

# *Undisciplining The Victorian Classroom*

Peer-Reviewed Syllabus

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## IDENTITY AND BELIEF IN VICTORIAN BRITAIN

LEVEL 6 (15 CREDITS)

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**Module Outline:** Victorians held a wide range of beliefs and followed a multitude of paths in their pursuit of truth and higher knowledge. This module will introduce you to the perspectives of Muslims and Hindus, atheists and humanists, spiritualists and Theosophists (among others) through the novels, poems, and other texts that they wrote. Their perspectives on religion, science, politics, and the supernatural will open up discussions about how faith and identity function in the modern world.

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## Teaching Schedule

We will meet for one two-hour seminar each week.

**Week 1: Religion and Literature**

**Week 2: Religious Seeking**, Francis William Newman, Marie Corelli, and Annie Besant

**Week 3: Religion of Science and Humanity**, William Winwood Reade

**Week 4: Spiritualism**, Anna Mary Howitt

**Week 5: Atheism**, James 'B. V.' Thomson and Constance Naden

**Week 6: Researching faith in Victorian periodicals**, *The National Reformer*

**Week 7: READING WEEK** (no seminar)

**Week 8: Islam**, W. H. Abdullah Quilliam and Ameenah (Emily) Lincoln

**Week 9: Judaism**, Israel Zangwill

**Week 10: Hinduism**, Sarojini Naidu

**Week 11: Theosophy**, H. P. Blavatsky

**Week 12: Essay consultations** (no seminar)

## Teaching and Learning Overview

You are expected to read the assigned primary text(s) prior to each week's two-hour seminar.

Each seminar session will begin with an introduction to the week's topic and primary text(s), which will enable you to put the reading into context. Class discussions will largely involve reading parts of the primary text closely and bringing these into dialogue with module themes and contexts. The seminar is an opportunity for you to discuss ideas generated by the reading, ask questions that have arisen (which we will endeavour to answer together as a group), and explore themes and issues that particularly interest you.

You are directed to primary texts under the individual week sections below, where you will also find suggestions for further reading and other resources. It would be helpful for you to bring a device to seminars that will enable you to refer to the texts directly during class discussions.

## Module Aims

- Developing an understanding of non-Christian beliefs in Victorian Britain and how these fed into religious, scientific, and political discourses, and shaped modern British society.
- Reading a range of textual forms closely: novels, short stories, poetry, and non-fiction.
- Studying non-canonical writers from a variety of social backgrounds, providing new perspectives on the question of faith and identity in the Victorian period.
- Encouraging the pursuit of independent research interests within and beyond set texts.
- Undertaking independent research, including developing skills by locating new material for study using digitised periodical databases.

## Learning Outcomes

- Students will have read a range of non-canonical Victorian writers and used these to inform their understanding of religion in British society.
- Students will have developed a good knowledge of nineteenth-century perspectives on faith and identity and the intersections between these.
- Students will have developed their skills in close reading a variety of textual forms: novel, short story, poetry, and non-fiction.
- Students will have demonstrated the ability to read and evaluate secondary sources critically and to use these alongside primary materials to build a critical argument.

- Students will have enhanced their independent primary research skills by locating material for study in digitised periodical databases.
- Students will have demonstrated effective spoken and written English skills and the ability to communicate an argument clearly and persuasively through participation in seminar discussion and written assessment.

## Hints & Tips

Many of the authors that you will be reading aren't often studied. This is therefore any exciting opportunity to bring your own ideas to the table and get used to undertaking original research that is not dependent on there being secondary, critical reading on the specific texts under discussion.

You are actively encouraged to pursue your independent research interests within and beyond the set reading. While I am here to provide guidance and support, I'm keen to hear about what you find interesting in these texts.

Almost all of the texts that we are studying are out of copyright, and as a result digital copies are freely available and links are provided to these. However, this also means that (cheap, and not so cheap) print-on-demand versions of several of these texts proliferate on Amazon and other online bookshops. Some of these are good quality facsimile reprints, whereas others are based on computers having 'read' digital copies (known as OCR texts) which often contain a high level of errors: see [Whitney Anne Trettien's interesting article reflecting on these kinds of publications](#). Please exercise caution if you choose to buy hard copies of the set texts.

## Expectations

In this class we respect individuals of all religions and none, and so we will discuss expressions of all forms of faith respectfully. When we discuss the varieties of religion, and non-religion, expressed in the texts we're studying, we are not talking about whether any one belief system is 'true' or 'correct'. We are instead focusing on how beliefs are expressed and how identities are formed around these.

## Reading List and Preparation Tasks

To get the most out of our seminars, you should have read the assigned primary text(s) in advance. When reading each of these texts, it will be helpful to consider:

- How does the author write about the intersections of faith and identity?
- How does the author position these in relation to the society in which the narrative is set?

The recommended secondary reading provides context for the primary texts. While it will be useful for you to read these before class, it is not a requirement.

### Week 1: Religion and Literature

*Introductory reading:*

- Joseph Blankholm, 'One good way to understand religion is to break it apart', *Psyche* (15 August 2022).  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20230128174619/https://psyche.co/ideas/one-good-way-to-understand-religion-is-to-break-it-apart>
- Sebastian Lecourt, 'Secular,' and Jayne Hildebrand, 'Spirituality,' *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 51.3 (2023), special issue 'Keywords Redux', 501-4, 509-13.  
<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/victorian-literature-and-culture/issue/A384D14294513FC7736231D1626494CC>

### Week 2: Religious Seeking

*Primary reading:*

- Francis William Newman, 'The Religion of the Letter Renounced' from *Phases of Faith* (London: Trübner & Co., 1850), pp. 65-88.  
<https://archive.org/details/phasesfaithorpa00newmgoog/page/n8/mode/2up>
- Annie Besant, *Why I Became a Theosophist* (London: Freethought Publishing Co., 1889). <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/fguhcn68>
- Marie Corelli, prologue to *A Romance of Two Worlds*, edited by Andrew Radford (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), pp. 5-7.  
<https://archive.org/details/romanceoftwowo00core/>

*Secondary reading:*

- Charles LaPorte, 'Victorian Literature, Religion, and Secularization', *Literature Compass* 10.3 (2013), 277-87. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lic3.12049>

### Week 3: Religion of Science and Humanity

*Primary reading:*

- William Winwood Reade, *The Outcast* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1875).  
[https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/The\\_Outcast/eYYEAQAAIAAJ](https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/The_Outcast/eYYEAQAAIAAJ)

*Secondary Reading*

- David Nash, 'Reassessing the "Crisis of Faith" in the Victorian Age: Eclecticism and the Spirit of Moral Inquiry', *Journal of Victorian Culture* 16.1 (2011), 65-82.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13555502.2011.554676>

## Week 4: Spiritualism

### Primary reading:

- H. [Anna Mary Howitt] *Glimpses of a Brighter Land* (London: Baillière, Tindall, and Cox, 1871), Preface (pp. vii-xviii), 'On Manifestations' (pp. 1-7), 'Explanation of Symbols' (pp. 59-63), 'Ernest' (pp. 63-74), 'Sympathy' (pp. 168-170).  
<https://archive.org/details/glimpsesabright00hgoog/>

### Secondary reading:

- Susan Tallman, 'Seeing things: Anna Mary Howitt in art history', in *Picturing the Invisible: Exploring interdisciplinary synergies from the arts and the sciences*, ed. by Paul Coldwell and Ruth M. Morgan (London: UCL Press, 2022), pp. 160-77.  
<https://www.uclpress.co.uk/products/178924>

## Week 5: Atheism

### Primary reading:

- James B. V. Thomson, 'The City of Dreadful Night', in *The City of Dreadful Night, and other poems* (London: Reeves and Turner, 1880), pp. 1-55.  
<https://archive.org/details/cityofdreadfulni00thomrich/>
- Constance Naden, 'The Pantheist's Song of Immortality', *The Complete Poetical Works of Constance Naden* (London: Bickers and Son, 1894), pp. 43-45.  
<https://archive.org/details/cu31924013529205/>

### Secondary reading:

- Amy Kahrman Huseby, 'James Thomson's *The City of Dreadful Night* and the Forms of Secularist Congregation', *Victorian Periodicals Review* 49.2 (2016), 228-48. <https://doi.org/10.1353/vpr.2016.0016>
- Clare Stainthorp, 'Constance Naden', *Humanist Heritage*.  
<https://heritage.humanists.uk/constance-naden/>

## Week 6: Researching faith in Victorian periodicals,

### Primary reading:

- *The National Reformer* (22 March 1874 and 26 April 1874), weekly periodical edited by Charles Bradlaugh.

There is a task to complete before this class. Please choose one item from the 1874 issues of *National Reformer* and

- write one paragraph that describes something about it that you found interesting.
- identify something you'd need to research further to contextualise/understand the text better.

Please bring this writing with you and be prepared to share it.

## Week 7: Reading Week.

Assignment 1 due.

## Week 8: Islam

### Primary reading:

- *The Collected Poems of Abdullah Quilliam*, edited by Ron Geaves and Yahya Birt (Oldham: Beacon Books, 2021), 'The Moslem's Refuge' (p. 16), 'The True Easter' (pp. 45-46), 'Islamic Resignation' (p. 63). <http://www.abdullahquilliam.org/poetry/>
- Ameenah (Emily) Lincoln, in *The Convert's Passion: An Anthology of Islamic Poetry from Late Victorian and Edwardian Britain*, edited by Brent D. Singleton (Wildside Press, 2009), 'La Illa ha, Illa Allah!', 'Hope Delusive!' (pp. 49-51).  
[https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/The\\_Convert\\_s\\_Passion/n5j5B\\_cH1aEC](https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/The_Convert_s_Passion/n5j5B_cH1aEC)

### Secondary reading:

- 'Editor's Introduction', in *The Collected Poems of Abdullah Quilliam*, edited by Ron Geaves and Yahya Birt (Oldham: Beacon Books, 2021), pp. ix-xvi.

## Week 9: Judaism

### Primary reading:

- Israel Zangwill, 'Anglicization' and 'Transitional', in *Nineteenth-Century Jewish Literature: A Reader*, edited by Jonathan M. Hess, Maurice Samuels, and Nadia Valman (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), pp. 356-84, 440-63.  
<https://archive.org/details/nashspallmallma01unkngoog/page/n176/mode/2up> &  
<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044092659473&seq=211>

### Secondary reading:

- Introductions to 'Anglicization' and 'Transitional' in *Nineteenth-Century Jewish Literature: A Reader*, edited by Jonathan M. Hess, Maurice Samuels, and Nadia Valman (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), pp. 356-7, 440-1

## Week 10: Hinduism

### Primary reading:

- Sarojini Naidu, *The Golden Threshold* (London: William Heineman, 1905), 'Introduction', pp. 9-23; 'Harvest Hymn' pp. 40-42; 'Suttee' p. 46; 'Ode to H.H. the Nizam of Hyderabad' pp. 59-61; 'In the Forest' pp. 63-64; 'My Dead Dream' p. 73-74. <https://archive.org/details/goldenthreshold00naidgoog/>

### Secondary reading:

- Zaynub Zaman, 'Sarojini Naidu, Cultural Exchange and Anti-Imperialism', *Journal of Victorian Culture* blog (3 December 2020).  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20230330024150/https://jvc.oup.com/2020/12/03/sarojini-naidu/>

## Week 11: Theosophy

### Primary reading:

- H. P. Blavatsky ['Sanjna'] 'Karmic Visions', *Nightmare Tales* (Theosophical University Press [1888])  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20211111132908/https://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/nightmar/night-3.htm>

Secondary reading:

- Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), pp. 1-14 – particularly pp. 3-5 about Blavatsky.

### **Week 12: Essay Consultations**

No reading.

The day before our one-to-one meeting, you must send me an email confirming: your intended essay topic, the texts you will focus on, and a short paragraph outlining the key question(s) you plan to address or argument you think you might make.

### **Recommended starting points for further reading:**

- Naomi Hetherington (ed.), *Nineteenth-Century Religion, Literature and Society*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), particularly vol. 4 'Disbelief and New Beliefs' (edited by Naomi Hetherington and Clare Stainthorp) and vol. 3 'Religious Feeling' (edited by Richa Dwor).
- Joshua King and Winter Jade Werner (eds.), *Constructing Nineteenth-Century Religion: Literary, Historical, and Religious Studies in Dialogue* (Columbus OH: Ohio State University Press, 2019)
- Mark Knight and Emma Mason, *Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)



## Assignment One: Research Exercise (25%)

This is a 1000-word independent research exercise, for which you will use digitised periodical databases to locate an article of interest and write about it. The research exercise should contextualise the article, perform some close reading of the text, and discuss what it tells us about identity and belief in Victorian Britain.

In this assignment you are expected to:

- follow your own interests beyond set texts by undertaking independent research.
- develop research skills by locating new material for study using digitised periodical databases.
- read and evaluate secondary sources critically and apply these to primary materials to build a critical context.
- read a text closely to consider how form and context shapes meaning.

(These are the Assignment-Specific Assessment Criteria.)

### Approaching this assignment:

When dealing with digitised periodicals it can be tempting to use the search function to find key words. However, I would encourage you to resist this temptation and instead browse issues by paging/scrolling through them and seeing what catches your eye.

Just like any magazine or newspaper today, each issue of a Victorian periodical will contain many different kinds of writing (editorials, essays, news items, letters to the editor, poetry, short stories, advertisements etc). You do not need to choose an article that is 'literary' for this assignment.

Once you have chosen an article, you will need to think about both its content and contexts to explore how it illuminates a nineteenth-century perspective on faith and identity and the intersections between these.

Your research exercise should identify and briefly discuss the following elements. In order to answer these questions, **you will need to read your chosen article carefully, think about how it fits into the periodical as a whole, and also undertake some secondary research to understand the context in which it was published.**

- What the article is about.
  - provide a short synopsis of the content.
- The publication context.
  - which periodical is it from and what can you find out about it?
  - who was the editor?
  - was it connected to a society/organisation?
  - for how long was it published?
  - was it published daily, weekly, monthly, or quarterly?
  - how much did it cost?
  - what do these questions suggest about its target audience?

- Who wrote the article.
  - if it is signed, what can you find out about the person?
  - if they use a pseudonym, what does it mean?
  - if it is anonymous, can you still identify information about the author (e.g. their occupation, gender, location, or religion) from the text itself?
- The genre/form of writing.
  - is it an editorial, essay, news item, letter to the editor, poem, short story, advertisement, or something else?
  - what expectations do you have about this form, and are they met?
  - how does the form shape what is said and unsaid?
- Why the article was written.
  - is it responding to 'news' (a historical event)?
  - is it participating in a debate?
  - is it expressing something personal?
  - is it promoting a specific idea/belief?
- How the article conveys its meaning.
  - perform a close reading of the whole thing (if it is short) or a specific passage (if it is a longer text) – see **Close Reading Techniques handout**.

### **Presentation and Assessment Criteria**

Although the format may be different from the written work you have done before, you should note that this remains a formal piece of literary-critical academic work, and its tone, style, and presentation should be pitched appropriately.

The assignment should have an introduction that contextualises the article by providing information about the periodical and the group that has published it. There should also be a short conclusion that sums up what the article can tell us about identity and belief in Victorian Britain

Your assignment's title should be the full bibliographic entry for your chosen article formatted using MHRA style: Author's name [if given], 'Title of article', *Title of periodical* volume number (date of publication), page span.

There should be a high standard of referencing and a complete bibliography: please follow **Writing and Referencing Guidelines**.

In accordance with the **Assessment Criteria for Undergraduates** your research exercise will be assessed on the basis of three main areas: 1) Knowledge and Understanding; 2) Engagement and Analysis; and 3) Expression and Presentation. Your assignment mark will take all three areas into consideration.

## Locating nineteenth-century periodicals:

Many nineteenth-century periodicals have been digitised and made freely accessible via various platforms. These will be the source of your primary text for this assignment. Below is a comprehensive (but not exhaustive) list of titles relevant to this course assignment. I suggest clicking on the link for a periodical title that catches your eye, choosing a random volume/date, and seeing what you find!

- The International Association for the Preservation of Spiritualist and Occult Periodicals (IAPSOP) has digitised lots of relevant journals (please focus on ones published in Britain): <http://iapsop.com/archive/materials/index.html>
  - Spiritualism includes: [British Spiritual Telegraph](#), [Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph](#), [Community's Journal](#), [Spiritual Herald](#), [Medium and Daybreak](#), [Light](#), [Spiritualist Newspaper](#), [Human Nature](#)
  - Theosophy: [Lucifer](#), [Theosophical Review](#)
  - Occultism: [Occultist](#), [Occult Review](#), [Occult Magazine](#)
  - Parapsychology: [Journal and Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research](#)
- *The Crescent and The Islamic World*: <http://www.abdullahquilliam.org/abdullah-quilliam-literature/>
- *The Jewish Quarterly Review*: <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/006128234>
- *The Secular Chronicle*: GoogleBooks volumes linked at bottom of webpage <https://heritage.humanists.uk/the-secular-chronicle/>
- *Our Corner* (freethought and socialist): archive.org has digitised volumes [https://archive.org/details/pub\\_our-corner?tab=collection](https://archive.org/details/pub_our-corner?tab=collection)
- *The Positivist Review*: archive.org has digitised volumes: <https://archive.org/search.php?query=%22positivist%20review%22>
- *Journal of Pali Text Society* (Buddhist scholarship): <https://palitextsociety.org/journals-of-the-pali-text-society-free-downloads/>
- *To-day: A monthly gathering of bold thoughts* (socialist) <https://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/serial?id=today1883>
- *The Labour Prophet* (Christian socialist): [https://warwick.ac.uk/services/library/mrc/archives\\_online/digital/unionjournals/about\\_prophet/](https://warwick.ac.uk/services/library/mrc/archives_online/digital/unionjournals/about_prophet/)

If you want to look for alternative periodicals, you might consult the following resources to locate titles focused on specific religious identities that are not listed above:

- Relevant databases that the library subscribes to might be '19th Century Collections Online', '19th Century UK Periodicals', and 'British Library Newspapers'.
- [Open Access 19th-century Periodicals](#)
- Josef Altholz, *The Religious Press in Britain, 1760-1900* (1989), Chapters 12 'Others' and 13 'Freethought'.

## Assignment Two: Research Essay (75%)

Write an essay of up to 3000 words in length. Discuss one of the following themes in relation to the expression of identity and belief in Victorian Britain:

- community
- conversion
- faith and doubt
- gender
- immigration and/or emigration
- language and/or vernacular
- literary form and/or genre
- national and/or international politics
- orthodoxy and/or tradition
- the periodical press
- physical and/or social sciences
- race
- sexuality
- the supernatural
- *another concept of your choosing (to be agreed with course convenor)*

You must write about two (or more) Victorian texts, at least one of which must be from our primary reading list.

### The basic format of your essay title should be:

[TOPIC] [relationship with] expression of identity and belief in [AUTHOR(S) / TEXTS]

Examples:

The role of conversion on the expression of Islamic identity and belief in the poetry of Abdullah Quilliam and John Yahya Parkinson.

The relationship between science and the expression of identity and belief through the lens of William Winwood Reade's *The Outcast* and the poetry of Constance Naden.

The influence of international politics on the expression of Jewish identity and belief in the writings of Israel Zangwill ('Anglicization' and *Children of the Ghetto*).

How gender shapes the expression of identity and belief in the writing of Sarojini Naidu and Anna Mary Howitt.

The role of death in shaping the expression of secular identities in James Thomson's 'City of Dreadful Night' and *The Secular Chronicle*.

### **Assignment-Specific Assessment Criteria (Research Essay)**

- Use of Victorian literature to inform understanding of religion in British society.
- Demonstrate a good knowledge of nineteenth-century perspectives on faith and identity, and the intersections between these.
- Demonstrate skills in close reading with an awareness of the specificity of textual forms.
- Demonstrate the ability to read and evaluate secondary sources critically and to use these alongside primary materials to build a critical argument.
- Demonstrated effective written English skills and the ability to communicate an argument clearly and persuasively.

### **General Assessment Criteria for All Undergraduate Assignments**

#### **Knowledge and Understanding**

- Identifies relevant material
- Understands relevant ideas, concepts, contexts, and practices (as appropriate)
- Applies relevant ideas and concepts (as appropriate) to materials

#### **Engagement and Analysis**

- Investigates relevant material (e.g., case studies, ideas, concepts, and practices, as appropriate)
- Demonstrates coherent and sustained reasoning
- Articulates an independent response to the task

#### **Expression and Presentation**

- Uses an appropriate structure
- Uses an appropriate style
- Observes presentational expectations