

## History 99-1: Histories of Victorianism

UCLA: winter 2004  
Professor Ted Porter  
6265 Bunche Hall, phone 206-2352  
[tporter@history.ucla.edu](mailto:tporter@history.ucla.edu)

Books required for purchase (available at bookstore):

Lytton Strachey, Queen Victoria  
Walter Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind  
Jess Marsh, Word Crimes  
James Secord, Victorian Sensation  
David Cannadine, Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire  
Judith Walkowitz, City of Dreadful Delight

Victorians saw their age as one of economic and political progress, and as spreading the benefits of civilization through an empire that covered much of the world. They also had worries, of course: about the power of industrial and commercial wealth, the spread of irreligion and political radicalism, and the relation of science to faith. The Victorian order began perhaps to break down by the 1880s, and in the 1890s Oscar Wilde could make fun of it in “The Importance of Being Earnest.” But it was the next, “Edwardian” generation that established an enduring stereotype of Victorianism as complacent, earnest, and above all, prudish. Lytton Strachey, an important Bloomsbury intellectual, helped to define this interpretation, and Walter Houghton’s intellectual history, written more than forty years ago, holds to many of these stereotypes. More recent historians have often dissented, though many of the same themes continue to be discussed and reinterpreted: evolution and values, purity, morality, the spread of civilization.

We will be simultaneously learning about the Victorian period, roughly from the 1830s to 1900, and reflecting on the ways that historians have interpreted and reinterpreted it. Although our books will not often contradict one another directly, they will present quite different perspectives on what Victorian society was like, how it was changing, and what factors are most important for a historical understanding of the period. As you read, you should always be thinking beyond the particular events and ideas under discussion, and asking yourself about the interpretive vision that seems to animate the book you are reading. How does it compare with other works you have read, in this class and elsewhere? What can you learn about the documentary materials (primary sources) and other interpretive accounts (secondary sources) the author has used, and can you see how the author is responding to previous scholarship? Are there topics left out of the book you are reading that might modify or even overturn the interpretation its author presents?

### Assignments and grading

This is a discussion course, and you should plan to come every week. Since the precise reading requirements, as well as presentation topics, will often be modified the week

before they come up, it is indispensable for you to check with me about them if for some reason you are unable to be present for a particular session. You should feel free to come discuss readings or questions with me during my office hours, or any other time.

You will be asked to make two presentations to the class, each for about 10 minutes (roughly 4 pages). The first is to report on some part of Houghton or Secord that is not required for the whole class; the second will involve examining one or two sources used by Marsh or Cannadine. You should write your presentation out in advance, though it is up to you whether to read what you have written or to present it more informally. In any case, you should revise your text after you have presented it and we have discussed it, and turn it in on the due date specified. There will be two additional writing assignments, as indicated below. The basis of grading is as follows:

Attendance and general discussion:	20%
Class presentations, and papers based on them (2):	40%
Assigned essays (2):	40%

### Topics and Assignments

Week 1: Introduction

Week 2: Strachey, Queen Victoria

Week 3: Houghton, Victorian Frame of Mind

First essay due: Jan. 22 (noon). Topic: "Has Houghton followed Strachey in his interpretation of Victorian morality and intellectual life?"

Week 4: Secord, Victorian Sensation

Week 5: Secord (continued)

First written report due Feb. 5 (noon)

Week 6: Marsh, Word Crimes

Week 7: Marsh (continued)

Week 8: Cannadine, Ornamentalism

Second written report due Feb. 26 (noon)

Week 9: Walkowitz, City of Dreadful Delight

Week 10: Walkowitz (continued), and possibly some reading from my forthcoming book, Karl Pearson: The Scientific Life in a Statistical Age.

Final essay due: March 18, (noon). Topic: "How has the new history of women and gender changed the historical understanding of Victorianism?"

