

English 5366: Studies in Victorian Poetry: BYOT Blog Post Assignment

Assignment Goals

- To broaden our study of Victorian poetry by considering circulation in periodicals, with a focus on *Good Words* and *The Yellow Book*.
- To situate selections from Victorian periodical poetry in relation to wider textual, cultural, historical, and material contexts.
- To engage in meaningful dialogue with relevant criticism and contributions from classmates.
- To practice writing research-informed prose that is accessible to a range of audiences.

Assignment Overview

For this assignment, everyone will be responsible for contributing to our class learning by calling our attention to patterns observed and insights gained through reading Victorian poetry published in one of two of our adopted periodicals: *Good Words* and *The Yellow Book*.

This assignment provides an opportunity for you to expand your knowledge of Victorian print culture by using the digital search tools and resources available at [Digital Victorian Periodical Poetry \(DVPP\)](#). It also provides a chance for you to respond to insights from recent literary criticism on poetry published in our two chosen periodicals.

To prepare for this assignment, please begin by reading the two scholarly articles that are linked on our course site:

- Caley Ehnes, "Religion, Readership, and the Periodical Press: The Place of Poetry in *Good Words*." *Victorian Periodicals Review* vol. 45 no. 4 (2012): 466–487.
- Linda Hughes, "Women Poets and Contested Spaces in *The Yellow Book*." *SEL* vol. 44 no. 4 (2004): 849–872).

These articles will help us think critically about historical, material, and critical contexts pertaining to each of these periodicals. In addition to issues raised by each article, I encourage you to think about questions and ideas discussed during our previous seminars. Half of our class will work with poetry published in *Good Words*, thereby responding to Ehnes's insights. The other half of our class will work with poetry published in *The Yellow Book*, thereby responding to Hughes. Please see the sign-up sheet on our course site.

For this assignment, you are asked to **bring your own texts (BYOT)**—that is, highlight three or four poems from the DVPP dataset that demonstrate a formal, cultural, or discursive pattern that strikes you as worthy of further exploration. Responding to a series of writing prompts, you will then compose a short, blog-style report (1500-1750 words) on your process and findings. These BYOT blog entries will be posted on the forum on our course site. During our seminar on February 26th, we will discuss the assigned articles and review everyone's posts. Please be prepared to talk about your findings and respond to questions!

Essential Resources

This assignment is built around the research tools provided by the *Digital Victorian Periodical Poetry Project*: <https://dvpp.uvic.ca/>.

The features available on the “Search for Poems” page (<https://dvpp.uvic.ca/search.html>) allow you to restrict your results by periodical(s), date range, poet’s name, assigned sex, or nationality (ditto for illustrators and translators, if applicable).

Please keep in mind that at least one in your series of 3-4 poems must come from your adopted periodical (either *Good Words* or *The Yellow Book*). You are welcome to include one or more poems from different periodicals on the basis of some salient connection (authorship, genre, illustration, theme, etc.).

A list of all periodicals included in the *DVPP* index of poems, along with some information about the periodical’s editorship and the years it ran, can be found here (go to “Poems” -> “All Poems”): <https://dvpp.uvic.ca/periodicals.html>

In the case of *The Yellow Book*, which had a comparatively shorter run and published comparatively fewer poems, you might also find it useful to browse the listing of all poems from *The Yellow Book*, available here (go to “Poems” -> “All Poems” -> “The Yellow Book”): <https://dvpp.uvic.ca/yellowbook.html>).

Each individual poem has a valuable set of metadata, which you will see on the right-hand sidebar menu of the page for that poem (see, for example, https://dvpp.uvic.ca/poems/yellowbook/1894/pom_785_twilight.html). This metadata includes information about the poet(s), if known. Clicking on the name of the poet(s) will bring up the corresponding entry in the *DVPP* personography, which includes a brief biography as well as a list of other poems associated with this person in the database.

In addition to searching the poetry made available on this site, spend some time perusing digital versions of your chosen periodical. Doing so will allow you to examine your chosen poems in relation to their wider context within the magazine.

- Full text online access to all issues of *Good Words* can be found by going to “British Periodicals Collection 1” under “databases” at Texas State Libraries. Within this database, you can then search for the specific periodical *Good Words*.
- Full text online access to all issues of *The Yellow Book* is available on the web thanks to *The Yellow Nineties 2.0*: <https://1890s.ca/yellow-book-volumes/>.

Early in the semester, I will provide some orientation to the various search tools available on *DVPP*, along with some suggestions about how you might most effectively use these resources. I recommend exploring and playing around with *DVPP* well in advance of this assignment’s due date, so that you’re confident using the search tools before you begin the assignment. You are welcome to consult with me during office hours or over email as needed. I’m happy to help.

Writing the Blog Entries

There are many ways to write these short blog posts, and you are encouraged to follow your own creative and critical inclinations. Your entry (1500 to 1750 words) should be written in paragraphs and address the following points:

- **Critical Context**
 - What critical insights inspired your investigation? Blog entries are expected to cite and respond to observations from Ehnes (*Good Words*) or Hughes (*The Yellow Book*). In addition, you are encouraged to consider connections to observations and conversations from our previous seminars and readings.
- **Discovery Process**
 - How did you make use of the *DVPP* search tools? On what basis did you select your short series of three or more poems? Did you undertake any further research or reading to inform your inquiry?
- **Material Context**
 - Provide relevant details of titles, authorship, illustrator (if applicable), translator (if applicable), and publication date (including the volume information and pagination) for your chosen texts. If your series of poems includes poetry published in periodicals other than the one assigned, provide the details about the magazine and editor as well.
 - How are your selected texts placed within the context of the magazine itself (e.g., where do they appear within the issue?) To answer this question, you will need to check out the full text online versions of your chosen periodical.
 - Do any design features (layout, font, illustrations, etc.) visible from the “page views” on *DVPP* strike you as meaningful, and if so, why?
 - If you choose your texts based on something they have in common in their material contexts (e.g., the gender/nationality/signature/identity of authors, use of illustrations/translations, anonymous or pseudonymous authorship, etc.), explain your rationale and findings.
- **Formal Features**
 - Explain and analyze textual and conceptual patterns within your selected poems. In addition to discussing content/theme, analyze features of genre and style.
 - If you choose your texts based on something they have in common in their formal features (e.g., rhyme schemes, sonnet form, key words in title or content, etc.), explain your rationale and findings.
 - Provide specific examples to support your points, including brief quotations and close reading with parenthetical citations where appropriate (per MLA norms).
- **Takeaways and Questions**
 - Reflect on what you discovered as through this foray into Victorian periodical poetry. What critical concepts/problems/issues did this exploration raise? What angles might be pursued further? While the blog entries are expected to include thoughtful analysis and close reading, the goal is to be inquisitive and exploratory: the emphasis is less on defending a thesis than on generating questions.

Make sure to give your blog post an original and catchy title that hooks your reader's interest.

Include a Works Cited list that provides all relevant details for the material cited in your entry, including the poems retrieved from *DVPP* (per MLA norms). Depending on your choice of texts, you may also want to include images from *DVPP* as figures within your blog entry (page images, illustrations, etc.) These can be uploaded as additional files.

DVPP has provided helpful guidelines on how to cite the project as a whole as well as individual poems accessed through this project: please see the "Cite" page on the menu (https://dvpp.uvic.ca/cite_dvpp.html).

Each blog post will be posted to our online course site (so that everyone can read it) and submitted to the corresponding assignment drop box (so that I can grade it and provide structured feedback).

Writing Style

While these entries are informed by scholarly sources, they should be written in a clear, accessible style. Assume that you are writing for an "educated outsider" (e.g., someone who is generally informed but not immersed in this field), so make sure to provide relevant context and define any specialist terms. Some good examples of this type of short and research-informed prose written for public audiences can be found on the *JVC Online Blog* (<https://jvc.oup.com/>) and the *Victorian Review Blog* (<https://victorianreview.org/?cat=217>).

Evaluation Criteria

This assignment will be scored out of 30 and evaluated according to the following categories:

- Critical response and critical questions: insightfulness, clarity, and originality.
- Self-reflection: thoughtful metacognition and detailed description of research process.
- Evidence and analysis: judicious examples, critical vocabulary, and accurate citations.
- Writing: clear, well-organized, grammatically correct, rhetorically compelling, and appropriate length.
- Use of resources: assigned scholarly article, *DVPP* search tools and biography, and other sources as appropriate.

Appendix: Notes to Educators

The original context of this assignment was a graduate seminar that enrolled 12 students. I believe it could be easily adapted for an upper-year undergraduate course, perhaps by providing more in-class instruction and simplifying the scope of the blog post (e.g., reducing the word count and key questions). My course design made this assignment an opportunity for formative feedback midway through the semester: it was worth 15% of the course grade and due on the sixth week of a fourteen-week term.

In the spirit of keeping things simple, I asked students to post their “blog posts” on an online forum set up on our course site. This format preserved many of the features of a blog posts, including the ability of classmates to provide online comments. One potential assignment modification would be to require students to comment on a set number of their blog posts, thus encouraging further peer-to-peer learning. In my case, the seminar format allowed for robust discussion during our three-hour session, but in the context of an upper-year undergraduate course I believe it would be useful to ask students to provide brief written comments on each other’s work.

If bandwidth permits, another modification might be to use the discussion forum format as an initial assignment and opportunity for formative feedback and later create a course blog that would be available on the web. In this case, students might be given the opportunity to revise their initial submissions (perhaps as another low-stakes assignment) before publishing them. Setting up a course blog on WordPress or another similar platform would allow for greater celebration and sharing of learning.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not gratefully acknowledge that the concept of a BYOT (bring your own texts) assignment is something that I adapted from Dr. Lisa Surridge, whose graduate seminar on “Material Matters: The Victorian Book as Object” (English 551) I had the pleasure of taking at the University of Victoria during Spring 2016. I am further grateful to Dr. Alison Chapman (University of Victoria) for the opportunities to work as a research assistant / consultant for the *Digital Victorian Periodical Poetry Project*.