



Mary Couts Burnett Library
Texas Christian University Campus

MIDWEST VICTORIAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION VICTORIAN POWER

— Seminar Descriptions —

Participants in MVSA seminars will write 5-7 page papers that will be pre-circulated to the other participants prior to the conference. During the seminars, the seminar leader and participants will identify important points of intersection and divergence among the papers and identify future areas of inquiry and collaboration. The seminar format allows a larger number of scholars to participate in MVSA and to seek financial support from their respective institutions to attend the conference and discuss a shared area of scholarly interest. Seminars are limited to 12 participants.

*All seminar proposals should be submitted via e-mail by
December 1, 2018.*

The Power of Protocols: The Genres and Institutions of Art

Seminar Leader: Pamela Fletcher, Department of Art History, Bowdoin College

Conventions of genre, exhibition, performance, publication, and review are the protocols and structures within which art is created, experienced, and evaluated. They shape artists' choices and viewers' expectations, serving both as guides to creation and interpretation, and as foils against which artists innovate and experiment. Over the long nineteenth century, many of these norms underwent dramatic change, as new forms of art and new models of display, performance, and publishing addressed ever-expanding audiences. And yet these protocols are not usually the object of study in their own right, perhaps because, by definition, they were so familiar to their practitioners that they were rarely explicitly codified or even discussed.

How, then, might we uncover and theorize the unspoken conventions that govern the creation and reception of art? Nicholas Dames has recently advocated for attentiveness to the protocols of Victorian book reviewing, arguing that it is precisely within the seemingly formulaic nature of the reviews that a Victorian theory of the novel can be found. In this Seminar, we will explore the implications of Dames' insight across a larger range of protocols governing artistic practice, broadly defined here to include visual culture as well as literature, music, and drama. For example, how did the hanging practices and architecture of the annual Royal Academy exhibition shape how artists imagined their pictures, and how viewers responded to them? How did conventions of genre set readers' and viewers' expectations for both the formal and affective experience of a work of art? And how did artists self-consciously work with or against those expectations? The Seminar invites papers that both explore individual case studies and develop methodologies to read seemingly mundane conventions as evidence of deeply held assumptions and beliefs about art and its power.

Send a 300-word abstract and 1-page CV (both as MWord documents) by **December 1, 2018**, to Pamela Fletcher at pfletche@bowdoin.edu.

**(Dis)locating and Provincializing Victorian Power:
Travel, Immigration, Class-Caste and Gender Mobility, Refugee Identity, and Exile**
Seminar Leader: Purna Banerjee, Department of English, Presidency University–Calcutta

The massive advancement in science, technology and industrialization in the nineteenth century rapidly reshaped the cultural landscape, political ecology, and the social structure of Britain and its colonies. The Great Exhibition of Works of Industry of All Nations (1851), organized by Prince Albert and members of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce was both an assertion of Britain's power and a celebration of its geopolitical superiority, especially as Europe emerged from two decades of crippling political and social upheaval. Sceptics like Marx "read" the Great Exhibition as a sign of capitalist fetishism of commodities, while inside the glittering Crystal Palace, an apparently egalitarian space to showcase Industrial progress and human ingenuity, Britain took center-stage in proclaiming its global power; however, not without unease. Over six million people came to London, the highest recorded mobility and displacement in European migration history until then, to see the Great Exhibition, despite it being an age marked by anxieties of travel, over-population, immigration, contagion, disease, and miscegenation. Despite the many and disparate detractors— from Marxian denunciations to aristocratic pronouncements on vulgar proximity to the world of commerce by King Augustus I of Hanover (and fears of the visitors morphing into revolutionary mobs)—the spectacle of The Great Exhibition may also be considered as a metonymic instance of British power being simultaneously projected and challenged by the presence of Others.

This Seminar seeks participants for an interdisciplinary discussion of other corollaries of the stated metonymic instance, such as, but not limited to, debates over citizenship, as they appear in texts that also document instances of subversion, dislocation, and provincialization of Victorian power and presence in fictional (novels and short stories) and nonfictional (journalism, ethnographies, diaries, travel narratives, letters etc.) narratives from the nineteenth century. These debates remain as relevant today as they were in the Victorian period, especially in narratives of contacts between different social, gendered, racial and colonial communities and their fluid metropolitan allegiances that accompanied the growth of imperial capitalism.

Send a 300-word abstract and 1-page CV (both as MWord documents) by **December 1, 2018**, to Purna Banerjee at purnabanerjee.chak@gmail.com.

Alternative Sources of Power: Victorian Religious Ecologies
Seminar Leader: Joshua King, Department of English, Baylor University

Putting "religion" next to "power" in scholarship on nineteenth-century Britain often used to entail portraying the first as holy oil lubricating the grim gears of the second, an ideological aid to capitalism, imperialism, and consumerism—and to the ecological violence on which these have depended. Yet, following the "religious turn" in the humanities and social sciences after the mid 1990s, many scholars have acknowledged the counter-cultural and even activist energies sustained by Victorian theologies, devotional literature, and religious ritual.

This Seminar calls for an explicitly ecological extension of this interest in the counter-cultural power of Victorian religion. It invites interdisciplinary attention to Victorian religious ecologies, instances of Victorians discovering in and through their theologies and religious practices ecologically sensitive sources of power for social, individual, and creative life. Of primary interest will be those efforts to imagine and participate in forms of power attentive to the biotic and inanimate communities in which humans are embedded, challenging the environmental destruction and injustice entailed in modern industrial capitalism. One might consider, for example, how John Ruskin built on his belief in a divinely sustained and significant natural world to champion an agrarian craft economy that would be powered by water, sun, and wind, and that would cultivate loving knowledge of fellow creatures. Poets such as

Christina Rossetti and Gerard Manley Hopkins lamented modern environmental violence, and in their poetics diversely evoked a world charged with the grandeur of God, in which the divine life of the Trinity pulsed through every stem, paw, and stone. Less often recognized are the natural theologies underlying Chartist poetry, protest, and preaching, which frequently repudiate laissez-faire political economy, envisioning the earth and its bodies in an egalitarian community sustained by a common creator. Equally important are the ways in which Victorian religious ecologies can be discerned beyond Christian discourses and the British metropole, emerging, for example, among the Brahmo Samaj, a Hindu reformist society begun in Calcutta, through their visions of a divinely sustained, affective community of beings that would overcome imperialism and nationalism. Seminar participants are encouraged to identify many more examples. The Seminar invites papers that will combine willingness to examine Victorian religious ecologies as serious and potentially revelatory experiments in thought and practice, even as they remain alert to the blind spots, injustices, and insufficiencies of these experiments.

Send a 300-word abstract and 1-page CV (both as MWord documents) by **December 1, 2018**, to Joshua King at Joshua_King@baylor.edu.

The Midwest Victorian Studies Association is an interdisciplinary organization welcoming scholars from all disciplines who share an interest in nineteenth-century British history, literature, and culture.

For more information, please visit www.midwestvictorian.org.

