall argument. As I move between individual points in your essay, I will want to see that you've provided connections between each piece of quoted evidence as you proceed, and helped your reader keep an eye all the time on your overall argument. These are very general guidelines; if you have specific questions I urge you to raise them in class or in office hours. Although I have required only a minimal rough draft for the first major paper, I encourage you to bring rough drafts to office hours if that would be useful for you.

Presentations: I'll be asking each of you to choose one assigned or optional reading and make a short presentation on it in class. The goal of your presentation should be to focus us on what, in your reading of the text, are its most important features and ideas, and to make connections -- if you see any -- to other texts we've read, but you can do this by raising questions, or by asking the rest of us to react or respond to your sense of a given passage. You should think of yourself as opening a conversation, rather than delivering a lecture. The most effective presentations can often start with something like, "I'm really confused about this thing, but here's my reaction to it right now . . . what did everyone else think?"

Grades will be figured as follows:

Essay I	10%
Essay II	30%
Essay III	50%
Presentations and contributions in class	10%

Absences: You may miss up to 3 classes without excuse or penalty. More than three absences will be grounds for failing the course.

Final Note: I reserve the right to schedule a final exam for this course if it seems like people aren't doing the reading.

Schedule of Assignments*

Cluster I: The Romantic Artist and the Concept of the Individual

1/14 Wordsworth (handout)

1/19 Williams (R) *Culture and Society* ch. II, "The Romantic Artist," (30-48)
 Carlyle (R) *Sartor Resartus*, Book First (33-97)

1/21 " (R) *Sartor Resartus*, Book Second, chs. 7-9, (159-188)
 " (R) "Signs of the Times" (1-29)

optional: Williams (R), *Culture and Society* ch. IV, "Thomas Carlyle" (71-86)

1/26 Mill *Autobiography*, 3-131

1/28 " (R) "Bentham" and "Coleridge"

optional: Williams (R), *Culture & S.*, ch. II, "Mill on Bentham and Coleridge" (49-70)

2/2 Tennyson "Ode to Memory," "Mariana," "Lady of Shallot"

2/4 " "Ulysses," "Morte D'Arthur," "Locksley Hall"

Friday 2/12: Essay I - close reading/explication of one short passage from Tennyson, 1 page

2/9 " Begin *In Memoriam*

2/11 " Finish *In Memoriam*

2/16 Elizabeth Barrett Browning (R) All but *Aurora Leigh* selections

2/18 " (R) *Aurora Leigh* selections

Due in Class: 1 page rough draft of Essay II

Cluster II: Domesticity and "The Woman Question"

2/23 Nightingale (R) "Cassandra" (1583-1600)

Armstrong (R) "The Rise of the Domestic Woman" (59-95)

2/25 Mill (and Mill) (R) "On the Subjection of Woman" (125-156)

optional: Cobbe (R), "What Shall we Do with our Old Maids" (235-262)

Friday 2/26: Essay II - 2000 words on a choice of topics

Cluster III: The Critique of Industrial Capitalism

3/2 Ruskin (R) "Unto This Last" (161-189)

" (R) "The Nature of Gothic" (73-109)

3/4 Marx (R) "On the Jewish Question, by Bruno Bauer" part 1 (39-57)

" (R) "The Fetishism of Commodities" from *Capital I* (435-443)

optional: Marx (R), from *German Ideology* (159-191)

3/9 & 3/11 - spring break; breathe deeply.

3/16 C. Rosetti (R) everything up to "Goblin Market"

3/18 " " (R) "Goblin Market" and all that follow

* Expect some changes and some rearranging.

- 3/23 R. Browning "My Last Duchess," Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister,"
 "The Englishman in Italy," "Home Thoughts, from Abroad"
- 3/25 " " "Fra Lippo Lippi," "Bishop Bloughram's Apology," "Andrea Del Sarto"
- 3/30 " " "Count Guido Franceschini"
- 4/1 NO CLASS - Easter Break
- 4/6 Arnold "The Forsaken Merman," The Scholar Gypsy," "Dover Beach"
- 4/8 " "Empedocles on Etna"

Cluster IV: "Culture", Nation, and Empire

- 4/13 Arnold (R - in the reader) "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" (258-285)
 Eliot (Marianne Evans) (R) "The Natural History of German Life" (167-205)
- 4/15 Arnold (R) from "On the Study of Celtic Literature" (291-351)
 Fanon (R) from *The Wretched of the Earth*, ch. 1 "Concerning Violence," (29-43)
- 4/20 Bodington (R) "Importance of Race and its Bearing on the Negro Qtn." (507-522)
 Carlyle (R) "Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question" (348-383)
- 4/22 Yeats (handout)
- 4/27 Pater (R) Begin selection from *The Renaissance*
- 4/29 " (R) Finish selection from *The Renaissance*

Tuesday May 4: Essay III - 2000-3000 words. Due at my office by 5:00 PM.

