

## English Literature: Historical Period (A005761)

**Course size** (nominal values; actual values may depend on programme)

**Credits 5.0**                      **Study time 150 h**

**Course offerings in academic year 2026-2027**

A (semester 2)                      English                      Gent

**Lecturers in academic year 2026-2027**

Forestier, Eloïse                      LW07                      lecturer-in-charge

**Offered in the following programmes in 2026-2027**

	crdts	offering
Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics and Literature(main subject Dutch - English)	5	A
Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics and Literature(main subject English - German)	5	A
Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics and Literature(main subject English - Greek)	5	A
Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics and Literature(main subject English - Italian)	5	A
Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics and Literature(main subject English - Latin)	5	A
Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics and Literature(main subject English - Spanish)	5	A
Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics and Literature(main subject English - Swedish)	5	A
Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics and Literature(main subject French - English)	5	A
Exchange Programme Linguistics and Literature	5	A
Preparatory Course Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature(main subject Dutch - English)	5	A
Preparatory Course Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature(main subject English)	5	A
Preparatory Course Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature(main subject English - German)	5	A
Preparatory Course Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature(main subject English - Italian)	5	A
Preparatory Course Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature(main subject English - Spanish)	5	A
Preparatory Course Master of Arts in Linguistics and Literature(main subject French - English)	5	A

### Teaching languages

English

### Keywords

Victorian Culture & Literary Genres, Social (Dis)Order, Morality, Gender, Power, Class, Ideology, Sexuality, Transgression

### Position of the course

Title: *Cultural Discourses and Social (Dis)Order in Victorian Literature*

This third year BA course centres on Victorian literature of the mid to late nineteenth century. The Victorian era (1837–1901) was marked by rapid industrialisation, imperial expansion, and profound social transformation. These developments generated not only new forms of social organisation, but also pervasive anxieties about instability, deviance, and the limits of moral authority. Victorian literature emerges from this context as a key site in which cultural norms are articulated, negotiated, and contested.

The course turns to literary texts to explore the cracks beneath the carefully maintained façade of Victorian respectability and moral order. In other words, it asks: To what extent do Victorian literary texts undermine the very social norms they appear to uphold? We will examine how these texts participate in the construction and regulation of social order, while simultaneously exposing its

fragilities. Rather than treating Victorian culture as simply “contradictory,” we will analyse how tensions, between respectability and transgression, discipline and desire, stability and disruption, are embedded within the very discourses that seek to maintain order. Drawing on approaches from Gender Studies, Marxism, and Queer Theory, the course explores how Victorian literature both reflects and shapes debates about class, gender, sexuality, and power. Particular attention will be paid to how different literary genres render visible what dominant culture seeks to regulate or conceal, including forms of desire, consumption, and social transgression. Precisely through its contrast with our present time, where the boundaries between right and wrong, and between truth and falsehood, are increasingly blurred, this course remains strikingly relevant today.

## Contents

The corpus spans key genres and moments of the period, including domestic realism, Gothic fiction, narrative poetry, and satire. Through texts such as *Jane Eyre* (1847), *North and South* (1855), *Goblin Market* (1862), *Carmilla* (1872), and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), alongside selections from the magazine *Punch*, or *the London Charivari* (1841–2002), students will investigate how narrative form and genre engage with the pressures of modernity.

A selection of points for discussion includes:

- **Historical context:** How do these texts construct and destabilise ideas of moral order and imperial authority?
- **Genre and discourse:** How do genres such as Realism, the Gothic, Fantasy, or Satire shape what can be articulated about taboo subjects?
- **Readership and reception:** Who read these texts, how, for example, did *Punch's* weekly circulation differ from the audience of the triple-decker novel?
- **Intersectionality:** How do class, gender, sexuality, and race intersect in figures such as Bertha Mason or Carmilla?

## Initial competences

To have completed "English Literature I" and "English Literature II" or to have acquired the necessary skills by other means. Some knowledge in 19<sup>th</sup> century literature and the Victorian era would be preferable along with analytical skills and the ability to write academic essays in English.

## Final competences

- 1 By the end of the course, students will be able to critically analyse how Victorian texts do not merely depict social order and disorder but actively participate in producing and managing the tensions between them.
- 2 They will be equipped with a theoretical toolbox to analyse and comprehend historical texts.
- 3 They will be able to distinguish and discuss literary genres and use this reflection to develop original research questions.
- 4 They will acquire experience working in a team, relying on one another's strengths to produce the best research results.
- 5 Finally, they will have developed the ability to give constructive academic feedback.

## Conditions for credit contract

Access to this course unit via a credit contract is unrestricted: the student takes into consideration the conditions mentioned in 'Starting Competences'

## Conditions for exam contract

This course unit cannot be taken via an exam contract

## Teaching methods

Seminar

## Extra information on the teaching methods

Seminar, lectures, group discussions, individual and group research.

## Study material

Type: Other

Name: Jane Eyre (1847)

Indicative price: € 6

Optional: no

Language : English  
Author : Charlotte Brontë  
Number of Pages : 448  
Available on Ufora : No  
Online Available : Yes  
Available in the Library : Yes

Type: Other

Name: North and South (1855)  
Indicative price: € 10  
Optional: no  
Language : English  
Author : Elizabeth Gaskell  
Number of Pages : 450  
Available on Ufora : No  
Online Available : Yes  
Available in the Library : Yes  
Available through Student Association : No

Type: Other

Name: Punch, or the London Charivari  
Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty  
Optional: no  
Language : English  
Online Available : Yes  
Additional information: online archive: <https://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/serial?id=punch>

Type: Other

Name: Goblin Market (1862)  
Indicative price: € 2  
Optional: no  
Language : English  
Author : Christina Rossetti  
Number of Pages : 64  
Available on Ufora : No  
Online Available : Yes  
Available in the Library : Yes  
Available through Student Association : No  
Usability and Lifetime within the Course Unit : not applicable

Type: Other

Name: The Picture of Dorian Gray (1890)  
Indicative price: € 6  
Optional: no  
Language : English  
Author : Oscar Wilde  
Number of Pages : 224  
Available on Ufora : No  
Online Available : Yes  
Available in the Library : Yes  
Available through Student Association : No

Type: Other

Name: Carmilla (1872)  
Indicative price: € 5  
Optional: no  
Language : English  
Author : Sheridan Le Fanu  
Available on Ufora : No  
Online Available : Yes  
Available in the Library : Yes

## References

### Course content-related study coaching

**Assessment moments**

end-of-term and continuous assessment

**Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the first examination period**

Oral assessment

**Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the second examination period**

Oral assessment

**Examination methods in case of permanent assessment**

Participation, Assignment

**Possibilities of retake in case of permanent assessment**

examination during the second examination period is possible in modified form

**Extra information on the examination methods**

Individual Essay (2500 words): 40%

Individual Oral Assessment based on the Essay (15 minutes): 25%

Group Presentation: 30%

Participation: 5%

**Calculation of the examination mark**

The individual essay must be followed by the oral assessment. Students who do not sign up for the oral assignment will not pass the course, and the final mark, if higher than 7/20, will be lowered to the highest non-deliberable mark (7/20)

**Facilities for Working Students**

1. Working students will be eligible to receive alternative assignments if they cannot attend classes regularly.
2. Working students can make an appointment for feedback on their assignments.