

2011-2012 Seminar Participants

"Bringing the Archives into the Classroom and the Classroom into the Archives"

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Early in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, a character boasts that his use of shorthand is "nineteenth century up-to-date with a vengeance." My students often find this line amusing, seeing the Victorian era as far from "up-to-date." To counter this sense of distance and familiarize students with the texture of nineteenth-century life, my courses attempt to resituate Victorian literature in its original cultural contexts. Having tried various approaches to such contextualization, I have become increasingly eager to incorporate archival material more often and more effectively. My project explores both the practical and pedagogical aspects of how to do so. In particular, I will investigate the nineteenth-century resources at relevant archives in the Greater Boston area and online archival sources available due to recent digitization projects; I will also investigate the best practices for using-through field trips and research-based assignments-such resources to enhance student learning. Having already developed a series of upper-level Victorian literature courses, I now feel ready to rethink the primary sources, assignments, and pedagogical assumptions that structure these courses. It is my hope that this project will invigorate my own teaching and research, as well as benefit colleagues tackling similar issues.

Project Description:

My project to bring the classroom to the archive and the archive to the classroom has three stages. First, I will examine the local archives best suited to improving older courses (such as *The British Novel and Psychology, 1800-1920* and *Fallen Women and Typewriter Girls: The Genders of British Literature*) and developing new ones (particularly a class on Victorian literature and religion emerging from my current work on Jewishness in Victorian fiction). I will start close to home, studying Stonehill's limited holdings in nineteenth-century journals, particularly copies of Dickens' *All the Year Round*. But my focus will be Boston University's Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center and the Victorian periodicals and first editions at Harvard's Houghton Library. I will also explore the use of online versions of Victorian periodicals, including resources like C19: The Nineteenth-Century Index, the Missionary Periodicals Database, and the Internet Library of Early Journals. The rapid increase in digitized (and searchable) Victorian primary sources has made it difficult to keep track of what is currently accessible. But it has also opened up new possibilities for student inquiry both in and out of the classroom.

While I consistently require students to research current scholarship, I have rarely asked them to locate nineteenth-century primary sources on their own. Similarly, I have had only one opportunity to take a student to an archive, B.U.'s Somerset Maugham collection, visited as part of a SURE project. This trip convinced me that hands-on experience (especially when the hands must be cloaked in special gloves to protect delicate manuscripts) provides a distinctive means of conveying the excitement, curiosity, and diligence that goes into successful academic work. Yet it is one thing to take a single student already immersed in a research project to an archive, quite another to take a whole class. Thus, my second stage is to examine current pedagogical literature on successfully employing archival materials. What are the

challenges of visiting archives in person and online? How have other scholars overcome them? How does one balance a heavy, regular reading load with substantive independent archival research? Are there ways to make such research collaborative? I look forward to discussing these issues with colleagues in the seminar whose different disciplinary contexts can inform my thinking. Finally, drawing on these two stages, I intend to craft a new syllabus with archive-based assignments to put the results of my research into practice.

Benefits:

As already suggested, this project's chief benefit would be to my students, whose knowledge of Victorian culture in all its contradictions and material richness would be enhanced. Most importantly, I hope to introduce them to the skills-and the pleasures-of archival research, ones that foster valuable critical thinking. I expect this project will also foster my own research on nineteenth-century culture so that both my teaching practices and my work will indeed be "up-to-date with a vengeance."

Community Outreach Plans:

I would welcome the chance to share my project not just with members of the English Department or colleagues who work on the nineteenth-century but with the wider Stonehill community. I enjoyed participating in a previous teaching roundtable and would be glad to do so again and/or an Academic Development Day session. Lastly, I would be interested in designing a paper for the annual conference of the Research Society for Victorian Periodicals or the North American Victorian Studies Association.