

Victorian Storage: How to Keep Things and/in Victorian Literature

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Locketts with hair. Canned goods. Lending libraries. Chemical embalming. Verse Memorization. The photograph.

The Victorian era was a period fascinated by and committed to acts of preservation. Publications on geological time and evolutionary science like Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* and Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* made acutely palpable the threats of mortality and ephemerality. The rise of material culture, the expansion of the British Empire, and the importation of goods from around the globe meant that Victorians—well, wealthy Victorians—had more and more stuff to store. In this course, we will consider Victorian literature as intertwined with several of the nineteenth century's many efforts at preservation.

We will begin by considering the most famous of Victorian storage spaces—the attic—in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. We will consider storage's role in concealment and the implications of keeping things like mental illness and the sins of empire “tucked away.” Themes of Victorian education in *Jane Eyre* will provide a transition to our course's next section on “brain storage,” memorization, and the Victorian schoolroom. We move then to Victorian antiquarianism and attempts at storing “dying” cultures, most specifically the oral culture and dialect of England's Lancashire. Dialect poets' attempted to capture the sounds and songs “of the people.” We will look at this attempt to store sound in our next unit as well, through our study of the phonograph and other nineteenth-century technologies designed to store sound and image. Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, chock full of information storage technologies, will transition us into our course's final unit on post-mortem embalming and corpses.

This course examines novels and poems—themselves storage technologies of a kind—as both examples and insights into what Jonathan Sterne calls the era's “ethos of preservation.” I hope, however, that this capacious theme will allow us to explore multiform aspects of Victorian history and culture: imperialism, Victorian education, Chartism and the working classes, gender roles and expectations, religion and doubt, Victorian medievalism, and more. Our readings, assignments, essays, and discussions aim to scavenge the stores of Victorian history and culture, and perhaps discover what we find still preserved in our lives and experiences.

REQUIRED COURSE TEXTS:

- Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. (Penguin Classics)
- Hughes, Thomas. *Tom Brown's Schooldays*. (Oxford World's Classics)
- Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. (Penguin Classics)

Electronic copies of all other readings will be linked or distributed through our course website. You will be expected to **print off and mark up** all electronic copies or, if you really do prefer to read electronically, use a note-taking application.

GRADING

Final Grade Percentages

- 10% Victorian Pack Rat Project
- 15% Close Reading Paper
- 20% Final Research Paper
- 15% “My Attic” Entries
- 20% Final Exam
- 20% Participation and Preparedness

Accessing Grades:

Grades for major assignments will be posted on ICON under “Grades” approximately two weeks after the due date. Your participation grade and your grades on informal assignments will be posted at the end of the semester.

If you have a question or concern about a grade on a particular assignment, please observe the 24/7 rule: wait 24 hours to contact me about the assignment, but do not contact me after 7 days after I returned the assignment with a final grade.

Grading Rationale:

Final grades will be determined on the University’s A-F grade scale, with A as the highest possible grade.

A: To earn an A in this course, you must excel consistently, producing polished, well-crafted work that demonstrates mastery of new techniques and skills. You must use the revision process strategically to shape your work for your audience and take an active thoughtful leadership role in the classroom.

B: To earn a B, you must exceed all of the requirements of a C by producing proficient work that shows good evidence of revision and attention to audience considerations. You must be an active and constructive participant in the classroom and complete all activities thoroughly and with care.

C: Earning a C in this course signifies an average performance. To receive a C, you must produce competent, college-level work, completing all projects satisfactorily and on time, contributing positively to the classroom environment, giving basic attention to revision, and showing improvement.

D or lower: Earning a D or lower indicates that you have not shown consistent effort, have not met the minimum class standards in some way, or have hurt your grade by plagiarizing, not turning in work, or failing to participate.

ASSIGNMENTS

Victorian Pack Rats Project (10%)

In completing this project, you will research a storage space common in Victorian homes. This could be a *room* (attic, cellar, pantry), built-in storage (cupboards, closets) or moveable storage space (wardrobes, vases, bowls, boxes, baskets).

What types of homes had this storage (only the wealthiest)? What did Victorians keep in this space? Why? Where would you find it? Is this space gendered or classed? Can you find any short stories, poems, or anecdotes that involve this storage space? Does it seem to have any connotations or symbolic meanings for Victorians? Write up a 2-2.5 page report on your most interesting findings (MLA formatting, 12-pt Times New Roman font, 1-inch margins).

Close Reading Paper (15%)

Write a 3-4 page paper that uses close reading and analysis to make an interpretive argument about a text read in our class. This argument can but does not need to be related to our course theme. Most important is your construction of a sophisticated, unique argument about an aspect of a text (perhaps a symbol, motif, metaphor, character, genre, narrative style) supported by textual evidence and rigorous analysis.

Final Research Paper (20%)

Around Week Nine of the semester, we will commence work on our final research papers. In this paper, you will select a primary literary text and a research “topic.” Your primary text need not be one covered in this course. I would prefer the text to be from the Victorian period (since one of the arguments of this course is that Victorians had a unique relationship with issues of storage and preservation), however, if you’d like to cover a text outside of this period, we can discuss this possibility.

Unlike in the close reading paper, the topic of the final research paper must relate in some way to our theme of “Victorian Storage.” I hope, however, after ten weeks in this course, we will better understand how flexible this theme can be. You can feel free to pursue a topic related to the approaches to storage covered in this class: attics and secrets, memory and learning, antiquarianism, storage technologies, and post-mortem preservation. You could, for example, consider “remembrance” and Christina Rossetti poems or the “phonograph” in Conan Doyle’s “The Story of the Japanned Box.” I would also encourage you, however, to consider thinking of other ways to approach the theme of storage: perhaps waste storage and pollution, canned food, the heart as sentimental storage...let your imagination go.

In a 5-7 page paper, use your research to construct an argument about the relation of your primary text and your research topic (e.g., Christina Rossetti critiques Victorian rituals of memorialization in order to encourage a remembrance of the living). This argument will find support in your close reading, analysis, and the contextualization provided by your research. We will discuss more about what kind of sources to use (as well as where to find and how to use them) in class.

Final Exam (20%)

During final exam week, you will take an exam (multiple choice, short answer, and essay) on the lectures, authors and works, critical readings, and overarching themes and terms of this course. Time, location, and date TBA.

“My Attic” Entries (15%)

Instead of holding reading quizzes through the semester, I will sporadically (approximately once a week), ask you to free write a paragraph on something you found “worth remembering” in the day’s reading. This could be a quote or a plot event you found intriguing, a character you have questions about, an idea for a paper topic, etc. After I grade these, I will return them to you to keep in a folder of some kind—your personal “attic”—that will function as idea storage for upcoming papers and discussions.

Participation and Preparedness (20%)

Participation

Students are expected to be present each class, on time, and engaged in the fullest sense. This means that students should listen actively and respectfully while also making helpful, substantive contributions to workshops, peer review, in-class activities, and discussion.

Preparedness

I expect that you come to class each day having read the material required for the day, that you have taken notes on that reading (either in the text or in another document), and that you have a couple of topics in mind to discuss in class when the opportunity arises.

Students will receive a “Participation and Preparedness” grade each day. Students who share lively and substantive contributions (plural!) as well as listen actively and respectfully to their peers will receive full marks. Tardiness, missing books, no notes, checking phones, etc. could all lead to deductions in this daily grade.

COURSE POLICIES AND EXPECTATIONS

Absences

You ought to be in class and on time every day. Absences cause you to miss out on instruction, learning time, and thinking opportunities. Consequently, absences, excused and unexcused, damage your learning experience and will negatively affect your grade. Assignments, directions, homework, and due dates will be updated in class and posted to our course website. It is your responsibility to know what these are, even if you miss a class. As mentioned above, you cannot earn points for reading quizzes, participation, or in-class activities on days when you have an unexcused absence.

If you plan to be absent for any reason, please contact me *before* the day you plan to miss. If your absence is unexpected, notify me as soon as possible. If you are absent for any reason, be sure to return prepared for the next day's lesson. Before emailing me to ask what you missed in class, contact a classmate for notes and check our course website for information on assignments and updates to the syllabus. If you are still unclear as to assignment details, please stop by during office hours and speak with me.

Communication with me

As the instructor of this course, I look forward to fostering and participating in an environment of respectful and thoughtful idea exchange. I also hope to be a resource for each of you as you develop your reading, writing, and discussion skills, both in class and in one-on-one appointments during my office hours.

I strongly encourage students to make an appointment or stop by my office hours to ask for clarification on assignments, raise concerns or discomforts, request help on assignments, or discuss any issue relevant to this class. Attending my office hours shows commitment to this course and demonstrates accountability for your learning.

If, for any reason, you find it necessary to email me (in regards to absences, time-sensitive questions, etc.), know that I do not check my email after 6 pm. I will do my best to respond to your email within 24 hours during the weekdays and 48 hours during the weekends.

Technology in the classroom

I expect that you will turn off/silence and put away all of your electronic devices (cell phones, iPads, iPods, etc.) before class begins. This includes laptops and e-readers unless otherwise specified. Inappropriate use of electronics during class time will negatively affect your participation grade. If, for any reason, you have a particular need for iPads, cell phones, or laptops during class time, please come talk to me during office hours.

COURSE CALENDAR

Key:

Week #

Day: Required Reading

In-Class Activities

I. What's In Your Attic?: Secrets and Stowaways

Week One

T: Course Introduction

“Keepsake” Free Write and Activity
Victorian Keepsake Scavenger Hunt

In Class Reading: Robert Browning, “Memorabilia” (1855)

Th: Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, Ch. 1-10

Mini-Lecture: Intro to *Jane Eyre* and Charlotte Brontë
Discussion

Week Two

T: *Jane Eyre*, Ch. 11-21

Discussion
Assign “Victorian Pack Rat” Project

Th: *Jane Eyre*, Ch. 22-32

Mini-Lecture: The Madwoman in the Attic, Feminism, and Victorian Literature
Discussion

Week Three

T: Research Workshop: Victorian Pack Rat Project

Th: *Jane Eyre*, Ch. 33-End

Jane Eyre wrap up and discussion

II. Brain Storage: Learning and Memory

Week Four

T: Hughes, K., “Reader, I Married Him,” Chapter 1 in *The Victorian Governess*
Mini-lecture and Discussion: Education, Class, and Gender in *Jane Eyre*

Th: Reading Victorian Readers Assignment

Lecture: “Victorian Education and the Victorian Schoolroom”
Syllabus Comparison Activity

Victorian Pack Rat Project due Friday at 5:00 pm.

Week Five

T: Hughes, T. *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*, Ch. 1-4

Discussion
Assign: Close Reading Paper

Th: *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*, Ch. 5-7

Discussion and activities
Close Reading Exercise

Week Six

T: *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*, Ch. 8-9, “On Learning by Heart” from *Royal Reader Series*

Tom Brown wrap-up
“What do I have memorized?” Activity

Mini-Lecture, Discussion, and Activities: Memorization in the Victorian schoolroom

III. Cultural Preservation: Antiquarianism and Dialect Poetry

Th: Robert Burns, “A Red, Red Rose,” “Tam o’ Shanter”

Mini-Lecture: Burns, Scots, and Antiquarianism

Close Reading Paper Rough Draft Workshop

Week Seven

T: “The Oldham Weaver,” Hollingworth, Introduction to *Songs of the People*, Edwin Waugh, “Come whoam to thi childer an’ me,” “Eawr Folk”

Mini-Lecture: Lancashire Dialect Poetry

Th: Ben Brierley, “The Lancashire Dialect,” Joseph Ramsbottom, “Gooin’ to scoo,”

Samuel Laycock, “Homely Advice to the Unemployed”

Discussion and activities: Class, representation, and appropriation

Week Eight

T: Close Reading Paper Final Draft Workshop

Lecture and Activities: Victorian Antiquarianism: Building preservation, museums, song and ballad collecting, etc.

Th: Clegg, “Th’ Owd Lanky,” Joseph Ramsbottom, “Gooin’ to scoo,” Janet Hamilton, “Oor Location”

Dialect and/in education

Close Reading Paper due on Friday at 5:00 pm

IV. Photograph, Phonograph, Typewriter: Storing Sound and Image

Week Nine

T: Edison, “The Future of the Phonograph,” Rudd, “Public Faces: Photography as Social Media in the Nineteenth-Century”

Mini-Lecture, Discussion, and Activities: Phonographic wax cylinders and cartes de visite

Free write and activity: 21st-century technologies of storage

Th: Stoker, *Dracula* Ch. 1-7

Intro to Dracula

Advertisement and Label Scavenger Hunt

“Track a Storage Technology” Challenge

Week Ten

T: *Dracula*, Ch. 8-14
Discussion and Activities
Assign: Final Research Paper

Th: *Dracula*, Ch. 15-18, Keep, “Blinded by the Type: Gender and Information Technology at the Turn of the Century”
Discussion
Lecture/Activities: Anatomy of a Critical Article

Week Eleven

T: *Dracula*, Ch. 19-23
 $\frac{1}{2}$ Discussion
 $\frac{1}{2}$ Research workshop and paper conferences

Th: *Dracula*, Ch. 24-End
 $\frac{1}{2}$ Discussion
 $\frac{1}{2}$ Research workshop and paper conferences

V. Corporeal Conservation: Post-Mortem Preservation

Week Twelve

T: Sterne, “A Resonant Tomb,” Ch. 6 of *The Audible Past*
Lecture and activities: Victorian death culture, post-mortem photography, death masks, etc.

Th: Tennyson, “The Lady of Shalott,” Swinburne, “The Leper”
The Corpse in Victorian Poetics

Week Thirteen

Thanksgiving Break

Week Fourteen:

T: Rossetti, “When I am dead, my dearest,” “After Death,” “Dream Land”
Imagining Death

Th: Final Draft Workshop: Research Paper

Week Fifteen

T: Final Research Paper Due
Presentations

Th: Oliphant, “Old Lady Mary,” Conan Doyle, “The Story of the Japanned Box”
Victorian Ghost Stories: Where are the spirits of the dead stored?

Week Sixteen

Final Exam Review and Preparation

Final Examination Date, Time, and Place TBA