**EN4223: Topics in the Nineteenth Century**

**Art, Sex, and Death: Victorian Aesthetics and Social Critique**

Spring 2015

Wednesdays, 1:00-4:00 p.m., AS4-0119

**Professor**:  Dr. Dustin Friedman                                                             **E-mail**:  ellfde@nus.edu.sg

**Consultation Hours**:  Tuesdays 4:00-5:00 p.m., by appointment    **Office**:  AS5-0314

This module looks at how art and aesthetic discourse during the Victorian era embraced the bizarre, the outré, and the outrageous to criticize dominant cultural values.  We begin by looking at the medievalism of authors such as Carlyle, Ruskin, Tennyson, and Morris as both an imaginative space of utopian social relations and a self-conscious appeal to aesthetic considerations.  This will lead us to a consideration of the frankly erotic poetry of A.C. Swinburne, whose artistic and sexual radicalism shocked the Victorian public.  We will then look at the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and its embrace of Ruskin’s notion that art should educate and uplift viewers with moral and intellectual content.   We will explore the radicalization of Ruskin’s views in the highly sensual poetry of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the lushly enigmatic lyrics of his sister, Christina Rossetti. Moving on from poetry and visual art, we will proceed to discuss critical writings by Matthew Arnold and Walter Pater, who thought that the act of artistic appreciation could actually create new types of people capable of transcending the philistinism of the era.  This will open the door to a consideration of Oscar Wilde, who transformed Pater’s “art for art’s sake” philosophy into an outlandish public persona that blatantly challenged gender and sexual norms.  We end the module by looking at Vernon Lee’s supernatural tales, where haunted art objects drive men to erotic mania, and the forthrightly perverse writings of the decadents, who though beauty was best when it first began to decay.

During the Victorian era, bourgeois values defined mainstream of cultural life:  industriousness, moral earnestness, propriety, and strictly defined gender roles were the order of the day.  Yet the realm of art emerged as the preeminent venue where those beliefs could be criticized, challenged, and even subverted.

**AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

Students will be able to:

1. Understand how the concept of art changed in the nineteenth century, from the culture’s articulation of its own values to itself into the realm where those values could be critiqued.

2. Craft literary interpretations grounded in close attention to textual details.

3. Navigate the complex field of secondary criticism and identify trends in contemporary literary scholarship.

4. Use their independent research skills to compose a theoretically and historically sophisticated final essay.

**READING LIST**

Stephen Greenblatt, ed., *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Volume E: The Victorian Era* (New

York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2012)

Vernon Lee, *Hauntings* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2006)

Various supplementary materials posted on the module IVLE

Note: The Forum Bookshop has had trouble stocking some of these items, so I recommend going to www.thebookdepository.co.uk.  They ship books to Singapore from the U.K. with no shipping fees.

**Grade Breakdown:**

Participation:  10%

Leading Discussion: 15%

Close Reading Assignment (approx. 800 words): 20%

Literature Review Assignment:  15%

First Draft of Final Paper (approx. 1000 words): 10%

Final Paper (approx. 2000 words):  30%

**Course Requirements**

**1. Participation (10%):**  This module is run seminar-style, which means regular contribution to class discussions are an absolute must.  Regular attendance and active participation by all students is one of the most important components of a successful module.  Every student is expected to contribute to every class session.  Lack of participation, inability to pay attention, repeated tardiness, or unexcused absences will severely hurt your participation grade.  Come on time, having read the material, ready to discuss it and ask questions about it.

**2.**  **Leading Discussion (10%):** One day, you and a partner will lead discussion for the last forty-five minutes of class.  Your job will be to lead the class in a discussion of our primary works in light of the critical or contextual readings provided for that day, and provide a written summary of that discussion.  This will evaluate your ability to formulate useful discussion questions, identify significant aspects of secondary readings and apply them to primary readings, and manage classroom discussion.

**3. Close Reading Assignment (20%):**A critical argument stands or falls based on the quality of the readings it offers of its central primary text. This skills paper is designed to give you practice using close reading, or detailed rhetorical analysis, to develop an interpretive claim about a single text.  You will choose a short passage from any text we have read this term, and develop a thesis based upon your analysis of, or reasoning about, the specific details you have noticed in your chosen passage.  **Due online no later than March 2**.

**4.  Literature Review Assignment (15%):**This assignment is designed to give you practice using the skills necessary to navigate the complex critical and informational terrain of Victorian studies.  You will use this research to help develop and write your argument for the final paper.  **Due online no later than March 23**.

**5. First Draft of Final Paper (10%):** This paper is the major writing assignment for this module and acts as a capstone to the rest of the work you will do this semester. Each student will distribute approximately 1000 words of his or her writing to a small group for the workshop the day before we discuss your work. While the pages can be one chunk of writing or two different parts from the paper, it must include the opening of the paper (in which you state the main claim and lay out your argument).  *You may not resubmit your close reading assignment*.  **Due April 10**.

**6. Final Paper (40%):**The final draft of your paper, worth 50% of your final grade, should be approximately 3000 words and should articulate a clear but complex argument about one of the texts we’ve read. You should discuss your topic with me as you begin developing it, and you will be expected to meet with me to discuss your progress on the paper.  **Due online April 22**.

**Course Policies**

**Late/Missed Assignments**:  I will not accept any late assignments unless you have a doctor’s note or a similar form of documentation that proves you are reasonably incapable of completing the assignment.  If you do miss class, make sure to check with your classmates about any handouts, work, or information you may have missed.

**Consultation**:  Please feel free to schedule an appointment with me to discuss your questions or concerns about the class, your progress, or anything else you might want to talk about.  I am available for help, consultation, or discussion.  Please e-mail me, and we’ll arrange time to meet.  I am also available for virtual conferences online via Skype, Facetime, or Gchat.  Please email me for more details.

**Email**:  I will try my best to respond to all emails within twenty-four hours.

**Plagiarism**:  Plagiarism is defined as using another person’s language, ideas, or thoughts and representing them as your own.  It is a serious offense and will be dealt with very severely.  If you use someone else’s work without quoting or citing completely, you have committed plagiarism and will fail the assignment and/or the course, and possibly face worse consequences.

**Tentative Schedule (subject to revision)**

**January 13: NO CLASS MEETING**

**January 20: Victorian Medievalism**

Thomas Carlyle, from “Democracy,” *Past and Present* (*NAEL* 1067-72)

John Ruskin, “The Savageness of Gothic Architecture,” from *The Stones of Venice* (*NAEL* 1342-52)

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, “The Lady of Shalott” (*NAEL* 1161-6)

Critical reading: Kathy Alexis Psomiades, “‘The Lady of Shalott’ and the Fortunes of Victorian Poetry” (IVLE)

**January 27: The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the Visual Arts**

John Ruskin, “A Definition of Greatness in Art,” “The Slave Ship” from *Modern Painters*

(*NAEL* 1338-9)

Pre-Raphaelitism, complete selections (*NAEL* 1463-1471)

Paintings by Turner, Millais, Brown, and Hunt (*NAEL* C1-6)

Critical reading: Tim Barringer, “Introduction” and “Rebellion and Revivalism” (IVLE)

**February 3: A.C. Swinburne’s Perversity**

A.C. Swinburne, “Hymn to Prosperpine” (*NAEL* 1526-9), “Hermaphroditus” (1530-1), “Anactoria" (IVLE), "Laus Veneris" (IVLE)

Critical reading: Karen Alkalay-Gut, “Aesthetic and Decadent Poetry” (IVLE)

**February 10: No Class** (Chinese New Year)

**February 17: William Morris’s Aesthetic Poetry**

William Morris, “The Defense of Guinevere” (NAEL 1513-22), “How I Became a Socialist” (NAEL 1522), “The Haystack in the Floods” (IVLE).

Contextual reading: Walter Pater, “Aesthetic Poetry” (IVLE)

**February 24: Recess Week**

**March 2: Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Sensual Body**

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, “The Blessed Damozel” (*NAEL* 1472-6), “Jenny” (*NAEL* 1478-87),

“Nuptial Sleep” (*NAEL* 1478)

Contextual reading: Walter Pater, “Dante Gabriel Rossetti” (IVLE)

Contextual reading: Robert Buchanan, “The Fleshly School of Poetry” (IVLE)

**Close reading paper due**

**March 9: Christina Rossetti and the Spiritual Body**

Christina Rossetti, “Song (When I am dead, my dearest”) (*NAEL* 1490), “Winter: My Secret” (*NAEL* 1494-5), “Up-Hill” (*NAEL* 1495-6), and “Goblin Market” (*NAEL* 1496-1508)

Critical reading: Kathy Alexis Psomiades, “She Has a Lovely Face: The Feminine and the Aesthetic” (IVLE)

**March 16: Matthew Arnold, Walter Pater, and the Aesthetic Life**

Matthew Arnold, “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time” (*NAEL* 1404-18)

Walter Pater, complete selections from *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (*NAEL* 1538-45)

Contextual reading: Walter Pater, “The Child in the House” (IVLE)

**March 23: Oscar Wilde and the Pose of the Aesthete**

Oscar Wilde, “The Critic as Artist, parts one and two” (IVLE) and another Wilde text to be decided by the class.

Critical reading: Simon Calloway, “Wilde and the Dandyism of the Senses” (IVLE)

**Literature Review Assignment Due**

**March 23 (evening make-up class): Transgressive Wilde**

Film: *Wilde*, dir. Brian Gilbert

Contextual reading: Alfred Douglas, “In Praise of Shame” and “Two Loves” (IVLE)

Contextual reading: Wilde, from *De Profundis* (*NAEL* 1777-80)

**March 31: Vernon Lee’s Aesthetic Supernaturalism**

Vernon Lee, “Amour Dure” and “Dionea” from *Hauntings*

Contextual reading: Vernon Lee, "Faustus and Helena: Notes on the Supernatural in Art" from *Hauntings*

Contextual reading: Heinrich Heine, from “The Gods in Exile” (IVLE)

**April 6: Decadence and Perversion**

Oscar Wilde, “The Harlot’s House” (*NAEL* 1722)

Lionel Johnson, “The Dark Angel” (IVLE)

“Michael Field” (Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper), [Maids, not to you my mind doth

change] (*NAEL* 1672), [A girl] (*NAEL* 1672-3), and [It was deep April, and the morn] (*NAEL* 1673-4)

Contextual reading: from Arthur Symons, “The Decadent Movement in Literature” (IVLE)

**April 13: Draft Workshop**

**Final draft due on April 22**