

The teacher's observations on the written exam in Romantic & Victorian Lit
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I am utterly disappointed by your overall performance. The grades speak for themselves.

Many of you over-worked the Quotation part, and neglected the Romantic Poet and the Victorian Novelist subjects. You guessed they would have equal weight. Wrong guess! The Quotation subject was in fact a concession I made to you, meaning to help you a bit, as it was mostly seminar-based. But, since this is an EXAM, I had to check what you assimilated from the course. So the quotation subject was devaluated: Quotation = 22%, Poet = 39%, Novelist = 39%.

For the **Quotation** part, I had expressly invited you to "choose one that would allow you to discuss one Victorian characteristic". Many of you just wrote the same old plot summary, or lame characterization, without paying attention at the formulation of the subject. No matter how brilliant those summaries were, none of those got beyond grade 6. Higher grades were obtained only if you connected your topic to a wider aspect of Victorian Age (science, morality, women's position) or literary Victorianism (omniscient narrator, objectivity..)

Frankenstein. I had around 15 people choosing a quotation from *Frankenstein*. With just one exception, none of them realized that *Frankenstein*, being published in 1818, could not belong to the Victorian Age (which started in 1837, with Queen Victoria's accession to the throne). So much about your knowledge of basic British history! Very few papers showed any awareness of these – and received a 5 or 5.50.

Cheating on Quotations. As I had long feared, some of you prepared comments on the quotation beforehand. Nothing wrong with that, except when these people actually *hid* those ready-made pages and produced them as if by magic during the class. These are:

Strimb Isabela - wrote an impossibly clean and perfect English analysis, which was no match at the rather deplorable work she did on the other subjects. As it turned out, it was all copied (and slightly adapted) from a Japanese website. I could have imagined she actually learned by heart the whole stuff, if it weren't for her perfectly relaxed calligraphy!

Nicoale Roxana - plagiarized from the infamous cheat mill SparkNotes, especially created to cater the needs of lazy subjects.

On the humorous side:

Critsetscu Raluca probably grabbed her quotation from the internet (obviously without ever opening the book). But Google can be tricky: it ended up turning not *The Invisible Man* by H.G. Wells but *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison (note the missing "the" article). There is no difference between the two, as they said at Radio Erevan, except that:

1. Ellison is (African-)American, not British (this course is about Brit.Lit after all).
2. Ellison wrote this novel in 1953, that is 51 years after the death of Queen Victoria. He cannot be called "a Victorian writer".
3. There is not a single element of science (or science fiction) in Ellison's book.

I know, “Google is no brainer” (=”nu-l bataie de cap”). Yeah, but one still needs to have some brains...

The subjects on the Poet & the Novelists are the simplest and most elementary I have ever given to a class of students. (In the previous years they would get something like “Omniscient narration in Victorian novels: reasons & uses” or “Women and education in Victorian Novel” or “Inspiration and the Genius in Romantic Poetry”, or “Constructions of Alterity in 19th Century Science Fiction”). OK, I was aware that the level of English & culture of many students in your class would not enable them to conceptualize such synteses, so I gave you the simplest subject one could imagine.

And yet, 80% of the students could not name 5 poems by one poet (BY the way, each of these poets is more important, in terms of European impact, than our Eminescu...) or 6 titles by a novelist. This is grotesque! These people do not deserve to be called “students” (and probably will soon cease to be...)! I know people who did not attend university (let alone a specialized English class) and who not only know the titles, but have actually read most of Hardy’s or Dickens’s novels.

I thought maybe that I, the professor, was to blame for this horrid result. Yet I don’t feel so. I have allotted each Romantic poet at least 1.5 hours of discussion. I have created new PowerPoint presentations to help you visualize and individualize these poets and address specifically those culturally “illiterate” among you. This required an extra effort, as it takes me about 3-6 hours to make one of these slide shows. We dedicated 5 weeks alone to the discussion of Romantic poetry... I gave you poetry handouts with the vocabulary explained in footnotes, so that you (I mean those lazy students) would not strain your intellectually virginal brains with dictionary work. How many of your teachers do that?

The same result in the Victorian Novelist section. Many of you were not able to give more than 1 or 2 novel titles. Few of you were able to make the intellectual effort of selecting 3 essential characteristics of these novelists’ art. (And no, the fact that Dickens had an unhappy childhood is *not* a feature of his art!).

As for me, I did my job. I started each class on these novelists (and poets) by giving you a list of the main characteristics of their art. Often the slide shows repeated those in visual form. I have made available for you the fully annotated copies of the novels. I invited you to borrow books from Room 8. I offered to print out the annotated books. Instead, you showed up at seminars without reading a word of those books, with hastily made printouts from Wikipedia or SparkNotes or other “cheat mills”. You made me be ashamed of you...

You either do not want to learn or you do not know how to do that. I will make sure you stay in this school long enough to learn it. Or quit. This is a promise.

One area where I was wrong was your attendance of my courses. Of the 40 students in this class, I usually had about 10 at our courses 8 a.m. Many more appeared at 10, to read their SparkNotes in the seminar.

This invites my reaction: Starting the next term, the attendance of my courses will be COMPULSORY - that is, obligatory. I will keep track of it and integrate it in your grade.

With utter disappointment,

Dr. Adrian Oțoiu