

Victorian and Edwardian Literature  
“The Empire Writes Back”

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Tuesday/Thursday 11:10a-12:40p  
Office Hours: T/R 1:00-2:30p

Our course’s title is taken from Salman Rushdie’s 1982 article in *The Times* “The Empire Writes Back, with a Vengeance.” Rushdie argues that by co-opting and combining British English with different global languages, the “Empire writes back to the Centre.” In discussing how global literature forges “English into new shapes,” Rushdie is primarily concerned with twentieth-century authors. This course maps out a prehistory of Rushdie’s interventions by highlighting works of literature that “wrote back” to the Empire during the nineteenth century, an age of dramatic colonial and imperial expansion. “The Empire Writes Back” introduces students to the literary and cultural study of the Victorian and Edwardian periods (approximately 1830-1914) through the voices of the Empire’s émigrés, cosmopolites, and colonial subjects. We will be taking up discussions related to the rise of liberalism and social protest, the Woman Question, the Crisis of Faith, mourning culture, aestheticism and decadence, and the relationship between Victorian and Modernist literary traditions. Anchoring our readings will be two central questions: how do we define what it means to be “British” within a global network of literary exchange, and how do our texts under consideration write both with and against the Empire?

**Learning Objectives:**

1. To acquaint students with major figures, genres, and forms in nineteenth-century literature and media.
2. To chart the development of literary, material, visual within a global context. We will be studying the production and dissemination of a variety of texts, including but not limited to the novel, poetry, non-fiction prose, as well as visual and textual ephemera.
3. To familiarize students with the social, intellectual, and technological contexts reflected in and constituted by various texts. In particular we will be focusing on treatments of gender, sexuality, class, race and ethnicity, and disability in both written and visual texts.
4. To refine analytical skills, including close reading, critical thinking, and communicating effectively in both verbal and written forms.
5. To identify some of the major concerns or “problems” in Victorian studies research and participate in current scholarly conversations.

**Class Expectations:**

1. You will come in having read every assigned text thoroughly and will be prepared to discuss it. Please purchase the editions of the books listed on the syllabus (I have provided ISBN numbers) so that we are all on the same page, literally.
2. Class will occasionally start with in-class writing assignments. These are short, informal, and designed to prepare you for participating in class. You are to take these writing exercises seriously and write the entire allotted time.
3. Occasionally we will do in-class activities that require technology, but non-class-related use technology is not permitted.

## Required Texts:

- Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince* (ISBN-13: 978-0140437492)
- Mary Seacole, *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands* (ISBN-13: 978-0140439021)
- Henry Box Brown, *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown, Written By Himself* (ISBN-13: 978-0807858905)
- T.N. Mukharji, *A Visit to Europe* (ISBN-13: 978-1230416854)
- Natsume Soseki, *I am a Cat* (ISBN-13: 978-0804832656)
- Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, *Sultana's Dream and Padmarag* (ISBN-13: 978-0143430186)

\*\*the rest of the assignments will be posted on our course's BlackBoard site

## Writing Assignments:

1. Paper #1: Analysis (15%)
2. Paper #2: Historical Document (20%)
3. Paper #3: Follow a Footnote (20%)
4. Abstract and Annotated Bibliography for Final Project (5%)
5. Final Project (30%)
6. Participation/Attendance (10%)

### Paper #1: Analysis (Week 4)

In "The Empire Writes Back, with a Vengeance," Rushdie argues: "The language like much else in the newly independent societies needs to be decolonized, to be remade into other images, if those of us who use it from positions outside of Anglo-Saxon culture are to be more than artistic Uncle Toms. And it's this endeavor that gives the new literatures of Africa, the Caribbean, and India much of their present vitality and excitement." Although we are reading texts that depict societies under colonial rule during the nineteenth century, Rushdie's call for re-working language into "other images" nonetheless resonates with our Victorian readings. For this assignment, pick a short passage from one of the texts that we have read so far. In a close reading, discuss how the author articulates Rushdie's call-to-action and how it contributes to the text's overall concerns. This requires you to pay keen attention to literary devices in order to connect the passage to the text's overall concerns/themes in a convincing and detailed manner. Your success on this paper demands you not simply summarize, but explicate your chosen passage. To prepare for this assignment, we will devote each class period to a brief discussion of specific literary devices.

### Paper #2: Historical Document (Week 7)

One of the objectives of this class is for you to get a sense of the rich historical and cultural context in which these texts were written. For this assignment you will find a historical document produced during the Victorian period. This may be a letter, a periodical article, a photograph, a law/piece of legislation, etc. Your job is to analyze this document in terms of form, genre, and content in order to explain how it may have served as an influence for any of the texts

that we have read, or how it reflects and shapes certain themes or key contexts we have discussed in class. You may want to choose a particular text that we have read to help orient your discussion, but your source must be something we have not specifically discussed in class. Our special collections on campus is a surprisingly large repository for nineteenth-century texts and images, so this would be a great place to start. You may also browse digital archives to find your document.

### **Paper #3: Follow a Footnote (Week 11)**

This assignment combines the close reading skills of Assignment #1 and the research skills of Assignment #2. From any of the readings that we discussed in class, choose one footnote that you found interesting, clarifying, or confusing. Conduct secondary research to learn more about the information presented in that footnote. Once you have completed your research, write an analytical paper that explains how “following” this footnote offers new and enhanced meanings for the text under question, and how it helps to articulate some of the text’s overall concerns. This requires you to pay keen attention to literary devices in order to connect the passage to the text’s overall concerns/themes in a convincing and detailed manner. Your success on this paper demands you not simply summarize your findings, but explicate your footnote and explain its relation to the text as a whole through analysis.

### **Paper #4 Final Project (Finals Week)**

For this assignment, you will return to the course two major questions now that the semester is over: how do we define what it means to be “British” within a global network of literary exchange, and how do our texts under consideration write both with and against the Empire? To answer these questions, you may choose any one text that we have read throughout the semester. Your paper should combine secondary historical/cultural research with close analysis of several passages in order to successfully answer the questions posed. You may submit this paper as a traditional 7-10 page essay or you may design your own alternative visual, multimedia, digital project. Should you choose the latter, you will include an artist’s statement that explains how your chosen medium and text work together to address the course’s major questions.

### **Abstract/Annotated Bibliography (Week 13-14)**

To prepare your for your final project, you will prepare an abstract of 250 words that sketches out a possible argument for your final project, as well as the form your project will take. This may include a tentative thesis, or common themes/conflicts that you have noticed and what possible arguments may emerge from those. Your annotated bibliography will require that you do research to find either primary sources or critical secondary sources that will help you develop your argument. For each source, you will supply a brief summary and how you see this source contributing to your argument.

### **Reading Schedule**

\*denotes text available on BlackBoard

**Week One:**

**Tues, January 23<sup>rd</sup>:** Course Introduction; optional reading: \*selections from Robin Gilmour's *The Victorian Period* (emphasis on "Empire and Utopia")

### **Mary Prince (1788-1833)**

Born in Bermuda to an enslaved family, Mary Prince was an abolitionist and author. She immigrated to London, England with the Wood family who she was sold to in 1815. After repeated conflict with the Woods, Prince left the household and began work with Thomas Pringle, the acting secretary of Anti-Slavery Society. The text we will be reading, *The History of Mary Prince*, was the first narrative of a black woman published in England.

**Thurs, January 25<sup>th</sup>:** *History of Mary Prince* (1831), pp. 1-50

**Tues, January 29<sup>th</sup>:** *History of Mary Prince*, pp. 51-120;

**Thurs, January 31<sup>st</sup>:** *History of Mary Prince*, pp. 121-160

### **Mary Seacole (1805-1881)**

Mary Seacole was born in Kingston, Jamaica to a Scottish father and Jamaican mother. Her mother was a doctress, a healer who used traditional African and Caribbean methods; Seacole learned early nursing skills from her mother. Throughout her life she traveled to Central America, Crimea to contribute to the war effort, and London.

**Tues, February 6<sup>th</sup>:** *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole* (1857), Ch. 1-7

**Thurs, February 8<sup>th</sup>:** *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole*, Ch. 8-13

**Tues, February 13<sup>th</sup>:** *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole*, Ch. 14-Conclusion

### **Henry "Box" Brown (1816-1897)**

Henry Box Brown was born to an enslaved family on a plantation in Louisa County, Virginia. In 1849, hatched a daring plan to escape to a free state (Pennsylvania) by sending himself in a wooden box labeled "Dry Goods," "Handle with Care," and "This Side Up." After his successful journey, Brown became a speaker for the Anti-Slavery Society. With the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, Brown moved to England and entered into the show circuit to support himself. His performances began with traveling antislavery panorama, but then branched out to include engagements as a magician and mesmerist. We will be reading his life narrative alongside visual ephemera of his exhibition career.

**Thurs, February 15<sup>th</sup>:** *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown* (1851), pp. 1-30

**Tues, February 20<sup>th</sup> :** *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown*, pp 31-80; \*Henry Box Brown ephemera

### **Egbert Martin (1861-1890)**

Little is known about this poet from Guiana. Martin was most likely born in 1861 in the colonial capital, Georgetown, to a father who was a tailor. Bedridden by illness, Martin began writing and publishing poetry by nineteen years old under the pseudonym "Leo". He gained empire-wide recognition when he won a competition for adding two verses to the British national anthem in honor of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. We will be reading his first collection of poetry recording life in colonial British Guiana.

**Thurs, February 22<sup>nd</sup>:** \*selections from *Leo's Poetical Works* (1883)

**Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922)**

Pandita Ramabai was born into a Brahmin family in the Canara district of the Madras province. Her father was a Sanskrit scholar; after he died in the 1877 famine, Ramabai carried on this work and became a regular lecturer at Calcutta University. Ramabai was a visible and vocal social reformer, especially for issues relating to women's emancipation and education. We will be reading a brief selection of her travelogue, as well as a non-fiction treatise on the status of women in India.

**Tues, February 27<sup>th</sup>:** \*selection from *Englandcha Pravas* ("Voyage to England, 1883); \**The High Caste Hindu Woman*

**T.N. Mukharji (1847-1919)**

Mukharji was a Bengali civil servant who cut his teeth working as an clerk for the Bengal Gazetteer Office in Calcutta. After being transferred to the Department of Revenue and Agriculture, Mukharji became an assistant clerk for exhibitions. In 1888, the Government of India assigned Mukharji to oversee the economic displays for the Indian Court at the 1888 Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London. We will be reading *A Visit to Europe*, a chronicle of his trip to the 1888 Exhibition.

**Thurs, March 1<sup>st</sup>:** *A Visit to Europe* (1889), Ch. 1 and 2 ("On the Way" and "First Impressions")

**Tues, March 6<sup>th</sup>:** *A Visit to Europe*, Ch. 3 ("The Exhibition and Its Visitors")

**Tues, March 20<sup>th</sup>:** *A Visit to Europe*, Ch. 4 ("Notes and Observations")

**Thurs March 22<sup>nd</sup>:** *A Visit to Europe*, Ch. 6 ("Last Days in England")

**Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949)**

"The Nightingale of India," Sarojini Naidu was a freedom fighter and poet born in Hyderabad, India. Her dual education at University of Madras and Girton College, Cambridge marked the beginning of a transnational career in which Naidu served as a representative for women's empowerment and Indian nationalism. In addition to her political work, Naidu was also a poet who started writing at twelve years old. We will be reading a selection of poems from *The Golden Threshold*, an example of aestheticism from the viewpoint of a female colonial subject.

**Tues, March 27<sup>th</sup>:** \*selections of poetry: "Indian Weavers," "The Snake-Charmer," "Indian Dancers," "Street Cries" (1905)

**Natsume Soseki (1867-1916)**

Soseki was a Japanese novelist and scholar of British literature educated at University College, London as "Japan's first Japanese English literary scholar" sponsored by the Japanese government. A poet versed in haiku and renku, Soseki was most known for his satirical novels. The novel we will be reading, *I am a Cat*, records the confluence of Western culture and Japanese traditions during the Meiji period in Japan through the eyes of a haughty house cat, "Mr. Sneaze."

**Thurs, March 29<sup>th</sup>:** *I am a Cat* (1905-6), Volume One

**Tues, April 3<sup>rd</sup>:** *I am a Cat*, Volume One  
**Thurs, April 5<sup>th</sup>:** *I am a Cat*, Volume Two  
**Tues, April 10<sup>th</sup>:** *I am a Cat*, Volume Two  
**Thurs, April 12<sup>th</sup>:** *I am a Cat*, Volume Three  
**Tues, April 17<sup>th</sup>:** *I am a Cat*, Volume Three  
**Thurs, April 19<sup>th</sup>:** *I am a Cat*, Volume Three

**Royeka Sakhawat Hossain (1880-1932)**

Begum Rokeya was a Bengali writer, activist, and advocate for women's education in India under British rule. A prolific writer, Hossain penned poetry, short stories, and novels, specializing in science fiction and fantasy to broadcast her feminist point of view. Bangladesh now observes Rokeya Day to commemorate Hussain's work. We will be reading two representative selections of her feminist science-fiction utopias.

**Tues, April 24<sup>th</sup>:** *Sultana's Dream* (1905)  
**Thurs, April 26<sup>th</sup>:** *Padmarag* (1924), Ch. 1-8  
**Tues, May 1<sup>st</sup>:** *Padmarag*, Ch. 9-18  
**Thurs, May 3<sup>rd</sup>:** *Padmarag*, Ch. 10-end

**Tues, May 8<sup>th</sup>:** presentations of final projects  
**Thurs, May 10<sup>th</sup>:** presentations of final projects