

## 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Women Write the Empire

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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 on canonical works, such as Alfred, Lord Tennyson's "The Lotus Eaters" or Rudyard Kipling's "The White Man's Burden"—brilliant works of literature, certainly, but they were also works that undermined, denigrated and denied the perspective of colonized and enslaved peoples.

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. 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 zoom in like a microscope on the granularity of empire? Together, we will pursue such questions as: 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? 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.

### Course texts:

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

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

Course reader available online or from [X Store]

### Course Requirements

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| • Section attendance and participation | 10% |
| • 1 <sup>st</sup> essay (4-5 pp.)      | 20% |
| • 2 <sup>nd</sup> essay (6-8 pp.)      | 30% |
| • Final essay (8-10 pp.)               | 40% |

### 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.

### English xxx: Schedule of Discussions and Readings

Jan. 17 Introduction, “Women Talk Back to Empire”

Jan. 19 **The Middle Passage, Slavery, and the Diaspora**

Tiffany Ruby Patterson, “Unfinished Migrations”

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, “Curse for a Nation”

Jan. 24 Michael Gomez, *Reversing Sail: A History of the African Diaspora* (Intro. pp. 1-3, “Transatlantic Moment” excerpt pp. 59-81, “Scope of the Trade” pp. 62-64, “Belly of the Whale” pp. 71-79; OPTIONAL READING: “African Provenance” pp. 65-71)

Jan. 31 Elizabeth Barrett Browning, “The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim’s Point”

Felicia Hemans, “The Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers in New England”

Tricia Lootens, “States of Exile”

Feb. 2 Felicia Hemans, “The Bride of the Greek Isle”

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, “Hiram Powers’ Greek Slave”

Tavia Nyong’o “Hiawatha’s Black Atlantic Itineraries”

Tricia Lootens, “Antislavery Afterlives: Changing the Subject / Haunting the Poetess”

Feb. 7 **Caribbean Hybridity**

Introduction to *The History of Mary Prince*

Gomez, “Enslavement” pp. 82-106

Feb. 9 *The History of Mary Prince*

Feb. 14 *The History of Mary Prince*

Feb. 16 *The History of Mary Prince*

**First paper due (uploaded online by start of class)**

Feb. 21 *The History of Mary Prince*

Paul Gilroy, excerpts from *The Black Atlantic*

Feb. 23 Introduction to Mary Seacole

Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina, *Black Victorians / Black Victorian*, Introduction pp. 1-7

Feb. 28 *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Mary Seacole in Many Lands*

Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, “Mrs. Seacole’s Wonderful Adventures in Many Lands and *the Consciousness of Transit*”

Mar. 2 *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Mary Seacole in Many Lands*

March 7 *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Mary Seacole in Many Lands*

March 9 *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Mary Seacole in Many Lands*

March 14 *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Mary Seacole in Many Lands*

March 16 Midterm Recap

**Second paper due (uploaded online by start of class)**

**\*\*\*\*March 18-26: Spring Break\*\*\*\***

Mar. 28 **East Indian Perspectives**

Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle's *Introduction to Theory and Criticism*, chapter on "The colony"

Mar. 30 selections from The Letters and Correspondence of Pandita Ramabai

Apr. 4 Torulata Dutt, "Our Casuarina Tree," "The Lotus"

Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak"

Apr. 6 Torulata Dutt, "Jogadhya Uma," "On the Flyleaf of Erkmann-Chatrion's novel entitled Madame Thérèse," and "France, 1870"

Priya Joshi, excerpts from *In Another Country: Colonialism, Culture, and the English Novel in India*

Apr. 11 Ramabai, "Married Life," "Legal Rights"

Sarojini Naidu "Damayante to Nala in the Hour of Exile," "Into the Woods"

Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism*, pp 23-52

Apr. 13 Introduction to (Rassundari Devi) Rashundari Debi's *Amar Jiban*

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"

April 18 *Amar Jiban*, pp. 1-50 (end before "Sixth Composition")

April 20 *Amar Jiban*, pp. 50-93 (to end of Part 1)

Apr. 25 *Amar Jiban*, 95-124

Apr. 27 Final Paper Peer Review

May 2 Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, selections from *Motichur* Part 1, "The Degradation of Woman" and "Sultana's Dream"

May 4 Last day of class - **Third paper due (uploaded online by 12 noon)**