



## MIDWEST VICTORIAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION VICTORIAN TASTE

### — Seminar Descriptions —

*Participants in MVSA seminars will write 5-7 page papers that will be pre-circulated to the other participants prior to the conference. During the seminars, the seminar leader and participants will identify important points of intersection and divergence among the papers and identify future areas of inquiry and collaboration. The seminar format allows a larger number of scholars to participate in MVSA and to seek financial support from their respective institutions to attend the conference and discuss a shared area of scholarly interest. Seminars are limited to 12 participants.*

*All seminar proposals should be submitted via e-mail by **November 16, 2016**. (See descriptions below for details.)*

Left: King Hall – Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio

### **Victorian Poetry in Good and Bad Taste**

*Seminar Leader: Julie Carr, Department of English, University of Colorado*

“Then in 1900 everybody got down off his stilts; henceforth nobody drank absinthe with his black coffee; nobody went mad; nobody committed suicide; nobody joined the Catholic church; or if they did I have forgotten. Victorianism had been defeated.” So wrote Yeats in 1937, suggesting a Modernist purging of Victorian bad taste in poetry. In today’s popular imagination, if considered at all, Victorian poetry is still often called upon to stand in for bad poetry everywhere—primly precious or excessively enthused, too rhymey too Godly too girly too long!

This seminar welcomes papers that take up the question of taste, both bad and good, in poetry from the Victorian period. Topics might include, but are not limited to: how Victorian notions of taste fed into particular movements or the work of particular poets; debate among Victorian “schools”; explorations in both genre and gender; Modernist reception and critique; the legacy of the Victorian in contemporary practice and criticism. In addition to traditional papers, this seminar also welcomes hybrid, digital, or creative projects.

Send a 300-word abstract and 1-page CV (both as MWord documents) by **November 16, 2016**, to Julie Carr at [julie.carr@colorado.edu](mailto:julie.carr@colorado.edu).

## **Shopping for Taste: The Marketplace and Everyday Cultures of Distinction**

*Seminar Leader: Erika Rappaport, Department of History, University of California–Santa Barbara*

“Nothing,” Pierre Bourdieu wrote in the introduction to *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, “is more distinctive, more distinguished, than the capacity to confer aesthetic status on objects that are banal or even ‘common’ (because the ‘common’ people make them their own) ... or the ability to apply the principles of ‘pure’ aesthetic to the most everyday life, e.g. in cooking, clothing or decoration.”

During the nineteenth century, the idea of taste broadened and was altered by the growth of the mass market, mass culture, urbanization, industrialization, and imperialism. Without these developments there would have been no need and no opportunity for individuals to assert distinctions based on taste. The manufacturer, retailer, and consumer produced, circulated, and consumed countless new things and experienced new tastes. The marketplace was an imaginative and real space that circulated and made new everyday cultures of distinction, transforming luxuries into ordinary objects, and the “banal,” into the distinctive.

This seminar invites papers on the relationship between circulation, exchange, consumption, production, and everyday cultures of distinction. Topics might include the role of mass-market publications as guides to daily living; the development of new cultures of expertise and taste makers, such as home decorators or fashion designers; and advertising and cultures of distinction. Participants might especially consider transnational cultures of consumption; the role of imperialism, religion, and struggles over taste and consumer practices. Finally, we would especially welcome papers addressing the ways in which consumers develop, resist, and reinterpret regimes of taste.

Send a 300-word abstract and 1-page vita (both as MWord documents) by **November 16, 2016**, to Erika Rappaport at [rappaport@history.ucsb.edu](mailto:rappaport@history.ucsb.edu).

## **Liberalism, Sociability, and Musical/Literary Taste**

*Seminar Leader: Phyllis Weliver, Department of English, St. Louis University*

Victorian Britain was perhaps predominately a liberal society. “Between 1830 and 1886,” political historian Jonathan Parry summarizes, “a coalition of anti-Conservatives known at various times as whigs, Reformers and Liberals was out of office for scarcely a dozen years and lost only two of fourteen general elections.” What impact did liberalism have on the role of beauty in Victorian sociability?

In Linda Dowling’s assessment of so-called “Whig aesthetics,” nineteenth-century liberals found beauty to be a democratic means of achieving civic cohesion. Art, to which all people could respond, was meant to preserve human feeling in the face of capitalism, industrialization, and rapid progress. Of course, liberalism is a slippery term, largely dependent upon context. Separate from platform politics, John Stuart Mill and Matthew Arnold developed influential theories about liberalism, and Christopher Harvie and William C. Lubenow have explored how Oxford and Cambridge men who came of age in the 1850s and 1860s were highly influenced by radical theories and collegiate sociability. Not unrelated, Victorian London experienced an explosion of homosocial and mixed-gender clubs, societies, salons, and at-home concerts.

What does this yeasty mixture suggest for our understanding of music and literature in Victorian Britain? Participants may wish to consider the following questions: Elaine Hadley and Amanda Anderson have recently investigated liberalism as practiced in daily life and understood through Victorian literature, but how does music-making interact with reading aloud, conversation, games, or other social practices? Is there a politics to musical taste that aligns with the moral uprightness of great Liberal leaders like Gladstone? What is the social or political role of sentiment, pathos, bathos, or wit in “liberal” musical and literary works and/or behaviors? Do we assess “liberal” taste through the qualities of the artwork or the responsiveness of the listener or reader? What source materials and

methodologies are useful for recovering social behaviors that are otherwise lost in the ephemera of performance and conversation?

Send a 300-word abstract and 1-page vita (both as MWord documents) by **November 16, 2016**, to Phyllis Weliver at [pweliver@slu.edu](mailto:pweliver@slu.edu).

*The Midwest Victorian Studies Association is an interdisciplinary organization welcoming scholars from all disciplines who share an interest in nineteenth-century British history, literature, and culture.*

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**For more information, please visit [www.midwestvictorian.org](http://www.midwestvictorian.org).**

