

ENG 344U: Victorian Literature

“Don't forget to speak scornfully of the Victorian Age;
there will be time for meekness when you try to better it.
Very soon you will be Victorian or that sort of thing yourselves;
next session probably, when the freshman come up.”

– [J.M. Barrie](#)

Our PSU Catalogue has this to say about ENG 344U: Victorian Literature: “Study of Victorian literature, including literary genres and themes, historical and cultural contexts, and major authors and movements.” Given the complexities of content and relatively lengthy endurance of the Victorian Age, which our Norton editors identify as lasting from 1830-1901 (a period that more-or-less corresponds to the reign of Queen Victoria, 1837-1901), that’s a hefty order. So much commentary and criticism has been produced on Literary Studies in the Age of Vic, and so many contemporary re-imaginings of Victorian times get produced in popular film and television (who among us has not seen a cinematic retelling of Victorian storytelling?), that doing justice to all relevant literary genres and themes, historical and cultural contexts, and major authors and movements becomes an overwhelming proposition. Researching these elements of the Age of Vic thoroughly might literally require a life’s work, and we only have 10 weeks.

Our solution will be to simplify. I tend to retain a canonical approach to 300-level courses, encouraging you to read as much of this stuff as you can in the short time we have together. Thus, the weekly progression of the course will go something like this:

After Module 1, which introduces the broad issues that we will apply to each author we analyze during the remaining weeks of the quarter, each module will introduce one major Victorian author, citing your Norton introductions and various online sources to provide background information that will help us to associate that major author with historical and social contexts. Put differently, we’ll use authors and their writings as touchstones to get us to historical and/or theoretical contexts, rather than the other way around.

That means that I'm going to depend on you to do some independent investigation of topics/terms not particularly familiar to you, whether the topic is about an element of the Victorian Age or a feature of the major author we are reading in a particular week. And you must promise to depend on me to answer questions if a concept needs to be clarified. Just send me an email in D2L anytime you need some professorial insights, and you shall receive.

The important caveat here: Do not become overwhelmed by the information overload that comes with studying Victorianism. Most important to me is that you exit the class knowing at least some of the major writers of the Age, what they wrote, and how it presaged later modern, postmodern, and other "isms." Put simply, I'd prefer that you know the sometimes sublime, sometimes imperial, sometimes subversive works of a George Eliot, an Alfred Tennyson, or a Rudyard Kipling than I am in your knowing the answer to the question, "What years did Victoria reign?" (Having said that, I've just given away one question that will appear on your final exam!)

This syllabus attempts to provide a comprehensive overview of the directions we will take in navigating major figures of the Victorian Age. It contains information on course expectations (*When's it due? How long does it have to be?*) along with boilerplate policy discussions required by the University.

1. Course Overview

Our 10-week course is divided into 10 weeks of lecture modules, each focusing on one or two prominent "must know" literary figures; these weekly module Questions for Discussion will all follow the same template (described below). Additionally, course participation counts, as you'll be asked to respond to at least three of your colleagues' posts each week. Finally, we will top off the course with a comprehensive final exam.

Thus, to reiterate for emphasis, over the course of the 10 weeks of modules, you will complete several tasks:

- Healthy reading, including the weekly lectures that in turn include relevant examples of primary Victorian texts and, occasionally, critical essays.
- A response to a Question for Discussion based on the weekly module.
- Feedback to your classmates that constitutes the “participation” element of your final course grade.

Weekly modules focusing on major authors will address significant ideas relating to the Victorian Age. You will not be tested on comprehensive reading of copious amounts of the Victorian canon, but on your critical and analytical ability to say something interesting about individual poems and stories, perhaps riffing off ideas presented in the lectures.

Specifically, every weekly module will challenge you to do the following:

1. Become familiar with the “must know” author or literary figure of the week.
2. Use one of our Norton editors’ five dominant “Victorian Issues” as a lens through which to view the author/work. More specifically, the Victorian Issues that you will exploit this term include the following and are introduced toward the end of the course text (starting on page 606 in my edition):
 - i) Evolution
 - ii) Industrialism: Progress or Decline?
 - iii) The “Woman Question”: The Victorian Debate about Gender
 - iv) Empire and National Identity
 - v) “Beacons of the Future”? Education in Victorian Britain
3. Post 500 words in response to the basic and everlastingly repeatable question for each weekly response: “What about the work you chose this week illustrates the ideas, issues, or concerns raised by one or more of the Norton editors’ five Victorian Issues?” Do your best to address each “issue” raised by your text of choice, though it’s fine to concentrate on just one.
4. Read your colleagues’ posts and pick at least three that caught your attention or intrigued you for some reason. Write separately in the discussion thread to each of these three colleagues explaining your

reaction to their posts. This effort represents the participation portion of your final course grade.

Our 10 weekly lecture modules focus on the following major figures. Hey, I wish we could fit in more, but such are the constraints of the academic quarter system. You certainly are encouraged to read the works of others contained in the Norton textbook (and, to foreshadow, your final exam will ask you to do just that: pick your own, different “major figures” for analysis. Put differently, you are asked to read the authors listed below throughout our standard 10 weeks, but then, it a twisted academic trick, THE PROFESSOR will ask you to apply the same weekly analysis to authors whom we did not talk about in the weekly discussion posts).

Module 1: Overview/Review of the Five “Victorian Issues” (so that you can apply them to your analysis in subsequent weekly responses)

Module 2: Thomas Carlyle

Module 3: Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning

Module 4: Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Module 5: Emily Brontë and George Eliot

Module 6: Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Christina Rossetti

Module 7: Oscar Wilde

Module 8: Rudyard Kipling

Module 9: George Eliot, *Middlemarch**

Module 10: Special Review**

*Note that Eliot’s *Middlemarch* is a prime example of a genre that I affectionately refer to as “The Big Victorian Novel.” Can’t escape a Victorian lit class without tackling a Big Victorian Novel, and *Middlemarch* is our lot this term. In an accompanying “Reading *Middlemarch*” text, I explain a few things about handling the reading load, suggesting a way to go about digesting Eliot’s masterpiece in healthy bites over the course of the term. You can find “Reading *Middlemarch*” in the course content and elsewhere, available through links on our homepage.

Responses to Questions for Discussion encourage you to discover and talk about Victorian texts of your own choosing in the context of the lecture modules, each of which (again) focuses on one or maybe two major figures.

No one expects you to be a PhD-carrying expert in Victorian Literature, but the Norton editors will give you a pretty solid underpinning for your work this term. Take your shot and have fun in these weekly posts. They are intended to immerse you in topics and approaches so that you get as much coverage of Victorian Age lit as possible.

Aim at a **500-word minimum** word count for each weekly Question for Discussion response. To reiterate, each weekly QforD will ask you to view a work of your choice by the author(s) featured that week through the lens of one of the Norton editors' five "Victorian Issues."

Let's consider an example. Most of us probably have read Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess." Here it is for a quick review, followed by musings about how one might use it to address our template Question for Discussion.

"My Last Duchess"

FERRARA

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now; Fra Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
"Fra Pandolf" by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek; perhaps
Fra Pandolf chanced to say, "Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint

Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat." Such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart—how shall I say?— too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace—all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men—good! but thanked
Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech—which I have not—to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse—
E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretense
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,

Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

“My Last Duchess” is intended to illustrate several Victorian Age themes, and the plot line (told as a remembrance) generally is assumed to chronicle the rocky marriage of our fictive narrator, a seemingly nouveau riche “Duke” who views wives like possessions. The marriage ends in murder, according to many readings: the ominous “then all smiles stopped together” conveys something more permanent than divorce, which, we can be pretty sure, would not suit our Duke’s fragile ego and need to hold onto and brag about possessions (as long as they know their place and stay in it).

In any case, if you were to choose “My Last Duchess” for the Browning module, can you imagine approaching it from any one or more of the Norton editors’ “Victorian Issues”? Why, of course you can!

- i) Evolution. THE PROFESSOR is stumped. It might be a bit of a stretch to argue “survival of the fittest” readings of the poem, but given the right incentive, hey, I could do it.
- ii) Industrialism: Progress or Decline? Ditto here. It would be possible to muse on where the Duke came by his fortune, certainly. Here we might analyze diction and voice to speculate that our uxoricide probably does not descend from old-world wealth, but (based on his habit of bragging about material possessions) is one of those Captains of Industry that [Thomas Carlyle](#) speaks of.
- iii) The “Woman Question”: The Victorian Debate about Gender. Ah-ha. This is the obvious choice, giving us much to say about gender and marriage, big Victorian themes for our Norton editors.
- iv) Empire and National Identity. Tough one to exploit. I’m leaning all my weight on issue iii at this point. However, how did this guy get to be a “Duke”? Worth exploring racial formation here.
- v) “Beacons of the Future”? Education in Victorian Britain. This topic ties in with “The Woman Question,” as the education of women and the dramatic increase in women’s literacy constitute hallmarks of the Age. Our “last” duchess clearly is educated and an overmatch for the dullard Duke, whose only recourse seems to be oppression and violence.

And there you go. A beginning to a response for a sample post on “My Last Duchess.”

Feedback to your classmates constitutes the “participation element” of your final course grade. At a **minimum, post three** feedback messages. Connect with at least three other people who said something wicked awesome or cool in the discussion topics aligned with the lecture modules. You should take your time and complete these feedback tasks over the course of the upcoming week. That is, while you are waiting to respond to the next week’s Question for Discussion, look back over everyone else’s responses to the previous one, and reach out to at least three of them. Make friends. Find a soul mate. Get married. Birth or adopt a kid. Name it after THE PROFESSOR.

The Final Exam asks you to twist our term-long approach by exploring authors that you didn’t get a chance to read given my choices for the weekly major figures. It will also re-engage you with the Norton editors’ “Victorian Issues” in slightly altered form. Hey, it’s a final exam, so THE PROFESSOR will play his cards close to his vest for now.

Deadlines, Due Dates, and Grade Distribution

The “Timeline” on our opening D2L homepage links you to the weekly lectures and Questions for Discussion. The following Timeline replicates deadlines and grade distributions:

By This Date	Get This Done	For Grade	Notes
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<p>“Now”</p>	<p>Read the Syllabus.</p> <p>Read the “How to Navigate This Class.”</p> <p>Read “Reading <i>Middlemarch</i>.”</p>	<p>Superfluous credit.</p>	<p>The syllabus is intended to capture all ye know of the class, and all ye might need to know, so it’s a long document and hopefully provides a roadmap to help you swing into the schedule. The related readings tell you i) how to get around in D2L and ii) how to plan on reading <i>Middlemarch</i> if you don’t have lots of time.</p>
<p>Friday January 10</p>	<p>Read M1: “Victorian Issues.”</p> <p>Begin reading <i>Middlemarch</i>? Consult the “Reading <i>Middlemarch</i>” strategy about how to tackle this Big Victorian Novel without</p>	<p>5%</p>	<p>This is an important warmup module because it introduces the Norton editors’ five “Victorian Issues” that you will be required to apply to each subsequent course module. Covering pages 3-29 and 606-</p>

	<p>becoming overwhelmed.</p> <p>Answer M1 Question for Discussion.</p>		<p>757, it's the heaviest reading you'll be asked to do in any given week. So, better get started!</p>
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<p>Friday January 17</p>	<p>Read M2: Thomas Carlyle</p> <p>Answer M2 Question for Discussion.</p>	<p>5%</p>	<p>This module asks you to engage with a major figure in light of the Norton editors' five "Victorian Issues."</p>
<p>Friday January 24</p>	<p>Read M3: Elizabeth Barrett Browning & Robert Browning.</p> <p>Answer M3 Question for Discussion.</p>	<p>5%</p>	<p>Ditto.</p>

Friday January 31	Read M4: Alfred, Lord Tennyson Answer M3 Question for Discussion	5%	Ditto.
Friday February 7	Read M5: Charlotte Brontë & George Eliot Answer M5 Question for Discussion	5%	Ditto.
Friday February 14	Read M6: The Rossetti's. Answer M6 Question for Discussion	5%	Ditto.

Friday February 21	Read M7: Oscar Wilde Answer M7 Question for Discussion	5%	Ditto.
Friday February 28	Read M8: Rudyard Kipling Answer M8 Question for Discussion	5%	Ditto.
Friday March 6	Read M9: <i>Middlemarch</i> Answer M9 Question for Discussion	5%	Ditto.
Friday March 13	Read M10: <i>Getting Ready for the Final Exam.</i> Answer M10 Question for Discussion	5%	Ditto.
Friday March 20	Final Exam	30%	To be revealed. You can count on a section covering basic information (e.g., what years did

			Victoria reign?) as well as major sections asking you to apply our editors' "Victorian Issues" rubric to new texts and in different contexts.
Throughout the term	Participation Grade: Respond to at least three of your colleagues' posts each week.	20%	Participation Grade.

Grade Distribution

Weekly responses to module questions for discussion: 50%.

Final Exam: 30%.

Participation: 20%.

Textbooks

Our two course texts are *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Victorian Age*, Volume E, 10th edition, and George Eliot's *Middlemarch*. Both texts should be available through our PSU Bookstore; however, savvy online book buyers can find significant discounts on used copies. If you have access to a different edition of the Norton Anthology volume on the Victorian Age (e.g., edition 9 would work just fine) that's ok by me. As for *Middlemarch*, I have seen it offered free of charge as a Kindle download, though the old-fashioned PROFESSOR in me is disturbed that I'm suggesting this paperless route. Oh, well. Bottom line: Watch your bottom line and save some money when you can.

Throughout the lecture modules, THE PROFESSOR provides links to texts and contexts that we will be using to illustrate key concepts. Occasionally, I'll also offer links to secondary sources that you can access through our library and use to stimulate further reflection.

THE PROFESSOR's bottom line: It's better to read several narrative structures closely than a lot of words superficially.

University Policy Statements

Access and Inclusion for Students with Disabilities

PSU values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to fostering mutual respect and full participation for all students. My goal is to create a learning environment that is equitable, useable, inclusive, and welcoming. If any aspects of instruction or course design result in barriers to your inclusion or learning, please notify me. The Disability Resource Center (DRC) provides reasonable accommodations for students who encounter barriers in the learning environment.

If you have, or think you may have, a disability that may affect your work in this class and feel you need accommodations, contact the Disability Resource Center to schedule an appointment and initiate a conversation about reasonable accommodations. The DRC is located in 116 Smith Memorial Student Union, 503-725-4150, drc@pdx.edu, <https://www.pdx.edu/drc>.

If you already have accommodations, please contact me to make sure that I have received a faculty notification letter and discuss your accommodations.

Students who need accommodations for tests and quizzes are expected to schedule their tests to overlap with the time the class is taking the test.

For information about emergency preparedness, please go to the [Fire and Life Safety webpage \(https://www.pdx.edu/environmental-healthsafety/fire-and-life-safety\)](https://www.pdx.edu/environmental-healthsafety/fire-and-life-safety) for information.

Syllabi Statement for Title IX Reporting Obligations

As an instructor, one of my responsibilities is to help create a safe learning environment for my students and for the campus as a whole. We expect a culture of professionalism and mutual respect in our department and class. You may report any incident of discrimination or discriminatory harassment, including sexual harassment, to either the [Office of Equity and Compliance](#) or the [Office of the Dean of Student Life](#).

Please be aware that as a faculty member, I have the responsibility to report any instances of sexual harassment, sexual violence and/or other forms of prohibited discrimination. If you would rather share information about sexual harassment or sexual violence to a confidential employee who does not have this reporting responsibility, you can find [a list](#) of those individuals. For more information about Title IX please complete the required student module [Creating a Safe Campus](#) in your D2L.

Here ends syllabus. Now, move on to the “Foreword” and Module 1.