MA in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture 2016-17

QUESTIONING THE VICTORIANS:
TEXTS, CONTEXTS AND AFTERLIVES

Convenor: Dr James Williams

INTRODUCTION

This course surveys some of the major literary and cultural developments in, and the central preoccupations of, Victorian writing, as formulated by contemporaries and by recent critics and theorists. It introduces key thematic areas and problems in the interpretation of nineteenth-century literature across a broad range of genres. Sessions are grouped to enable students to sample theoretical, historical, and aesthetic approaches. Below is an outline of the module so you can see the whole term at a glance, followed by more detailed descriptions of seminars.

For each seminar there is core reading which is compulsory preparation, and also a selection of further reading which you are encouraged to sample as widely as possible. To give you an idea of what to expect, unless a tutor has indicate otherwise, a well-prepared MA student arriving for a seminar will have read all the core reading and at least three or four article-sized items—which could be, for example, book chapters—by different authors in the further reading.

THE TERM AT A GLANCE

Week 1: No seminar
Week 2: Authorship and Authority: Work, Gender and Power (Trev Broughton)
Week 3: Poetry and Philology (Matthew Townend)
Week 4: Monsieur Flaubert’s Crime: Madame Bovary (Geoffrey Wall)
Week 5: Making Sense of Nonsense (James Williams)
Week 6: READING WEEK
Week 7: Princess Casamassima and Great Expectations (Victoria Coulson)
Week 8: Civilizing Missions: Writing and Empire (Jim Watt)
Week 9: Oscar Wilde: Art, Theatricality, Aestheticism and Comedy in the Fin-de-Siècle (Hugh Haughton)
Week 10: V21 and Beyond (Trev Broughton)
SEMINAR INFORMATION

WEEK 2 AUTHORSHIP AND AUTHORITY: WORK, GENDER AND POWER
Dr Trev Broughton

What conditions shaped the emergence in the nineteenth century of the identity ‘author’ and the consolidation of writing for publication as a profession? What might it mean to think of representations of authorship historically, or as themselves kinds of history? How did Victorian writers conceive of their roles, responsibilities and rights? To what extent did class and gender condition the possibilities and experience of authorship? This seminar will begin by considering a number of different, but overlapping, engagements with these questions.

Core Reading
NB all these will be available as photocopies. Please do not write on them as I will need them back once you have finished with them.
Thomas Hood ‘Copyright and Copywrong’ (1837).
Thomas Carlyle ‘The Hero as Man of Letters’ (lecture delivered 1840, pub. 1841).
Elizabeth Barrett Browning Aurora Leigh II ll. 433—541 and III ll. 157—343 (1857).
Elizabeth Gaskell The Life of Charlotte Brontë (Volume I Chapter XIV).
Margaret Oliphant The Autobiography pp. 60—108 (written 1890—94).

Further Reading
Try to dip into at least one of the following:
Martin Danahay Gender at Work in Victorian Culture (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).
Philip Davis ‘Conditions of Literary Production’ in The Victorians, Oxford English Literary History vol. 8, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 197—256. This should be available as an e-book if you can’t find a paper copy.
Hilary Fraser et al., Gender and the Victorian Periodical (Cambridge: CUP, 2003).
The library also has stock on each of the writers you’ll be looking at this week – explore freely.

For influential poststructuralist accounts of the question of authorship, read, if you haven’t already, Roland Barthes ‘The Death of the Author’ and Michel Foucault ‘What is an Author?’ [1966]. Both are widely anthologised, but available in Vincent B. Leitch (ed.) *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*.

As preparation for the first seminar, pick a theme, idea, trope, image or concept and come along willing and able to talk informally for a few minutes (no more than 5) about how it connects (or distinguishes) representations of authorship/writing in two or more of the set texts (Hood, Carlyle etc). Examples might include ‘payment’, ‘independence’, ‘periodicals’, ‘paper’ – follow your nose. If you wish to illustrate your ideas with a short handout (no more than one side of A4), you can send it to me on jlb2@york.ac.uk before the day of the class and I’ll get it printed up.

**Week 3: Poetry and Philology**

**Dr Matthew Townend**

In the nineteenth century, the rise of the discipline of philology revolutionized attitudes to language. Philology taught its adherents to view language *historically*, in terms of change over time, but also *comparatively*, in terms of family connections between languages and reconstructed ancestor-forms. It furthermore accentuated the primacy of *spoken* language over written, and thus foregrounded the value of non-standard modern dialects. In emphasizing these points, philology formed part of broader historicist movements in the nineteenth century, and had obvious affinities with other new disciplines such as folklore, comparative mythology, and (of course) the study of evolution in the biological sciences. Victorian Britain’s supreme philological achievement was the production of the *Oxford English Dictionary* – begun in 1857, but not completed till 1928.

In encouraging an evolutionary approach to language, in recapturing older, lost words and meanings, and in rehabilitating unwritten, oral varieties, the new discipline of philology (literally, ‘the love of words’) profoundly changed how people thought about the English language (and other languages). It was inevitable, then, that philological thinking should have an impact on contemporary ideas about literary language. Two poets who were heavily influenced by Victorian philology were William Barnes (1801-86) and Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), and in this seminar we will examine how these two Dorset writers responded imaginatively to the insights and opportunities which philological study revealed. Barnes was an important early worker in the fields of dialectology and historical philology, and should probably be regarded as the most influential dialect poet of the nineteenth century. Hardy shared some of Barnes’ interests, but was especially concerned with how the enlarged vistas of philology made available a whole range of forms and words from different times and places.

In our seminar, we will look closely at a number of poems by Barnes and Hardy, as well as a piece of prose writing by each. The first, 1844 edition of Barnes’ *Poems of Rural Life in the Dorset Dialect* includes a ‘Dissertation’ on that dialect; we will place
this alongside the introduction that Hardy wrote when he edited a selection of Barnes’ poems in 1908 (the only editorial work that Hardy ever undertook).

**Reading**
All the primary texts will be made available in advance, either in photocopied or digitized form: you should read these carefully, and bring them along to the seminar. The secondary reading is all available electronically, as either e-books or e-journals; please read a sample of the items listed.

**Core Reading**
Selected poems by William Barnes (to be supplied)
Selected poems by Thomas Hardy (to be supplied)

**Further reading … on Victorian philology**

… on Barnes

… on Hardy

**Week 4: Monsieur Flaubert’s Crime: Madame Bovary**
Mr Geoffrey Wall

In January 1857, the author of Madame Bovary was prosecuted ‘for offences against public morality and religion’. Though the prosecution ultimately failed, the trial itself
stands as a major episode in the history of censorship, as well as in the more diffuse history of indignation. Fortunately for posterity, a verbatim transcript of the trial was commissioned by the defence. Thereafter, in compliance with Flaubert’s wishes, that transcript is always appended to French editions of the novel. Thus, for the first generation of readers of Madame Bovary, the meta-textual legal drama of the trial was always a conspicuous supplement to the text of the novel. In the many hours of speeches, for and against, a whole structure of feeling, let us call it conjugality, was laid bare.

Flaubert’s crime, his primary cultural transgression, was that he had ‘done’ Emma Bovary’s voice. Done it with such insidious authenticity, such seductive intimacy, such textual-erotic magic, that conventional moral judgment upon the adulterous woman was rendered powerless. The Bovary trial raised a host of questions about reading, realism, emotion, imagination, gender and judgment.

**Core Reading**

**Further Reading**
Dominick LaCapra, Madame Bovary on Trial (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1982).

**WEEK 5: MAKING SENSE OF NONSENSE**
**Dr James Williams**

In one sense, nonsense writing has always existed, in every culture; in another sense, it is peculiarly a phenomenon of Victorian England, the product of two writers whose names are consequently always linked to each other: Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll. This seminar seeks to explore the work of these two writers and ask some fundamental questions: What kind of sense might there be in nonsense? Is nonsense always easily differentiated from sense? What are the literary debts and legacies of Victorian nonsense? What is particularly Victorian about nonsense, and what isn’t? Is nonsense for children, and why might that matter? Where do the styles of writing of Lear and Carroll overlap, and where do they differ? How might close attention to nonsense help us see other forms and genres of literature more clearly, or in new light?

**Core Reading**

**Further Reading**


**WEEK 6: READING WEEK (NO SEMINAR)**

**WEEK 7: THE PRINCESS CASAMASSIMA AND GREAT EXPECTATIONS**

**Dr Victoria Coulson**

My seminar will be on Henry James, *The Princess Casamassima* and Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*. Students will need to have read both texts closely and must have hard copies of each. I will contact you once term begins with specific information about how to prepare for the seminar - this will be a list of topics and questions concerning the two novels. I will not set any secondary reading.

**WEEK 8: CIVILIZING MISSIONS: WRITING AND EMPIRE**

**Dr Jim Watt**

‘There is a destiny now possible to us’, John Ruskin declared in his 1870 inaugural lecture at Oxford, ‘the highest ever set before a nation to be accepted or refused’. This session begins with a discussion of the idea of imperial destiny in speeches by Livingstone and Ruskin, and it goes on to consider a range of more critical and/or sceptical perspectives on the ‘civilizing mission’ of empire, including from writers who locate a savage darkness within Britain itself.

**Core Reading**

David Livingstone, ‘Cambridge Lecture no.1’ (1858).

John Ruskin, ‘Inaugural Lecture’ (1870).

The Livingstone and Booth are in Imperialism and Orientalism: A Documentary Sourcebook, ed. Barbara Harlow and Mia Carter (Blackwell, 1999), and the Ruskin, Blyden, Conrad, and Kipling are in Empire Writing: An Anthology of Colonial Writing, 1870-1918, ed. Elleke Boehmer (Oxford World’s Classics, 1998). These pieces are all fairly short, and photocopies will be provided.

Further reading
Joseph McLaughlin, Writing the Urban Jungle: Reading Empire in London from Doyle to Eliot (University of Virginia Press, 2000).

WEEK 9: OSCAR WILDE: ART, THEATRICALITY, AESTHETICISM AND COMEDY IN THE FIN-DE-SIÈCLE
Prof. Hugh Haughton

This seminar will look at Wilde in relation to theatricality, aestheticism and sexuality, setting his hyper-self-conscious farce The Importance of Being Earnest against two critical dialogues from Intentions (1890) and his fictional essay on Shakespeare, ‘The Portrait of Mr. W.H.’

Wilde was a master of numerous art-forms – poetry, theatre, fiction, fairy-tale, novel, review and critical essay among them – but he was also a major theorist of art, working in and against the English tradition of Ruskin, Arnold, Morris and Pater, and the French tradition of Gautier, Baudelaire and Huysmans. The nature of his own art as well as his thinking about art have been subject to scandal and controversy from the first, and we will look at the changing critical reception of Wilde from his own time to ours, as well as at the forms of theatrical questioning and self-questioning he practised in his plays and prose. Wilde is in many ways a transitional figure between ‘Victorian’ and ‘Modern’, and we will explore how Wilde’s writings
bring together art and scandal, comedy and sexuality, in a way that continues to challenge our notions of cultural, moral and biographical identity.

**Core Reading**

**Further Reading**
**On Wilde:**

**On The Importance of Being Earnest and Wilde’s theatre:**
Kerry Powell, *Oscar Wilde and the Theatre of the 1890s* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990)

**On Intentions and Wilde’s essays:**
Julia Prewitt Brown, *Cosmopolitan Criticism: Oscar Wilde’s Philosophy of Art* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1997)

**WEEK 10: V21 AND BEYOND**
**Dr Trev Broughton**

The ‘ten theses’ of the V21 collective have recently livened up debate among Victorianists, and animated the self-consciousness of individual scholars about their locations, assumptions, methods and aspirations. They are in part inspired by the work of Caroline Levine, in her recent book *Forms: Wholes, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton, N.J.:Princeton University Press, 2015). We will make parts of this text available.

They can be found here: [http://v21collective.org/manifesto-of-the-v21-collective-ten-theses](http://v21collective.org/manifesto-of-the-v21-collective-ten-theses)
The Manifesto in turn generated a series of blog posts or think pieces (e.g. http://v21collective.org/ian-newman-on-amused-chuckling/). For the purposes of this exercise you’ll need to follow the instructions to sign up for the blog (on the right of the initial v21 screen), so that you can read some of the ensuing debates. Spend some time browsing around the various interventions and think pieces. Keep in mind that the collective bears the imprint of its US provenance, and certainly doesn’t represent Victorian Studies everywhere. In particular it tends to speak to a certain post-modernist/language-dominated configuration of interdisciplinarity: one many British historians (for instance) would not recognize. Martin Hewitt’s post https://profmartinhewitt.com/2015/03/26/v21-manifesto-ten-alternative-theses/ (which was initially rejected by V21 amid social media recriminations) is a case in point.

An alternative debate, with a more historical rather than formalist slant, can be found in Peter Andersson’s ‘How Civilized were the Victorians?’ Journal of Victorian Culture 2014: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13555502.2015.1090673 with responses and reflections by Andersson, Navickas, Franklin, Huggins, Matthews-Jones, Steinbach, and Betts on JVC online http://blogs.tandf.co.uk/jvc/ See for instance http://blogs.tandf.co.uk/jvc/2016/01/03/oliver-betts-how-civilized-were-the-victorians-a-reply/

As preparation for this, our final session of the module, I would ask you to pick out one or more of the suggested tasks below, and come to the class prepared to lead part of the discussion based on your preparations. If you want any handouts photocopied, please send them to me at jlb2@york.ac.uk at least 24 hours before the session.

• Pick out a thread or idea from the ongoing V21 debate, or the ‘How Civilized’ debate, and consider how it might relate to an aspect of your work on the module (or your nineteenth-century studies generally). Come prepared with some ideas and/or a handout to share.

• Bring a handout in which part of the V21 debate is situated alongside a piece of nineteenth-century text -- or a piece of secondary criticism -- of your choice. How do they illuminate or challenge each other?

• Offer a short (no more than 5 minute) presentation on an aspect of the V21 debate, or the ‘How Civilized’ debate, that particularly annoyed, inspired or challenged you.

• Write your own V@Y21 Manifesto (make it as long or as short as you like) and be prepared to discuss/defend it.

• Write a short ‘post’ in the V21 think-piece style and bring copies for us to share.

James Williams
July 2016