



**RACHEL SAGNER BUURMA** — selected works

about research teaching notes

# Victorian Literature + Victorian Informatics syllabus

1 Comment

instructor: Rachel Sagner Buurma

semester: Fall 2014

time: W 1:15-4, plus occasional labs tba

location: McCabe Library Video Classroom (third floor)

This mid-level core course offers a survey of canonical Victorian literature through the lens of Victorian information theories and knowledge organization practices. Reading texts like Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*, Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market," Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, Alfred Tennyson's *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*, John Henry Newman's *The Idea of the University*, and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, we will investigate the relation between information, knowledge, and literature: how did Victorians imagine literature as information? And how do new literary-critical methods of interpretation draw on the idea of literature as information to test old readings and invent new ones? Calibrating the distance between various Victorians' ideas about information and our own, we will read Tennyson's *In Memoriam A.H.H.* alongside Lewis Carroll's index for

that famous poem before creating our own indexes to it, study John Stuart Mill's "On Liberty" by comparing it to his complete works using topic models, and interpret Darwin's *The Origin of Species* alongside three different visualizations of that work's seven major revised editions and our own experience with textual version control. Throughout, we will focus on developing techniques for close, middle-distance, and distant reading, with an emphasis on exploring digital tools for finding, organizing, counting, curating, decomposing, rereading, and remaking literary texts.

# Schedule

## Introduction

some topics: overview of Victorian literature + culture; major events and genres; major Victorian literature themes; histories of the relationship between literature and information; the idea of literature as information; brief overview of literature as information in 20th c literary criticism; ideas of information overload and knowledge organization from the nineteenth century through the present day

### September 3

- *Jane Eyre*, first pages
- definitions: data, information, knowledge
- workshop: close reading the novel (with chapter 1 of JE)
- short assignment 1: JE close reading (due September 8)

## Jane Eyre and Communication Networks

some topics: Victorian geographies; the domestic novel; religion; knowledge organization and empire; narration and totality; reading and publishing; disciplinary developments; urbanization; communication technologies; census and health data

### September 10

- *Jane Eyre* (1847), ch 5-25
- excerpt from Menke, "Victorian Informatics"
- short excerpts from Day, "The Modern Invention of Information" and Gleick, "The Information: A History, a Theory, a Flood"
- examine Edwin Chadwick's Sanitary Map of the Town of Leeds (1842)
- in-class demo: mapping JE (Stanford Named Entity Recognizer, Mapbox)

- workshop preparation: install **Zotero**, examine a few models of citation management and workflow
- workshop: citation management and note-taking: reflecting on your own practices of knowledge collection and organization

## September 17

- *Jane Eyre*, ch 26-end
- examine some indexes to Victorian novels [HathiTrust collection link here]
- examine this **historical timeline of computable knowledge**
- workshop: plain-text authoring + the separation of form and content, 1850-present
- workshop: close reading poetry (using the first stanzas of *In Memoriam*) (handout)
- short assignment 2: *In Memoriam* close reading (due September 24)
- short paper assigned

## Indexing *In Memoriam* A.H.H.

some topics: meter; lyric; elegy; Victorian taxonomies, subject classifications, and other knowledge organization technologies; histories of management and business; finance, credit, and debt; science and medicine

## September 24

- read: Tennyson, “The Lady of Shalott” (1832), *In Memoriam* (1850) (first reading)
- short selection from Wheatley, What is an Index?
- short selection from Day, “Indexing It All”
- examine Lewis Carroll’s index to *In Memoriam*
- preview: close reading non-fiction
- short assignment 3: create your own index to a section of *In Memoriam* (see handout)

## October 1

- read: *In Memoriam* (second reading)
- come ready to present your own index to *In Memoriam*

## Visualizing Variations on *The Origin of Species*

October 8

- chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 14 from Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (1859)
- look at three visualizations of Origin: Ben Fry's [The Preservation of Favoured Traces](#), [\(En\)tangled Word Bank](#) by Stephanie Posavec and Greg McInerny and [Darwin Online's variorum of the six British editions of Darwin's Origin of Species](#) published between 1859 and 1872
- Drucker, selections from *Graphesis*
- set up a Github account and watch [Git for Ages 4 and Up](#)
- workshop: using Git for text version control

## Filling in the Blanks: Empty Forms in *Lady Audley's Secret*

some topics: railways and other transportation forms; tabular data; clocks, timetables; personal ads; journals; blank books (add link to HathiTrust collection of blank books)

October 15

FALL BREAK (read *Lady Audley's Secret*)

October 22

- *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862)
- Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds* handout
- Ramsay, ["The Hermeneutics of Screwing Around; or What You Do with a Million Books"](#)
- short excerpts from Stallybrass and Gitelman on blank books
- workshop preparation: The Historian's Macroscopic [regex tutorial](#)
- workshop: intro to csv form and regex
- examine some examples of blank forms and blank books (in HathiTrust)
- short paper due to Dropbox Friday by midnight

## Cataloging "Goblin Market"

October 29

- Rossetti, "Goblin Market" (1862)
- Burton, "Archive Stories: Gender in the Making of Imperial and Colonial Histories"

- brief excerpts from Samuel Butler's Notebooks
- examine some 19th c library catalogs: The British Museum and London Library
- conceptual networks and linked data: take a look at John Ockerbloom's [Online Books Page](#), the [NYPL's Networked Catalog](#) and projects in [OCLC ResearchWorks](#)
- short assignment 4: conceptual networks of "Goblin Market" (due November 5)

## John Stuart Mill's Topicality

November 5

- *On Liberty* (1859), all
- complete topic modeling stop words exercise using Stanford Topic Modeling Tool and Mill's complete works (see handout)
- readings on stop words by Freedgood and Rosenberg
- short assignment 5: stop words for *Aurora Leigh*

## Searching for *Aurora Leigh*(1857) (keywords and stop words)

November 19

- Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, first, second, and fifth books
- handout based on Hebert Tucker, "Aurora Leigh: Epic Solutions to Novel Ends"
- Blackwood's Magazine review of *Aurora Leigh*
- Gibbs and Cohen, "A Conversation with Data" (skim)

[Here the syllabus continues moving forward temporally, continuing the survey, but recurs conceptually, taking up the topics discussed earlier in the semester and reframing them inside later-19th c debates about public culture, expertise, educational institutions, etc]

## Public Culture, the University, and Information Overload

some topics: public culture; secularization, religion and literature; the history and present of higher education; Orientalism; archeology of Palestine; data and empire; information, knowledge, and totality;

November 12

- Matthew Arnold, “Dover Beach” and selections from *Culture and Anarchy*
- John Henry Newman, selections from *The Idea of the University*
- Said, selections from *Orientalism*
- short excerpts from Robinson, “Biblical Researches in Palestine” and Borrow, “The Bible in Spain”
- H.G. Wells, “The Idea of a Permanent World Encyclopedia” (1937, but tilts earlier)

## Code and Code-breaking at the Fin de siècle

November 26

- Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Dancing Men” or “Study in Scarlet”
- *Sherlock* episode
- optional: Bram Stoker, *Dracula* in whole or in part
- Galison and Daston, “The Image of Objectivity” from *Objectivity*
- Edith Rickert, brief selections from *New Methods for Literary Study*
- short assignment 6: “New Methods for Literary Study” reading

December 3

- Jules Verne, “The Cryptogram”
- Henry James, “In the Cage”
- Victorian personal data: examine Francis Galton’s [Life History Album](#)
- Paul Otlet, “Something about Bibliography” (1892) + something about the Mundanaeum (loop back to Wells, compare)

## Texts

The main books you will need to buy are:

Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre*. Penguin. ISBN 978-0141441146

Mill, John Stuart. *On Liberty*. Broadview. 1551111993

Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* Broadview Press. 1551113376

Alfred Tennyson, *In Memoriam* Broadview Press 978-1554811434

Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley’s Secret*. Oxford World’s Classics. 978-0199577033

optional: Bram Stoker, *Dracula*. Broadview. 978-1551111360

These books are available at the bookstore. You are also welcome to buy the books online or at a different store. Be aware that you need to have *your own copy of the specific edition of each of the books listed above*. Make sure you have the correct edition by matching the ISBN number you see listed at the end of each title. All other texts will be available. Please print out, read, mark up, and bring to class ALL of the texts assigned for each week unless advised otherwise.

## Class format

Though this will vary as needed, in general our first hour will be dedicated to some overview of major questions and issues along with contextualization and background, often partially in the form of lecture but including discussion. During the second hour we will tend towards closer readings of the week's main literary work, delving into particular passages in more depth as we link back to broader developing interests and themes. The third hour will sometimes be occupied by a related workshop.

## Open workshops

Occasionally we will open our class's third workshop hour to interested outside parties. Feel free to invite friends, family, teammates, lab mates, housecats, that guy who is always hanging out in the periodicals reading room. More on this in class.

## Short assignments

Short writing assignments of varying length and specificity are scattered throughout the syllabus and will be assigned individually in class. They require you to respond in clear, organized, edited prose and to think about your audience in determining your guiding tone and feeling.

Instead of posting this work on a single WordPress or Blackboard site, this class will experiment with using dispersed publishing platforms for hosting and sharing your own work and links to other interesting writing and projects, along with tools for collecting, aggregating, and curating the course's different elements. Use something familiar (a public Facebook thread? a text message? an illuminated manuscript? a Tweet linking to a Gist?) or try something new. Do it the same way each time, or try some different approaches. Like this course, this exercise asks you to think about communication and information organization across the digital/non-digital opposition; it asks you to think about what reading and writing tools and media are most integrated

into your everyday life already – and also to think about whether you like to see your coursework bump up alongside your existing practices, prefer to keep it separate, or something in-between.

However you choose to write and publish, think about audience and access: will your reader need to create a new account or find a new tool to access your work? Will it be easy for you to notify her that your writing has appeared? Will she be able to comment easily? What tools and publishing platforms are appropriate for the kind of reading, writing and collecting you are doing? You might write on paper and Instagram; you might record a voice note and provide a transcript in a program that allows commenting; you might type on your Remington, take a high-quality photo, upload it to your Evernote, share the link, and provide a link to a comment thread. You might make the appropriate number of letterpress copies and slip them under our doors. (Note: some of these ideas are better than others; some of these ideas are more time-consuming than others.)

The other piece of this project will be finding a way to aggregate, organize, and curate your classmates' writing and comments. Again, a number of lightweight analog and digital tools for this purpose exist; we will discuss at greater length in class.

I hope that this aspect of our short writing assignments will raise a few large questions for us to check in on over the course of the semester:

- + How do we track and organize information across analog and digital media? How do you organize across paper and screen?
- + How do we think about the difference between **“pushing” and “pulling” in social media and online writing platforms?**
- + What are the assumptions, affordances, limitations built into the various analog and digital tools we use to create, share, and comment on writing in all spheres of our lives?

## Short paper

This is a simple, close-reading-based 5-6 page paper, extending work you have done in your more informal writing assignments. It does NOT need to make an argument; it need only offer a series of related close readings. It is due to Dropbox by midnight Friday October 24th. We will discuss specifics further in class.



## *In Memoriam* project

The goal of this project is to think about different ways to reading *In Memoriam* 1) by examining some existing printed indexes to the poem, 2) tracking one formation – an idea, form, reading – via that index and finally 3) by creating your own new index to the poem along with a short rationale of what your index offers its reader.

## Final project or paper

Your final paper or project should take up some problem or question that has come up in the course and consider it in relation to one of our major literary texts, developing an argument and expressing it in an appropriate form. This could be 10-15 page piece of writing, or a project in some other form with a related shorter piece or pieces of writing.

The final project/paper plan should include:

- + a workflow
- + a citation management plan
- + a few paragraphs detailing the project's argument and key readings

The final project/paper is due on December 15.

## Grading

25% class participation (includes note-taking, quizzes, etc)

15% short assignments

25% percent 5-6 page close reading paper

10% final exam

25% final project/paper

## Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a very serious offense. It includes both the direct copying of the words of another person without crediting him or her and paraphrasing the ideas of another person without giving credit. If you have any questions about how to properly cite another person's work, please do not hesitate to ask me.

## Your Own Devices Policy

Because our class is intensively collaborative, I will expect that you will be focused on the texts and on your classmates. If it is your experience that having a screen in front of you can distract you from the work of being in class, please take measures to prevent

such self-distraction. (I like **StayFocused**; you may like other programs or strategies.) Also because the intensively collaborative work of this class will sometimes be screen-based work, you should know that you may be requested, at very short notice, to project your device's screen for the class to view. Please plan accordingly.

## Attendance and due dates

Because this is a discussion-oriented class, attendance is essential. Missing more than three class sessions will result in a lowered grade (1/3 of a grade per additional unexcused absence) unless you have a valid excuse confirmed by your advisor or class dean. (Remember to reserve some of your absences for the possibility of missing class due to routine illness like the flu or a bad cold.) Late papers will incur a penalty (1/3 of a grade per class day late) unless you have a similarly valid excuse. So if a paper is due on Friday and you don't turn it in until Wednesday, that's 2/3 of a grade late, making an actual B+ paper, for example, into a recorded B-.

## Accommodations for disability

I want to work to make sure that everyone in this class has the access to the materials, resources, and support they need in order to learn most effectively. You are always free to talk to me about your own situation. A key Swarthmore resource in this area is the Office of Student Disability Services. Their accommodations policy is here: If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact Leslie Hempling in the Office of Student Disability Services (Parrish 113) or email [lhempli1@swarthmore.edu](mailto:lhempli1@swarthmore.edu) to arrange an appointment to discuss your needs. As appropriate, she will issue students with documented disabilities a formal Accommodations Letter. Since accommodations require early planning and are not retroactive, please contact her as soon as possible. For details about the accommodations process, visit the Student Disability Service Website at <http://www.swarthmore.edu/academic-advising-support/welcome-to-student-disability-service>. You are also welcome to contact me [the faculty member] privately to discuss your academic needs. However, all disability-related accommodations must be arranged through the Office of Student Disability Services.

## Acknowledgements

Here is a partial, in-progress list of writing I drew on to create this syllabus. A stack of info studies syllabi, including Jasmine McNealy's **Information Literacy and Critical**

**Thinking** (UKC 101-003, University of Kentucky), Nathan Hensley's **Victorian Literature and Globalization**, Georgetown Spring 2013; Brian Croxall's **Intro to DH**, (Eng 389, Emory University, Spring 2014); Laura Heffernan's **Victorian Literature and Objectivity** (English 4251, University of North Florida, Spring 2012) [in progress – more to be added here]

This syllabus is necessarily an incomplete document; we will revise and save versions of it as the class progresses. The most up-to-date copy will be available on github: [https://github.com/rbuurma/vic\\_info](https://github.com/rbuurma/vic_info)

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 444 Castro Street, Suite 900, Mountain View, California, 94041, USA.

UNCATEGORIZED

---

One response to “Victorian Literature + Victorian Informatics syllabus”

*Weekly Roundup: April 5 | Digitized History* April 6, 2015 at 1:26 am

[...] This syllabus from Rachel Sagner Buurma, which incorporates digital methods and tools throughout the course [...]

[Reply](#)

[Leave a Reply](#)

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked \*

## Comment

☐ Notify me of followup comments via e-mail

Name \*

Email \*

Website

Post Comment