

Course Outline: EN 3550: The Victorians

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH | FALL/WINTER 2026-2027

Note for students: This short course outline is provided for planning purposes only. Course information is tentative and subject to change; the final course syllabus will be available by the first day of classes.

Course Code

AP/EN 3550 6.0A (Y) – The Victorians

Course Director: Dr. Tina Y. Choi

Course Description

Queen Victoria's reign, from 1837 to 1901, was a period of profound transformation for both Britain and the globe: London's population more than tripled, reaching around 6 million by the end of the century; the city unveiled the world's first underground railway; Charles Darwin published his groundbreaking *The Origin of Species*; England's factories ran 24 hours a day to satisfy a growing population of middle-class consumers; and the reach of Britain's empire expanded across the Pacific, India, the Caribbean, Africa, and North America. In these respects, Victorian Britain seemed to stand at the forefront of technological and political progress in Europe. But these developments also raised numerous questions, to which writers like Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Oscar Wilde, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, produced some of the most memorable and influential literary works of the modern age in response. Many of these questions remain pressing ones for us today. Is industrial and technological progress always a positive thing? With growing social and income inequality, who bears responsibility for the poor and the unhoused? What are the causes of criminality, violence, and suffering, and how can they be addressed? Amid increasing secularization and growing interest in scientific modes of thought, Britons asked what relevance religion might still have in modern society. As empire expanded, how should Britain make sense of its relationship to foreign spaces and colonized peoples?

We will attend to the period's transforming literary conventions and its subgenres, which include the "condition-of-England" novel, adventure fiction, and the aestheticist essay. More generally, the course will consider the ways in which these works imagined individual and national experience, and the contributions of gender, race, and social class to their representations.

This course provides an overview of British literature of the Victorian period. Students will learn to read, think, and write critically about these works, and to contextualize them with relation to broad literary and artistic trends, historical events, and cultural influences of the period. English 3550 offers a foundation for more advanced study of nineteenth-century literature and cultural history, or for the continuing study of British literature of other periods.

Course Delivery

Delivery Mode: SEMR

Tuesdays 2:30-5:30pm

This course will be taught as a combination of lecture and discussion.

Course Materials

Norton Anthology of English Literature, 11th edition, Volume E (The Victorian Period)

tentative list of novels: Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret* (Oxford); Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (Penguin); Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton* (Oxford); H. Rider Haggard, *King Solomon's Mines* (Oxford) + additional short works, to be distributed

Tentative Grade Breakdown and Deadlines

Assessment	Weight	Mode	Tentative Deadline
2 short essays	15%	in class	20 October
short fall-term essay	20%	assigned	20 November
longer winter-term essay	35%		1 March
in-class test	15%	in class	15 March
active, informed participation in discussions	15%	in class	N/A
	100%		

Additional Information

Category:	C
Historical Requirements:	Time Period II (1700-1900)
Open To:	Yr 3, 4 (EN, ENPR, CRWR students only)