MA in Victorian Literature and Culture 2018-19

QUESTIONING THE VICTORIANS: TEXTS, CONTEXTS AND AFTERLIVES

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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 indicates, 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: Introductory Meeting (James Williams)*
Week 2: Introducing Postgraduate Victorian Studies: V21 and Beyond (Trev Broughton)
Week 3: Elizabeth Gaskell’s North and South (Trev Broughton)
Week 4: The Invention of Irish Poetry (Matthew Campbell)
Week 5: The Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian ‘Literary’ Painters (Elizabeth Prettejohn)
Week 6: READING WEEK
Week 7: Making Sense of Nonsense (James Williams)
Week 8: Princess Casamassima and Great Expectations (Victoria Coulson)
Week 9: Yellowing the 1890s: The Yellow Book (Nicoletta Asciuto)
Week 10: Oscar Wilde: Art, Theatricality, Aestheticism and Comedy in the Fin-de-Siècle (Hugh Haughton)

* Please note this meeting is for students taking the Victorian Literature and Culture MA, rather than for all students taking Questioning the Victorians.

With the exception of Week 1, Seminars meet on Mondays at 4pm. Please consult online timetables for room information.
SEMINAR INFORMATION

WEEK 2: V21 AND BEYOND
Dr Trev Broughton

This seminar is designed as an introduction to some of the most recent and/or consequential debates in Victorian literary studies. We start with some big but important questions. What does it mean to ‘read closely’? What are the implications of reading in the light of historical context (and what, anyway, does ‘Victorian’ mean)? Does ‘form’ matter, and if so, how? Our first session drops us straight into what is perhaps the most recent cluster of developments: the so-called V21 controversy.

In 2015 the ‘ten theses’ of the V21 collective livened up debate among Victorianists, and animated the self-consciousness of individual scholars about their locations, assumptions, methods and aspirations. The members of the V21 collective 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 via the VLE.


The Manifesto in turn generated a series of blog posts or think pieces (e.g. [http://v21collective.org/ian-newman-on-amused-chuckling/](http://v21collective.org/ian-newman-on-amused-chuckling/) ) For the purposes of this week’s 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. An even more recent offshoot is the V21 ‘Forum on Strategic Presentism’ in *Victorian Studies* 59 1 (Autumn 2016): 87—126. This is made up of several short pieces and you should be able to access them via the University Library Website, ‘E-Resources’, ‘P’ ‘Project Muse’ ‘strategic presentism’: [https://muse-jhu-edu.libproxy.york.ac.uk/](https://muse-jhu-edu.libproxy.york.ac.uk/).

Keep in mind that the Collective bears the imprint of its US provenance, and certainly doesn’t represent Victorian Studies everywhere, or even all North American Victorian Studies. 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/](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.

Whether you agree with it or not, it would be useful to think about the implications of the ‘return to Form’ advocated by Caroline Levine, so start with her book even if the subsequent debate is not your cup of tea. And if it isn’t, try one of these alternative approaches:

a) An intervention with a more historical rather than a formalist slant can be found in Peter Andersson’s ‘How Civilized were the Victorians?’ *Journal of Victorian Culture* 20.4:
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/. A fuller version of the various responses can be found in the ‘Roundtable’ feature of Journal of Victorian Culture 22.1 (Spring 2017): 57-122, with an additional piece by Andersson:
http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rjvc20/22/1?nav=toc
Journal of Victorian Culture is available via the library catalogue.

b) Alternatively, for an historian’s perspective on some of this you might look at the (trans-period) ‘Viewpoint’ section of the recent Past and Present 234.1 (Feb 2017) on ‘Presentism’. Again, this is available via the library catalogue.

As preparation for this, our first 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 offer up some ideas, responses, or provocations. These do not have to be complicated or sophisticated: just something that expresses your reaction (however confused, annoyed or whatever…). Remember – everyone is in the same boat, and there are no right answers or preferred approaches.

- Bring along a passage from next week’s set text (North and South) and use it to raise questions about the usefulness (or limitations) of thinking about ‘form’ or ‘history’ or both. Send a copy of your chosen passage to me to photocopy (see below).
- 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 3 minute) presentation on an aspect of the V21 debate, or the ‘How Civilized’ debate, that particularly irritated, 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.

If you want any handouts photocopied, please send them to me at jlb2@york.ac.uk at least 24 hours before the session.

**WEEK 3: ELIZABETH GASKELL’S NORTH AND SOUTH**
**Dr Trev Broughton**

In 1851 the national Census showed that for the first time in British history, more people lived in the city than in the country. The new industrial cities were seen as representing the best and the worst of Britain, and in the first half of the nineteenth century Manchester came under particular attention as the city in which commentators saw both the promise of a new Jerusalem and the horrors of the future. Gaskell’s novel asks many of the questions which troubled people of the time:
How can a country call itself civilised, and Christian, and yet allow such poverty to exist? What should the relationship be between factory-owner and worker? Did the same class distinctions hold true for north and south of England? How obedient should one be, and to which laws? Did the new social order provide new opportunities for women? And what should the role of literature be in this troubled time?

**Core Reading**

**Further Reading**
The Introduction to the OUP recommended edition is useful, as is its bibliography. See also:


And some related primary reading...
Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton* (1848).

**WEEK 4: INVENTING IRISH POETRY: MOORE, FERGUSON, MANGAN**

Prof. Matthew Campbell

What was going on in Ireland before Yeats and Joyce? Was it all just gothic novels, famine and emigration, folksongs and music hall? Why do ‘Victorian poetry people’ not read nineteenth-century Irish poems? Just how can we think about Victoria's Great Britain if we are not aware it had been since the Act of Union with Ireland in 1801 also a United Kingdom? Why do we think about Victorian England but 19th Century Ireland? How did Irish literature emerge from a European nationalism and republicanism that largely left England alone? And which are the good poems that it would be a pleasure to read and understand? These and other questions will be raised in this seminar.

**Core Reading**
A short anthology of texts will be circulated in advance via the VLE.

**Further Reading**

Some Anthologies

Zimmermann, George Denis. *Songs of Irish Rebellion* 2nd edn. (Dublin: Four Courts, 2002).

Some History and Criticism

Arnold, Matthew, *On The Study of Celtic Literature* (1867) [various editions, including online at Project Gutenberg].

———, and Michael Perraudin (eds), *The Voice of the People 1760-1914* ([s.l.]: Anthem, 2012).


Princeton University Library Chronicle (Special Issue on Irish Poetry), 59, 3 (1998).


**WEEK 5: THE PRE-RAPHAELITES: VICTORIAN ‘LITERARY’ PAINTERS**  
*Prof. Elizabeth Prettejohn*

This seminar will explore the visual art of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, their close associates and followers. Why are works of Pre-Raphaelite visual art overwhelmingly popular with museum and gallery audiences, yet treated with condescension or disdain by many art historians and curators? The seminar will address this question in a variety of ways, and will pay particular attention to the frequent charge that Pre-Raphaelite painting is ‘too literary’.

**Core Reading — well, actually, Looking**

Please familiarize yourselves with works by Pre-Raphaelite artists in the collections of Tate, the Ashmolean (Oxford), or Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, which can easily be accessed through their websites (listed below). You may make your own choice of which works to study; please choose at least 4-6 works by different artists, for example: Ford Madox Brown, Edward Burne-Jones, Charles Allston Collins, Arthur Hughes, John Everett Millais, William Morris, Dante Gabriel Rossetti,
Elizabeth Eleanor Siddall, John William Waterhouse, Joanna Boyce Wells, Thomas Woolner.

Tate: search at http://www.tate.org.uk/art/

Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery
Pre-Raphaelite Online Resource at http://www.preraphaelites.org/
See also the gallery installation shots at http://www.birminghammuseums.org.uk/bmag/highlights/the-pre-raphaelites


Another useful resource for finding pictures in public collections is the BBC’s Your Paintings website: http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings/

Please try to make an opportunity to see the important exhibition on Edward Burne-Jones at Tate Britain, 24 October 2018–24 February 2019.

Further Reading
[All the following are in Key Texts]
Tim Barringer, Jason Rosenfeld, and Alison Smith, Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Avant-Garde, exhibition catalogue (London: Tate, 2012).
Elizabeth Prettejohn, The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites (London: Tate, 2000).
Elizabeth Prettejohn, ed., The Cambridge Companion to the Pre-Raphaelites (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); also available as e-book.

WEEK 6: READING WEEK (NO SEMINAR)

WEEK 7: 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**
Edward Lear, selections from *The Complete Nonsense and Other Verse*, ed. Vivien Noakes (London: Penguin Classics, 2006). Keen nonsensifiers will want to acquire and read the whole thing, but a selection will be made available on the VLE.

**Further Reading**

**WEEK 8: THE PRINCESS CASAMASSIMA AND GREAT EXPECTATIONS**
**Dr Victoria Coulson**

The purpose of this seminar is to look in depth at the treatment of topics that retained a cultural centrality across the British and American nineteenth century in related novels by two literary giants of the period, Charles Dickens and Henry James.
To prepare for the seminar, students should read both novels in full: I will be in touch in the autumn with details of specific topics to consider. As these are substantial novels, and the seminar will focus on developing nuanced, sophisticated analyses of specific passages, students will not be required to undertake any additional, critical reading.
WEEK 9: YELLOWING THE 1890s: THE YELLOW BOOK
Dr Nicoletta Asciuto

Yellow and green were the two colours appropriated by Decadent writers and artists as symbolical of natural decay: this week, we shall closely scrutinize one particular shade of late Victorian and Decadent yellow, The Yellow Book. [T]he Oscar Wilde of periodicals, as it was welcomed by one of its first reviewers, The Yellow Book was relatively short-lived (13 volumes over three years) yet it caused a real sensation amongst the late Victorians which still fascinates scholars today. With its blend of literature, art, satire, erotica, and even tradition, The Yellow Book quickly established itself as challenging Victorian morals and the precursor of modern literary magazines. In this seminar, we will discuss the texts of The Yellow Book in its original publishing context as well as consider its wider social, cultural, aesthetic, political, and literary value for the end of the Victorian age and for the looming twentieth century.

Core Reading
The Yellow Book: An Illustrated Quarterly (London: The Bodley Head/John Lane, 1894-1897). The Yellow Book is available in hard copy in the library, as well as via the ProQuest database (via Library website). It is also easily available in open access via the website The Yellow Nineties Online (www.1890s.ca). Please come to the seminar having read Volume I (1894) of The Yellow Book in full.

Please also read the following two reviews of The Yellow Book’s first volume:

Further Reading
Ian Fletcher, Decadence and the 1890s (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1890).

WEEK 10: OSCAR WILDE: ART, THEATRALITY, 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:**

**On Intentions and Wilde’s essays:**

James Williams,
July 2018.