

EL 405.01: Victorian Poetry and Prose

Fall 2023

Boğaziçi University

Instructor: Melih Levi

E-mail: melih.levi@boun.edu.tr

Schedule: Wednesdays 15:00-15:50 [[TB310](#)], Fridays 15:00-16:50 [[NH102](#)]

Office Hours: TBA

This course moves through the literature of the Victorian Age in a chronological manner, starting with Alfred Lord Tennyson's *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* (1830) and ending with late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Thomas Hardy. My hope is that a chronological movement through the period will give you a stronger sense of the changes in literary style and debates on aesthetics. The Victorian Era was a time of profound transformations in social and cultural life in England: Rapid rises in industrialism and urbanization, numerous scientific developments, colonial expansion, imperialism, increasing gap between the social classes, labor movements, changing gender norms, and widely different conceptions about the role of aesthetics. These issues will consistently inform our discussions of the literary texts.

The Victorian Age is an excellent one to think about this relationship between “**literary forms**” and “**social formations**” as the English society and culture went through extensive transformations in this period. We will study changes in social formations (family, gender, class, politics) alongside changes in literary form. Particularly, our focus will be on the journey of the **sonnet** throughout the long nineteenth century. Why did so many Victorian poets turn to this form? What did they find in it? What did they do with it? How did they change or modernize it? How can we relate those changes in literary form to changes in social consciousness and conventions?

As we move through the Victorian Period, the following questions will keep us busy:

- What distinguishes the Victorians from the Romantics? How do the Victorians think about and dramatize *voice* in poetry and fiction?
- How do authors try to bridge the gap between poetry and fiction? How do poets add dramatic elements and a stronger narrative impulse to their works?
- How do social issues like class and gender make their way into the literary domain?
- What kind of role do artists and critics envision art as having in social life?
- How did domestic space and family life work in Victorian life? What roles were men, women, and children expected to fulfill? How did writers affirm or subvert those roles? How did the harsh matrimonial laws affect marriages and romantic partnerships?

I will assume that you are familiar with the historical backdrop, so please inform yourself about the period before the semester begins as well as during the semester. Five articles about historical periods in the Victorian Era (Longman's general introduction, 1832, 1851, 1870 1897) are available on Moodle. **Do read the Longman Introduction.** The rest is optional, though I strongly recommend that you read them as we move along to refresh your grasp of historical context.

Our **50-min Wednesday classes** will be devoted to an introductory discussion of the primary reading. Our **2-hr Friday classes** will be a more in-depth discussion complemented with references to supplementary readings that shed light on the historical period.

Course Policies:

- Your regular **attendance** and **participation** are expected. Skipping classes will obviously lower your contribution score.
- You have to **read** assigned **primary texts** carefully and digest them **before coming to class**. For longer works like sonnet sequences, I have provided the whole but also indicated the specific parts I want you to read carefully. The supporting texts are only mandatory for the specific week you are asked to write a response, though you are clearly encouraged to read them for a more complete intellectual appreciation of literature and the historical period.
- There will be three types of written assessment: An early midterm, a pre-class close reading response paper, and two reflective essays.
- Please submit your work on time.
- Plagiarism is **not acceptable**. You can review the department's website for more information. Every assignment that you submit should contain your work and your work only. It is fine, of course, to consult secondary sources or the internet but do this to formulate your own original ideas. If you ever want to use an idea that you encounter in another source, make sure to provide the appropriate citation so that we know you are bringing an idea other than your own. Copying or using someone else's words *or* ideas without giving them due credit is a form stealing: It is a breach of intellectual honesty and academic integrity. Please do not do it. If you have any questions or feel unsure about what counts as plagiarism, please talk to me.

Evaluation:

Contribution	20%
Early midterm	20%
Close-reading response	35%
Reflective essays	30%

Assessment Types:

1. Early midterm (Formal feedback: x)

There will be a Moodle midterm on Oct 14 or 15. This midterm will test your knowledge of the history of the Victorian Period, relevant concepts discussed in class, and the three authors we will have covered (Browning, Tennyson, and Gaskell).

2. The close-reading response paper (Formal feedback: ✓)

After the midterm, we will start pre-class responses.

Students will be divided into six groups (A, B, C, D, E, F). Every week, one group will submit the pre-class responses. The reading schedule below indicates which group submits when. Submit your response to the appropriate forums on Moodle **by 17:00 on Thursday**. For example, if you are in Group A, you submit your first response by **17:00 on Monday, Oct 26**.

You know which week you are supposed to write. Start early, read in advance, and work through several drafts. You would do yourself a favor by generating your own essay prompt so that your paper addresses a particular problem. Please treat this **like an academic paper with rigorous close-reading and robust argumentative structure**. You should aim for **1,000 words**.

Before writing, make sure to read the assigned texts carefully and **understand** them. Students often analyze texts without a good comprehension of what they mean. Do not make this mistake. Can you advise a friend without really understanding their problem? The same with literature. You should not write about a text without first understanding what it has to say. Responses that do not demonstrate sufficient comprehension of the text will not receive any points.

Close-reading (textual analysis) will make the bulk of your response. You should avoid generalizations and base your analysis on careful explications of the passages you provide. This means paying close attention to how authors choose their words, organize their sentences, use specific literary devices, and make particular demands on readers' attention. SparkNotes-like analyses which go through the poem in a summary or paraphrase mode will not receive points. Rather, build a central argument out of a deep appreciation of the unique literary style stemming from such aspects of language as diction, syntax, sound, meter, rhythm, rhyme, voice, poetic techniques (e.g., alliteration, line endings, enjambments, repetition). Obviously, do not go through the text like a shopping list: Identify those specific aspects of language and style which seem essential to the poem's ability to breathe. Why does the poet cultivate *this particular style* to tackle *this particular theme*?

Please aim to create **coherent argumentative threads** in your writing. The introductory paragraph should articulate a clear argument and describe the novelty of your approach. Each subsequent paragraph should begin with a clear claim.

The responses will be graded on the following:

- a) The quality and specificity of close reading (35 p)
- b) Argumentative specificity and the cohesion of your arguments (35 p)
- c) The demonstration of a strong understanding of the texts (30 p)

3. Reflective essays (Formal feedback: x)

Throughout the semester, I will post ten questions aimed at stimulating your reflections on the rich tapestry of the Victorian period. These prompts will encourage you to explore the era's multifaceted dimensions, encompassing literature, society, culture, history, and the intriguing dynamics of texts. An important part of a literary education is to fashion your voice as a writer, and writing essays, more casual in style than academic papers, give us that chance. These assignments invite you to experiment with your voice, reflect generously on what you are reading, the period you are studying.

Your task is to write **two reflective essays** in response to the questions that resonate with you. Each essay should fall within the **600-800 word range**, and you should share them on the Moodle forum. While there's no specific deadline for each prompt, please ensure you've uploaded two responses by the last day of classes. The assessment for these assignments will primarily be based on completion. If you submit your work on time, demonstrating the appropriate effort and engagement, you will receive full points. If your assignment does not show sufficient effort and engagement with course content, you will not receive any points.

Reading schedule:

Date	Primary Texts	Supporting Text
Mandatory: Introduction from <i>The Longman Anthology</i>		
Optional: Lawrence Poston, “1832”		
Sep 27 & Sep 30	<p>Alfred Lord Tennyson, <i>Poems, Chiefly Lyrical</i> (1830):</p> <p>Read: “The Eagle”; “Ode to Memory”; “Mariana”; “Ulysses”</p> <p>Robert Browning, <i>Dramatic Lyrics</i> (1842); <i>Men and Women</i> (1855)</p> <p>Read: “Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister”; “My Last Duchess”; “Porphyria’s Lover”</p>	<p>1831 William Johnson Fox, “Tennyson – Poems, Chiefly Lyrical – 1830”</p> <p>1831 Arthur Henry Hallam, “On Some Characteristics of Modern Poetry”</p> <p>1864 Walter Bagehot, “Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning; or, Pure, Ornate, and Grotesque Art in English Poetry Pub.”</p>
Oct 4 & 6	<p>Elizabeth Gaskell, <i>Mary Barton</i> (1848);</p> <p>Read: Chapters 1-10</p>	<p>1842 Thomas Carlyle, <i>Chartism</i></p> <p>1844 Engels, from <i>The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844</i></p> <p>1840s Henry Mayhew, <i>London Labour and the London Poor</i></p>
Oct 11 & 13	<p>Alfred Lord Tennyson, <i>In Memoriam</i> (1850)</p> <p>Read: Opening proem, 1, 2, 5, 7, 27, 47, 118, 119 (compare to 7), 129, Epilogue</p>	<p>1856 John Ruskin, "Of the Pathetic Fallacy"</p> <p>1864 Charles Dickens, “Mr Wegg Looks After Himself” in <i>Our Mutual Friend</i></p> <p>1888 A.C. Swinburne, “Dethroning Tennyson: A Contribution to the Tennyson-Darwin Controversy”</p>
Midterm (Oct 14-15)		
Optional: Anthony H. Harrison, “1851”		
Oct 18 & 20	<p>Elizabeth Barrett Browning, <i>Sonnets from the Portuguese</i> (1850)</p> <p>Read: I, X, XIII, XVIII, XXI, XXII, XXVIII, XXIX, XXXII, XLII, XLIII</p>	<p>1470 Francesco Petrarca, sonnets 1, 189 and 190 from <i>Il Canzoniere</i>; William Shakespeare, Sonnet 18</p> <p>1843 E.B. Browning, “The Cry of the Children”</p> <p>1844 “Past and Future” from E.B. Browning’s <i>Poems</i> [compare to Sonnet 42]</p>
Oct 25 & Oct 27 Group A	<p>George Meredith, <i>Modern Love</i> (1862)</p> <p>Read: 1, 2, 11, 13, 17, 21, 45, 50</p>	<p>1843 Sarah Stickney Ellis, <i>The Wives of England</i></p> <p>1858 Gerald Massey, “Poetry – the Spasmodists”</p> <p>1862 R.H. Hutton’s review and A.C. Swinburne’s response in <i>The Spectator</i></p>
Nov 1 & 3 Group B	<p>Matthew Arnold, <i>New Poems</i> (1867)</p> <p>Read: “Dover Beach”</p> <p>Algernon Swinburne, <i>Poems and Ballads</i> (1866)</p> <p>Read: “Dolores”</p>	<p>1853 Matthew Arnold, Preface to <i>Poems</i></p> <p>1868 Matthew Arnold, “Sweetness and Light” from <i>Culture and Anarchy</i></p> <p>1866 John Morley’s Review of Swinburne in <i>The Saturday Review</i></p>

Nov 8 & Nov 10	<p>Wilkie Collins, <i>The Moonstone</i> (1868)</p> <p>Read: First Period, Ch. 1-10 & Narrative 8</p>	<p>1851 “The Front Row of the Shilling Gallery” in <i>Punch</i></p> <p>1863 Henry Mansel, “Sensation Novels”</p> <p>1914 Lady Login’s Recollections: <i>Court Life and Camp Life, 1820-1904</i></p>
Optional: Linda K. Hughes, “1870”		
Nov 15 & Nov 17 Group C	<p>D.G. Rossetti, <i>The House of Life</i> (1860s-70s)</p> <p>Read: VI, XLVII, LIII, LX, LXXX</p>	<p>1868 Walter Pater, Preface to <i>The Renaissance</i></p> <p>1870 Robert Buchanan, “The Fleshly School of Poetry”</p> <p>1871 D.G. Rossetti, “The Stealthy School of Criticism”</p>
Nov 22 & 24 Group D	<p>George Eliot, <i>Brother and Sister: Sonnets</i> (1874)</p>	<p>1798 William Wordsworth, “Tintern Abbey”</p> <p>1860 George Eliot, <i>The Mill on the Floss</i></p> <p>1897 Alice Meynell’s essays on childhood</p>
Nov 29 & Dec 1 Group E	<p>Christina Rossetti, <i>Monna Innominata: A Sonnet of Sonnets</i> (1881)</p> <p>Read: 1, 2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 13</p>	<p>1862 Christina Rossetti, “Goblin Market”</p> <p>1863 Christina Rossetti, “Francesco Petrarca” in <i>The Imperial Dictionary of Universal Biography</i></p> <p>1885 Christina Rossetti, <i>Time Flies: A Reading Diary</i></p>
Optional: Stephen Arata, “1897”		
Dec 6 & 8 Group F	<p>Augusta Webster, <i>Mother and Daughter</i> (1881-1895)</p> <p>Read: 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 17</p>	<p>1870 Augusta Webster, “The Happiest Girl in the World”</p> <p>1881 Augusta Webster, “Gone Seaward”</p> <p>1879: Augusta Webster, “Poets and Personal Pronouns” and “The Livery of Woe”</p>
Dec 13 & 15	<p>Michael Field’s <i>Sight and Song</i> (1892)</p> <p>Read: “L’Indifférent,” “Venus,” “Mercury and Cupid”</p> <p>Gerard Manley Hopkins, <i>Poems</i></p> <p>Read: “Spring and Fall”; “The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo”</p>	<p>1866-1875 Extracts from Hopkins’s journals</p> <p>1889 Alice Meynell, “The Rhythm of Life”</p> <p>1899 Arthur Symons, <i>The Symbolist Movement in Literature</i></p>
Dec 20 & Dec 22	Thomas Hardy and Conclusion	