

From the Editor

An Ever-Expanding Field

Those of us who study nineteenth-century literature are sometimes met with sneers by some who think the literature of this era has nothing to say about our contemporary world or who believe that anything worth saying about these works has already been said. Of course, neither of these erroneous ideas could be further from the truth. To counter the first misconception, I like to recommend that people read the first twenty pages or so of *Oliver Twist* (1837-39). This novel's exploration of the lives of the poor and of the government's role in relieving poverty is strikingly current nearly two hundred years later. As to the second misconception, I can only suggest that a willful ignorance would cause a person to hold such an opinion. The richness, complexity, and diversity of nineteenth-century texts provides an inexhaustible source for scholarly commentary and debate. Moreover, the age that produced these works was steeped in social, political, cultural, scientific, and intellectual upheaval, and we are still coming to terms with many of the changes that occurred during this time. Clearly, there is still much to be said about nineteenth-century literature. In order to help facilitate scholarship about this incredibly complex field, the editorial staff of this journal has expanded to include a Pedagogy Editor and a Media Reviews Editor.

Any academic journal has college educators as a core constituent of its readership, and many academics can attest that being a skilled researcher in a field is quite different than being an expert teacher, and vice versa. With this in mind, *I19* seeks to publish pedagogical pieces in which scholars of nineteenth-century literature can share assignments, course designs, and classroom activities with others to help facilitate the teaching texts in our field. We are therefore pleased to introduce Vivian Delchamps of the Dominican University of California as our Pedagogy Editor who will lead our efforts in publishing scholarship on teaching the fantastic literature of this era.

Dr. Delchamps's areas of expertise include nineteenth-century literature, illness, pain, and disability, and she studies how nineteenth-century women writers such as Emily Dickinson, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Frances E. W. Harper "used literature to supplement diagnostic ways of knowing and capture the raw potential of disabled embodiment." She has published essays in *Poetry and Pedagogy*, *Insurrect!*, and other venues, and she has an article forthcoming on *The Wizard of Oz*.

Teaching science fiction, fantasy, and fairy tale of the nineteenth century is complex on many fronts. Firstly, as shocking as it may be for those of us who grew up loving these genres, many students are not as familiar with the fantastic as we assume they will be. The first novel I ever taught was Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), and near the end of the first class, after a minimally successful discussion, a dismayed-looking student raised her hand and asked, "Why doesn't she just write about things on *Earth*?" At that point I realized how badly I had failed, and that I should have begun the discussion of this book, before we had even started reading, about the conventions of science fiction and how authors often use this genre as a way to displace problems from our everyday reality so that issues are defamiliarized and we can look at them with a fresh point of view. Better preparation would have helped my students be more open to the ways Le Guin explores sex, gender, and culture in this novel. Secondly, as mentioned above, the nineteenth century was a time of unprecedented change, and students studying literature from this time need to understand its history and culture. Nineteenth-century society can be both alien and startlingly similar to our own, and helping students see how this era in many ways gave birth to the world we live in can help them to appreciate its literature. Finally, the teaching of literature from any time period and of any genre is a complex undertaking, and as educators we are always looking for better ways of reaching our students.

The stories the nineteenth century produced maintain a central spot in popular imagination still today. Consider, for instance, how many reinterpretations of *Frankenstein* (1818) or *Dracula* (1897) have been produced by film studios in just the past two years. Or, think about the ways the works of Edgar Allan Poe have remained a staple of American cinema and television for decades, ranging from Vincent Price movies to *The Simpsons* (1989-present). Even beyond these canonical works and authors, the nineteenth century remains a time period that Hollywood loves to engage with and recreate. Because of the popularity of nineteenth-century fantasy, science fiction, and fairy tale throughout various forms of media, this journal has expanded to include a Media Reviews Editor, a position that will be filled by Joe Conway. Dr. Conway studies early American literature, pop culture, and economics in literature and culture, and he is the Director of Graduate Studies at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. He writes that our culture in the twenty-first century still needs “the tropes and characters of the nineteenth century in order to make sense of itself. Moby Dick was Big Oil before Exxon and BP, Dracula foreshadows vulture capitalism, Frankenstein’s monster continues to embody marginalized consciousness.” In regards to contemporary recreations of the nineteenth century in contemporary media, he says “Despite changing technologies—videogames replacing books, for example—we can’t shake the sense we are still citizens of the nineteenth century.” He teaches early sf writers such as Shelley, Hawthorne, and Wells along with their twenty-first century descendants like Nnedi Okorafor and Silvia Moreno-Garcia. He also teaches neo-slave narratives beside nineteenth-century autobiographies of formerly enslaved people, and Edgar Allan Poe beside Toni Morrison. He writes that “Anna Kornbluh describes our contemporary culture as one of pure ‘immediacy,’ and so one way to ensure the work of previous writers continues to hold relevance for our students is by demonstrating how much a part of the past continues to haunt the present.”

In our media reviews section, we plan to highlight not only fantastic writings from the nineteenth century, but also science fiction and fantasy set in this time. One of the most interesting aspects of studying literature from previous eras is the ability to trace how succeeding generations have interpreted those works, and how they have injected their own concerns and ideas into it. Also, especially in the context of nineteenth-century literature, contemporary media set in this time provides the opportunity for previously silenced voices to be heard. Populations that suffered atrocities during the nineteenth century—those who suffered from industrialism, class oppression, sexism, homophobia, global colonization, slavery, or Manifest Destiny, for example—now have the chance to tell their own stories.

Nineteenth-century studies is a field that is ever-expanding, and having these two new positions will enhance *I19*'s ability to engage in conversations about teaching texts written in this century and about new media inspired by this time. We hope the contributions of this journal will have a meaningful impact on the study of this complex and intriguing field.