English 542—The Victorian Novel

Instructor: Scott Banville

In this course, we will explore the development of what is commonly assumed to be a monolithic form, the Victorian novel. Far from being a stable form, the Victorian novel evolved throughout the period. We will read examples of early-, mid-, and late-Victorian novels and consider how the novel responds to and reflects broader literary movements as well as the dramatic cultural, economic, and political transformations that took place throughout the Victorian period. We will pay particular attention to how the modes of dissemination reflect and drive innovations in the form and subject matter of the novel. To these ends we will read a representative sample of Victorian novels—three volume novels, social problem novels, sensation novels, single-volume novels, etc.—in order to more fully understand the diversity of subject, genre, and form present in the Victorian novel. In addition to reading the novels, we will read what the Victorians wrote about the novel and what modern critics and scholars have to say about the Victorian novel.

Through class discussions and writing assignments students will learn to write and speak with clarity and precision, to read and listen critically and with comprehension, and to engage in careful logical thinking and critical analysis.

Texts:

- Sketches by Boz—Charles Dickens (selections)
- Hard Times—Charles Dickens—Longman Cultural Edition
- Jane Eyre—Charlotte Brontë—Broadview Edition
- Lady Audley's Secret—Mary Elizabeth Braddon—Broadview Edition
- The Romance of a Shop—Amy Levy—Broadview Edition
- Online Readings/Course Pack

Assignments:

**Online Reading Responses:** For each class period listed on the syllabus, you will write a brief (200-250 words) response to the reading assigned for that day and post it to the Online Reading Response section of WebCT. These need to be posted before class. Writing about literature is one of the best ways to know what one thinks about it. These responses will give you a chance to work out in your own mind prior to class what you think and feel about the poems, short stories, novels, and other texts we’ll be reading throughout the quarter. Thus, you should come to class prepared to share your thoughts and feelings with the class. On occasion, I will post a prompt for each day’s response. Beyond giving our online discussion some focus, these prompts will also help guide you through the readings by giving you cues on what might be important or significant in the text at hand. You are, of course, welcomed to post responses that are not generated by the prompt, but I’ll provide them in case anyone is feeling a bit hesitant or unsure about their abilities to write about poetry, novels, etc. These responses will also give you some practice in writing about literature, a skill you will need to deploy for the exams and the formal essay assignment. Further, since you’ll have access to the responses of your fellow classmates, you’ll be able to better understand the texts by being exposed to different interpretations and reactions. To this end, you will be responsible for reading and responding to at least three (3) of
your peers’ postings over the course of the term. These responses to responses need only be 100 to 150 words and should consist or more than “I agree” type statements. These responses should be done within a week of the original posting.

Online Reading Responses are to be posted on the day due and before the start of class. Online Reading Responses not posted by the start of class are considered not done and are not eligible to be “made up”—if they are not posted by the start of class consider them missed. You may miss up to TWO Online Reading Responses without negatively effecting your grade.

In a nutshell, you must post a response for each day listed on the syllabus and throughout the quarter you must respond to at least three (3) of your peers’ responses by posting to the Online Reading Responses section of WebCT.

**Mid-term Exam:** This exam will be taken in class and will cover all of the material covered up until that point, i.e., all readings and topics covered in class. N.B., it is likely we will not discuss all of the readings in class or discuss them in depth, but you are still responsible for the material. The exam will consist of passage identification, passage identification with significance, short answer questions, and a brief essay question. In the essay and short answer questions, you will be asked to apply the analytical and interpretive skills we’ll be developing over the course of the quarter. Thus, there may very well be questions asking you to discuss a text or work that we have not spent considerable time talking about in class—though we would have spent considerable time discussing a similar type of text.

**Annotated Bibliography:**
You will compile an annotated bibliography based on one of the novels or authors we are reading this quarter. The bibliography will consist of eight (8) citations of scholarly articles or book chapters and a brief annotation of each. The bibliography and annotations will adhere to MLA style. You may want to organize your bibliography around a particular theme or sub-themes, i.e., representations of education in *Hard Times* or “the Condition of England” and *Hard Times*. You may want to expand or build upon your annotated bibliography for the Formal Essay assignment.

The Annotated Bibliography will acquaint you with the various research databases and resources available via the library. The assignment will also help you learn how to evaluate the scholarly work of others and how to incorporate the work of others into your own writing. Since the goal of this assignment is to increase your familiarity with the databases and resources available via the library, you should not use any Internet sources, i.e., those you have located with Google or other Internet search engines. Further, you may choose to use the research.

**Formal Essay:** You will write a five (5) to six (6) page essay about some text, topic, or group of texts that we have or will have read. Again, one of the best ways to know what we think and feel about literature is to write about it. This essay should provide a close reading of a particular text, topic, or group of texts. While I will provide you with some suggestions for topics, you are encouraged and invited to write on a topic of your own choosing provided you discuss it with me in advance (this doesn’t mean you email me the night before the paper is due). In any event, I am willing and more than happy to discuss any aspect of the assignment, including looking at drafts, with you during my office hours, after class, or via email. The Writing Center also offers in-
person and on-line writing assistance. More information about this assignment will be forthcoming.

**Final Exam:** The final exam will be *cumulative*, though it will focus more heavily on the second half of the quarter. You should be prepared to make connections among the various chronological periods (think compare and contrast) and or notice how one period is reacting to or building upon the others (how they may deal with similar issues in different ways or how they may have different concerns altogether). Structurally the final exam will be similar to that of the Mid-term Exam.
**Daily Schedule**

**Week One**

**Monday**  
Introduction to the Course.

**Wednesday—The Narrative Sketch**  
Read “Shops and their Tenants,” “London Recreations,” “Private Theatres,” “Gin-Shops,” “Shabby-Genteel People,” and “The Pantomime of Life” in *Sketches by Boz*—Charles Dickens  
Write a Reading Response and post it online

**Week Two**

**Monday**  
Read “Sketches of Young Gentlemen” including the “Conclusion” in *Sketches by Boz*—Charles Dickens  
Read “Character: The True Gentleman” from *Self-Help*—Samuel Smiles  
Write a Reading Response and post it online

**Wednesday—The Industrial Novel and Social Problem Novel**  
Read *Hard Times*—Charles Dickens  
Read from *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*—Jeremy Bentham

**Week Three**

**Monday**  
Read *Hard Times*—Charles Dickens  
Read “Captains of Industry”—Thomas Carlyle and from *The Realistic Imagination*—George Levine  
Write a Reading Response and post it online

**Wednesday**  
Read *Hard Times*—Charles Dickens  
“A Note on *Hard Times*”—John Ruskin, “Review”—Edwin P. Ripple, and Read “Review”—Margaret Oliphant  
Write a Reading Response and post it online

**Week Four—The Bildungsroman, The Role of Women, and Empire**

**Monday**  
Read *Jane Eyre*—Charlotte Brontë  
Read *The Daughters of England*—Sarah Stickney Ellis and from *Desire and Domestic Fiction*—Nancy Armstrong

**Wednesday**  
Read *Jane Eyre*—Charlotte Brontë  
Read “On the Social Position of Governesses”—Sarah Lewis  
Write a Reading Response and post it online
Week Five
Monday
Read Jane Eyre—Charlotte Brontë
Annotated Bibliography Due

Wednesday
Read Jane Eyre—Charlotte Brontë
Read “Statement of the Jamaica Committee”—John Stuart Mill, "The Outbreak in Jamaica,” and “Editorial”
Write a Reading Response and post it online

Week Six
Monday
Read Jane Eyre—Charlotte Brontë
Read from The Novel and the Police—D.A. Miller

Wednesday—The Sensation Novel
Mid-term

Week Seven
Monday
Read Lady Audley’s Secret—Mary Elizabeth Braddon

Wednesday
Read Lady Audley’s Secret—Mary Elizabeth Braddon
Read “Our Female Sensation Novelists” and “Sensation Novels”—H. L. Mansel
Write a Reading Response and post it online

Week Eight
Monday
Read Lady Audley’s Secret—Mary Elizabeth Braddon
Read “Our Survey of Literature and Science”
Write a Reading Response and post it online

Wednesday
Read Lady Audley’s Secret—Mary Elizabeth Braddon
Write a Reading Response and post it online

Week Nine
Monday
Read Lady Audley’s Secret—Mary Elizabeth Braddon

Wednesday—The New Woman and the Single-Volume Novel
Read The Romance of a Shop—Amy Levy
Read “The Girl of the Future”—Grant Allen and from New Women, New Novels—Ann Ardis
Write a Reading Response and post it online

**Week Ten**
**Monday**
Read *The Romance of a Shop*—Amy Levy
Read “The New Aspect of the New Woman Question”—Sarah Grand and “The New Woman”—Ouida
Write a Reading Response and post it online

**Wednesday**
Read *The Romance of a Shop*—Amy Levy
Read “New Novels”—George Saintsbury and “Why Women Are Ceasing to Marry”—Ella Hepworth Dixon
Formal Essay Due.

**Exam Week.**