

# Undisciplining The Victorian Classroom

Peer-Reviewed Syllabus

Peer Reviewer: Ronjaanee Chatterjee

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## Nineteenth-Century Women Write the Empire

Amy Kahrman Huseby, Florida International University, email: [ahuseby@fiu.edu](mailto:ahuseby@fiu.edu)



Fig. 1-4 (left to right): Mary Seacole (Mary Evans Picture Library, 2008); Torulata Dutt (frontispiece from *Life and Letters of Toru Dutt* by Harihar Das. London: Oxford UP, 1921); Pandita Ramabai Sarasvati (frontispiece from *The High-caste Hindu Woman*. Philadelphia: J. B. Rodgers printing co., 1887); Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (var. Begum Rokeya; Rokeya Khatun; Rokeya Katoon; R. S. Hossein), unattributed photograph

In nineteenth-century England, the period between 1807, when the empire dissolved their participation in the slave trade, the 1833 Abolition of Slavery Act, and 1884, when the race for Africa culminated in the Berlin Conference to carve up the African continent, was a rich time for writers producing literature. Courses on Victorian literature used to focus on texts from England that imagined what imperial spaces and people were like. They tended to emphasize canonical works, such as Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s “The Lotus Eaters” or Rudyard Kipling’s “The White Man’s Burden”—important works of literature, certainly, but they were also texts that undermined, denigrated, and denied the perspective of colonized and enslaved peoples.

Genres of women’s writing about empire offer a clear through line for this course. Biographies, essays, letters, and lyrics all afforded women spaces in which to experiment and think about their own identities and the effects of imperialism. Some of the texts we will read represent the contradictions of colonial expansion as they write for a white audience and distance themselves from their own gender and race. Others will illustrate the value of disagreement, talking back, and voicing one’s own perspective. We will consider how these authors variously attempt to take home with them, and leave it behind. Along the way, we will do the work of teasing out identity from a history of compounding acts of assimilation in order to discover the multitudinous ways women writers were strengthening the British empire, and resisting it.

**TRIGGER WARNING:** The texts and viewing in this course are often disturbing and include discussions and imagery of racism, graphic violence, and sexuality. Prior to beginning a new text, I will always alert you if a potentially triggering subject is addressed. However, if this type of imagery upsets or offends you, please give thought to whether this is the right course for you.

## COURSE TEXTS:

*The History of Mary Prince* (Penguin, ISBN-13: 978-0140437492)

*Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Mary Seacole in Many Lands* (Penguin, ISBN-13: 978-0140439021)

*Motichur* (Oxford UP, ISBN-13: 978-0199450374)

All other assigned texts will be available digitally and free of charge on Canvas (indicated with a C on the Course Schedule).

### Course Requirements

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|---|-----|
| • Group Discussion Leader                       | 10% |
| • Community Contribution Reflections            | 15% |
| • 1 <sup>st</sup> Paper (5-6 pp.)               | 20% |
| • Proposal for Final Paper OR Project (4-6 pp.) | 25% |
| • Final Paper OR Project (7-8 pp.)              | 30% |

### Learning Outcomes

- To **gain familiarity** with different genres of 19<sup>th</sup>-century writing;
- Become a better **critical reader**, noticing subtle details and uses of language, connecting ideas and texts, asking questions, and identifying assumptions and values;
- Become a better **critical writer**, learning to make analytical arguments that are original, persuasively argued, clear, and well written;
- Become a more **active listener** by taking good lecture notes, listening to your peers in discussion sections, and asking questions;
- Understand how even the most entertaining stories carry **cultural and social values that emerge out of their historical contexts**;
- Become a more **thoughtful and knowledgeable citizen** by learning about the experiences of people both like and unlike you, thinking through questions of injustice and intolerance; and,
- Becoming better able to **interpret, argue, and communicate ideas** about your world.

In this class, we will assume a comparative stance toward writing in the British Empire and engage with Victorian women writing around the world who were thinking about how women's bodies and lived experience represent national experiences and events.

#### **Together, we will consider questions including:**

- How might focalizing our exploration of this ostensibly homogeneous thing called "England" through the writing of women of color work to not only dispel the silence of their experiences but in a sense to zoom in like a microscope on the granularity of empire?
- Who has the right to write the story of colonized and enslaved people? What was the work of such writing? What was being probed?
- Were these writers engaged in some sort of cultural anthropology, looking outward at their changing society, or autobiography, representing personal experiences of colonization and slavery?
- In what ways did perspectives on the British empire differ and change around the world? What did it mean for a woman in India to be a British subject versus a woman from the Caribbean, for instance? And how did imperialism impact their daily lives?

## Course Schedule

T = Text you purchase

C = Text on Canvas (LMS)

### **Week 1, Writing Imperialism and Gender**

#### **DISCUSSION TODAY:**

Introduction, Syllabus

Discussion Leader Assignment explanation and sign-ups

#### **READING FOR NEXT TIME:**

1. Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, "The colony" (chapter; C)
2. Rachel Lee, "Notes from the (Non)field" (article; C)
3. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes" (article; C)

## MODULE 1: LIFE WRITING

### **Week 2, Reading Colonial Life Writing**

#### **DISCUSSION TODAY:**

1. Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, "The colony" (chapter; C)
2. Rachel Lee, "Notes from the (Non)field" (article; C)
3. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes" (article; C)

#### **READING FOR NEXT TIME:**

1. *The History of Mary Prince* (Introduction and pp. 1-19; T)
2. Jenny Sharpe, "Something Akin to Freedom" (article; C)
3. Michael Gomez, *Reversing Sail: A History of the African Diaspora* ("Transatlantic Moment" excerpt pp. 59-81, "Scope of the Trade" pp. 62-64, "Belly of the Whale" pp. 71-79) (excerpts from a book; C)

**Week 3, NO CLASS MEETING TODAY – LABOR DAY OBSERVED (this week can be swapped out for Spring Break, Fall Break), or a research gap in your schedule**

### **Week 4, Writing Slavery, Writing Freedom**

#### **DISCUSSION TODAY:**

1. *The History of Mary Prince* (Introduction and pp. 1-19; T)
2. Jenny Sharpe, "Something Akin to Freedom" (article; C)
3. Michael Gomez, *Reversing Sail: A History of the African Diaspora* ("Transatlantic Moment" excerpt pp. 59-81, "Scope of the Trade" pp. 62-64, "Belly of the Whale" pp. 71-79) (excerpts from a book; C)

#### **READING FOR NEXT TIME:**

1. *The History of Mary Prince* (Introduction and pp. 20-38; T)
2. Michael Gomez, *Reversing Sail*, "Enslavement" pp. 82-106, "African Provenance" pp. 65-71 (excerpts; C)
3. Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts" (article; C)

## **Week 5, Writing a History of Violence**

### **DISCUSSION TODAY:**

1. *The History of Mary Prince* (Introduction and pp. 20-38; T)
2. Michael Gomez, *Reversing Sail*, “Enslavement” pp. 82-106, “African Provenance” pp. 65-71 (excerpts; C)
3. Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts” (article; C)

### **READING FOR NEXT TIME:**

1. *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Mary Seacole in Many Lands* (Chs. 1-9; T)
2. Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina, *Black Victorians / Black Victorian* (Introduction pp. 1-7; excerpts; C)
3. Elizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, “Mrs. Seacole’s Wonderful Adventures in Many Lands and *the Consciousness of Transit*” (article; C)

## **Week 6, Writing Caribbean Biography**

### **TODAY'S DISCUSSION:**

1. *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Mary Seacole in Many Lands* (Chs. 1-9; T)
2. Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina, *Black Victorians / Black Victorian* (Introduction pp. 1-7; excerpts; C)
3. Elizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, “Mrs. Seacole’s Wonderful Adventures in Many Lands and *the Consciousness of Transit*” (article; C)

### **READING FOR NEXT TIME:**

1. *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Mary Seacole in Many Lands* (Chs. 10-End; T)
2. Introduction & Appendices to *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Mary Seacole in Many Lands*
3. Alisha Walters, “‘The tears I could not repress, rolling down my brown cheeks’: Mary Seacole, Feeling, and the Imperial Body” (article; C)

## **Week 7, Writing the Imperial Body**

### **TODAY'S DISCUSSION:**

1. *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Mary Seacole in Many Lands* (Chs. 10-End; T)
2. Introduction & Appendices to *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Mary Seacole in Many Lands*
3. Alisha Walters, “‘The tears I could not repress, rolling down my brown cheeks’: Mary Seacole, Feeling, and the Imperial Body” (article; C)

### **READING FOR NEXT TIME:**

1. Felicia Hemans, “The Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers in New England” (poem; C)
2. Tricia Lootens, “States of Exile” (article; C)
3. Tricia Lootens, “Antislavery Afterlives” from *The Political Poetess* (chapter; C)

## **MODULE 2: IMPERIAL LYRICS**

**Due: First Paper Thesis & Introduction for Peer Workshop (bring 2 copies to class)**

## **Week 8, Writing Land, Possession, & Nationalism**

### **TODAY'S DISCUSSION:**

1. Felicia Hemans, “The Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers in New England” (poem; C)
2. Tricia Lootens, “States of Exile” (article; C)
3. Tricia Lootens, “Antislavery Afterlives” from *The Political Poetess* (chapter; C)

**READING FOR NEXT TIME:**

1. Felicia Hemans, "The Homes of England," "The Traveller at the Source of the Nile" (poems; C)
2. Letitia Stimson, "The Homes of England" (poem; C)
3. Jason Rudy, excerpts from *Imagined Homelands*, "Circulating Sentiments: Felicia Hemans in Canada and Australia" (chapter; C)

**Due: First Paper uploaded to Canvas by 2:00 p.m.**

**Week 9, Writing Domesticity & Motherhood****TODAY'S DISCUSSION:**

1. Felicia Hemans, "The Homes of England," "The Traveller at the Source of the Nile" (poems; C)
2. Letitia Stimson, "The Homes of England" (poem; C)
3. Jason Rudy, excerpts from *Imagined Homelands*, "Circulating Sentiments: Felicia Hemans in Canada and Australia" (chapter; C)

**READING FOR NEXT TIME:**

1. Felicia Hemans, "Indian Woman's Death Song"
2. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point"
3. Eliza Hamilton Dunlop, "Aboriginal Mother" (poem; C)
4. Torulata Dutt, "Our Casuarina Tree" (poem; C)

**Week 10, The Imperial Poetess Writes****TODAY'S DISCUSSION:**

1. Felicia Hemans, "Indian Woman's Death Song"
2. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point"
3. Eliza Hamilton Dunlop, "Aboriginal Mother" (poem; C)
4. Torulata Dutt, "Our Casuarina Tree" (poem; C)

**READING FOR NEXT TIME:**

1. Pandita Ramabai selections from *The Letters and Correspondence* (excerpts; C)
2. Pandita Ramabai, "Married Life" (pp. 56-75) excerpt from *The High-Caste Hindu Woman* (C)
3. Clementina Butler, *Pandita Ramabai Sarasvati: Pioneer in the Movement for the Education of the Child-widow of Indian* (a biography) (excerpts; C)

**MODULE 3: LETTERS & ESSAYS**

**Due: Proposal for Final Paper/Project uploaded to Canvas by 2:00 p.m.**

**Week 11, Writing about Marriage****TODAY'S DISCUSSION:**

1. Pandita Ramabai selections from *The Letters and Correspondence* (excerpts; C)
2. Pandita Ramabai, "Married Life" (pp. 56-75) excerpt from *The High-Caste Hindu Woman* (C)
3. Clementina Butler, *Pandita Ramabai Sarasvati: Pioneer in the Movement for the Education of the Child-widow of Indian* (a biography) (excerpts; C)

**READ FOR NEXT TIME:**

1. Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, selections from *Motichur*, "The Degradation of Woman," "The Better Half," "The Good Housewife," and "Sultana's Dream" (T)
2. Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism*, pp 23-52 (excerpts; C)

## **Week 12, Subcontinent Feminist Writing**

### **TODAY'S DISCUSSION:**

1. Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, selections from *Motichur*, "The Degradation of Woman," "The Better Half," "The Good Housewife," and "Sultana's Dream" (T)
2. Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism*, pp 23-52 (excerpts; C)

### **READING FOR NEXT TIME:**

1. (Rassundari Devi) Rashsundari Debi's *Amar Jiban* (Introduction and pp. 1-50 [end before "Sixth Composition"]) (C)
2. Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*, pp. 95-134 "A Book of Her Own, A Life of Her Own: The Autobiography of a Nineteenth-Century Woman" (excerpts; C)

**Week 13, NO CLASS MEETING TODAY – VETERANS' DAY OBSERVED BY FIU (this week can be swapped out for Spring Break, Fall Break, or a research gap in your schedule)**

## **Week 14, Writing the Hindu Wife and Nation**

### **TODAY'S DISCUSSION:**

1. (Rassundari Devi) Rashsundari Debi's *Amar Jiban* (Introduction and pp. 1-50 [end before "Sixth Composition"]) (C)
2. Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*, pp. 95-134 "A Book of Her Own, A Life of Her Own: The Autobiography of a Nineteenth-Century Woman" (excerpts; C)

### **READ FOR NEXT TIME:**

1. (Rassundari Devi) Rashsundari Debi's *Amar Jiban*, pp. 50-124 (C)
2. Priya Joshi, "Circulation of Fiction in Indian Libraries" and "Readers Write Back" (excerpts; C)
3. **Due: Final Paper OR Project uploaded to Canvas by 2:00 p.m.**

## **Week 15, Reading & Writing Back**

Presentations (if any) (C)

Course Wrap-Up, Goodbyes, and Survey

### **TODAY'S DISCUSSION:**

1. (Rassundari Devi) Rashsundari Debi's *Amar Jiban*, pp. 50-124 (C)
2. Priya Joshi, "Circulation of Fiction in Indian Libraries" and "Readers Write Back," excerpts from *In Another Country: Colonialism, Culture, and the English Novel in India*

## Sample Assignments

**Group Discussion Leaders 10%:** Leading discussion is an opportunity for you to develop your close reading skills and strategies, become a more active listener, and practice your critical thinking during discussions with peers. Starting Week 2 of the term, each of you will be responsible with your small group for leading one discussion. Large group discussions foster important communication skills that will benefit not only your experiences in the college classroom but well beyond the classroom and into the work you do after college. By posing intriguing, thought provoking, timely, pertinent, and even debatable discussion questions, you will have an opportunity to drive the conversation, while negotiating tangential topics that enter into the discussion. In other words, you will strive to balance your own interests and questions alongside those of your peers.

There will be a sign-up sheet on the first day of class. Remember: Leading discussion does not mean you have to do all the talking! Instead, it involves guiding discussion and reorientation conversation if it gets off track or becomes silent.

### Preparing to lead discussion:

1. You will prepare 2 or 3 "keyword" discussion questions on a single PowerPoint or KeyNote slide. The slide must have textual evidence from the reading to support the key word you have chosen. This textual evidence will contextualize how you arrived at your key word and also enable you to take us to specific moments in the text. Student models for these slides are available in Canvas (LMS) in the "Assignment Models" folder.
2. You will also post the questions to our Canvas discussion board for the week by 8 p.m. on the Sunday before discussion with the title "KEY WORD DISCUSSION PROMPT [date]." For example, "DOMESTICITY PROMPT 8/24/17." Please see the documents "How to Lead Discussion" and "Discussion Leader Prompt Instructions" for more detailed instructions.
3. You may choose to meet with me before you lead class--preferably at least a week before so we can develop and discuss your plan. I'm also glad to answer questions by email! When in doubt, ask.

**Community Contribution Reflections (15%):** Instead of "participation" grades, which students tell me are ambiguous and can feel punitive, in this class you will track your own contributions to our learning community. Community contributions are an opportunity to perform an act of intellectual curiosity, kindness, or engagement that not only benefits your own learning but that of others. What are community contributions? Essentially, they are opportunities for you to "do a thing" for the class.

### Some ideas for community contributions might include:

- Asking substantive interpretive questions during discussion. If you're not sure how these are different from just any old question, ask me.
- Identifying several moments in a text that we are reading and directing the class's attention to those during discussion. Offer a close reading of one or more of these moments relevant to the topic in class.
- Offering to serve as the speaker during class presentations for your small group.
- Offering to serve as the notetaker in GoogleDocs during small group work.
- Offering to identify quotations in the text your group is discussing and to bring them up in discussion as examples.
- Taking notes every day and posting them online for everyone in class to see (you might do this on Canvas or GoogleDocs, for example).

A more complete list of ideas is provided to you on Canvas (LMS) and in our full version of the syllabus. Community contributions are worth 15% of your total grade for this course.

To assess these, you should keep track of how you contribute to our learning community. I will not keep track of how you contribute to the class. That is your responsibility. When you write your Community Contribution Reflections, you will detail how you have contributed to the course and provide evidence of those contributions. You will be asked to submit three brief reflections this term in which you detail your community contributions and justify your grade for the course. More details on these reflections will be provided in a separate document.

**First Paper (20%):** You will be asked to write a first paper (5-6 pp. double spaced in MLA format) based on either several prompts relevant to our reading to that point in the term or a prompt that you develop, if you choose to do so. Time is included in the course for peer review, so that you can get early feedback on your argument and support from both your classmates and me. Full instructions will be provided to you well in advance of the assignment due date and we will have time in class to discuss the instructions and any questions you have.

**Proposal (25%), Final Paper, and Project (30%):** The topic for the final paper is to be drawn from the class theme, “Nineteenth-century Women Write the Empire.” Your aim will be to make your own critical intervention into one of the texts on the reading list in this course, framed by the wider indigenous, decolonial, or otherwise disruptive approaches we have discussed in this course. You will have the choice of either writing an 8-10 pp. double spaced, MLA format, thesis-driven essay, or creating an alternative project. In either case, you will submit a proposal for your final project in Week 11, which I will then comment on and offer suggestions. Full instructions will be provided to you well in advance of the assignment due date and we will have time in class to discuss the instructions and any questions you have.