MA in Victorian Literature and Culture 2015-16

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 and art, as formulated by contemporaries and by recent critics and theorists. It introduces key thematic areas and problems in the interpretation of nineteenth-century literature and painting across a broad range of genres, and aims to enable students to sample different 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.

Seminar plans differ according to tutors’ preferences, but in most cases 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 a rule-of-thumb sense of what to expect, unless a tutor has specified 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: Marx’s Ghostly Matters (John Bowen)
Week 4: Victorian Genres (James Williams)
Week 5: Tennyson’s Princess: Poetry and Progress (Matthew Campbell)

Week 6: READING WEEK

Week 7: The Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian ‘Literary’ Painters (Elizabeth Prettejohn)
Week 8: Civilizing Missions: Writing and Empire (Jim Watt)
Week 9: Princess Casamassima and Great Expectations (Victoria Coulson)
Week 10: Round Table Discussion: the V21 Manifesto (James Williams and others)
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. Alternatively, choose a short passage (no more than half a page) from one of the extracts (Trollope, Carlyle etc) and come prepared to lead a five minute discussion based on it. 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 jlbz@york.ac.uk before the day of the class and I’ll get it printed up.

**WEEK 3: MARX’S GHOSTLY MATTERS**
**Prof. John Bowen**

Karl Marx was a contemporary of Dickens and George Eliot and did much of his most important writing in England. His legacies have continued to haunt the study of Victorian literature and culture and this seminar explores some of the key moments of that presence and inheritance.

**Core Reading**
Karl Marx ‘The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napolon Bonaparte’, in *Surveys from Exile* ed. David Fernbach, especially sections 1 and 7. Also available on line at [http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/)

**Further reading**

**WEEK 4: VICTORIAN GENRES**
**Dr James Williams**

Victorian literature is full of genres meeting, clashing, overlapping, dissolving, reforming. To give just a few examples, we find novels taking on the essay (George
Eliot, Henry James); essays doing the work of fiction (Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde); life-writing, fiction and autobiography refusing to stay apart (John Ruskin); children’s literature re-making itself and critiquing the canon from the margins (George MacDonald, Lewis Carroll). In this seminar, we'll focus on a particularly central pressure-point in the study of Victorian genre: the way poetry responds to the dominance and ambition of the contemporary novel. We'll look at two poetic texts which are responding to the pressures of the novel (as well as moving between epic, lyric, and satire, comedy and tragedy): Arthur Hugh Clough’s *Amours de Voyage* (1858), and George Meredith’s *Modern Love* (1862). We’ll be reading them closely and asking a number of distinct but related questions: how did the Victorians think about and classify their literature? Where do we find genres in conversation or in flux, and how do we read texts which self-consciously cross over genre boundaries? What might modern and contemporary genre theory have to say to the Victorians (and what might they say back)?

**Core Reading**


Full e-texts of all both poems are also available via Literature Online (LION) and (for Clough only) Project Gutenberg.

**Further Reading**


WEEK 5: TENNYSON’S PRINCESS: POETRY AND PROGRESS
Prof. Matthew Campbell

Tennyson’s Princess Ida notoriously dismisses the sentiment of the great blank verse lyric of the passion of the past ‘Tears, idle tears’ by looking forward to ‘That great year of equal mights and rights’. The Princess: A Medley, published in various versions between 1847 and 1851, was Tennyson’s most substantial publication before In Memoriam (1850). While its everyday tale of male undergraduates dressing up in drag to sneak into a University of women before being afflicted by ‘weird seizures’ might appear to be a rather more burlesque achievement than we associate with the man who was to become Victoria’s laureate in 1850, it broaches topics of feminism, science, progress and poetry which are crucial to an understanding of mid-Century Britain. It also contains a number of great Tennysonian lyrics along with ‘Tears Idle tears’ – ‘The splendour falls’, ‘Now sleeps the crimson petal’ and ‘Come down O Maid’ – which are by turns erotic and elegiac. The Princess is a tale of psychic breakdown, restoration and love told in lush faux-medieval surroundings.

Core Reading
Alfred Tennyson, The Princess. The standard edition of Tennyson is edited by Christopher Ricks, The Poems of Tennyson, 2nd edn. 3 vols. (London: Longman, 1987). Full texts of the poem are also widely available online via, eg., Literature Online (LION) and Project Gutenberg.

Further Reading
Seamus Perry, Tennyson (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2005).

WEEK 6: READING WEEK

WEEK 7: 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 — and 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/](http://www.tate.org.uk/art/)

Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery
See also the gallery installation shots at [http://www.birminghammuseums.org.uk/bmag/highlights/the-pre-raphaelites](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/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings/)

**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 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: 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 10: Round-Table Discussion: The V21 Manifesto
Dr James Williams and others

The term will conclude with a round-table discussion with as many tutors present as possible, in which you’ll have a chance to ask questions arising from the term’s
seminars. We'll be particularly asking: what are the live issues in Victorian studies today? What does the field look like, and what contributions might you make? As a spur for this discussion we'll talk about the recent *V21 Manifesto*, produced by a group of scholars dissatisfied with what they see as the failings of mainstream Victorian studies (on line at http://v21collective.org/manifesto-of-the-v21-collective-ten-theses/). Please come having read this carefully, and take a little time to explore the wider V21 website, which will set the manifesto in context.

James Williams
July 2015