

Introduction

Producing this decennial edition of VIDES, the journal of the Master of Studies in Literature and Arts (MLA) programme, has been an invaluable and rewarding experience for the 2020-2022 cohort of students. It has allowed us the much longed for opportunity to collaborate and personally interact with our classmates, whilst drawing upon each other's interests and academic backgrounds. In the lead up to writing our dissertations, producing this publication has encouraged us to refine and diversify our research and writing skills, giving us exposure to an abundance and variety of source material, methodologies and specialisations, encompassing the true interdisciplinary nature of the MLA.

Throughout this two-year course, a discussion of what it really means to work and write in an interdisciplinary way has been visited and revisited. It is easy to call something interdisciplinary if it approaches and discusses two or more disciplines in tandem, for example Literature and Art. What we hope to achieve in our compilation of articles for this edition of VIDES, is a display of interdisciplinary articles which embody the elements of interdisciplinary writing: the use and application of multiple methodologies combined to examine, analyse and interpret different forms of media, particularly with approach to two different chosen but connected artefacts.

The MLA is unique in that it comprises an assembly of students from various academic, occupational and general backgrounds, who contribute expertise from their specialisations and draw upon the knowledge of others, as they delve into new and novel topics and experiment with previously unencountered skills. For the most part our four residences, in which students come together for a series of successive lectures and seminars, have been taught chronologically, spanning from the sixteenth to the early nineteenth century. Modules have been dedicated to a spectrum of disciplines, and there has always been a focus in discussions on making connections between subject areas, not only where source materials approach the same subject, but where thematic links can be drawn

across disciplines, time periods, artefacts and media. This encouragement to notice and describe connections has been vital preparation for writing our own and editing one another's articles for VIDES.

After the pandemic, which prohibited student's attendance in Oxford for the first year of residences, it is notable that many of our cohort have chosen to write on the nineteenth century; a period on which our first in-person residence in October of last year was based. One can't help but remember the relief and excitement of this time, during which insightful and engaging conversations burgeoned across modules, during seminars as well as between classes. Many students have chosen to discuss nineteenth-century topics in their articles, a testament to the impetus and enthusiasm which can arise from a free and personal exchange of ideas between deeply passionate and expressive students. These exchanges gave rise to all manners of comparisons and connections, in innovative and insightful ways, spurring symbiotic interest and enthusiasm in areas many of us may never have expected.

Across our topics and time periods, a theme appears to have widely emerged, which speaks to a historic pattern domestically and globally, across genders, races and abilities, of considering how identity is established and perceived, and questioning established social orders and hierarchies of power. The topics and figures who seem to have captured the attention of this cohort are those which primarily appear to pose challenge to traditions and schools of thought, those whose attempt to shift the boundaries of social obscurity and marginality and those which broaden the realms of power and perception, often culminating in productive and destructive dynamic power tensions.

In this vein, Laurence Mercer examines the mid-seventeenth-century religio-political tension between monarchism and republicanism in his discussion of two contrasting depictions of the Interregnum (1649–1660) – a broadside ballad, *The Parliament Routed: / OR, / Here's a HOUSE to be let* (1653), and an oil painting, *Charles II's Cavalcade Through the City of London, 22 April 1661* (1662) by Dirk Stoop (c. 1610–1686). In the light of similar challenges to and enforcements

of monarchical authority, Simon Court's analysis of the illustrations of *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) draws parallels between the 'absolutist' presentations of Crusoe and Van Dyck's court portraits of Charles I, and how this reflects the political theories underpinning the novel set against the backdrop of seventeenth century European imperialism and colonialism. Leading on from this, Ritch Sibthorpe examines the changing perceptions of Edward Colston, as seen in John Cassidy's celebrated sculpture (1895), when set in comparison to its twenty-first century defacement. In this article he considers the contemporarily relevant tensions between the preservation of historic memory and the semantic fluidity of history. Annette Oliver further approaches the colonial history of Britain and in comparing the anti-slavery medallion produced by Josiah Wedgwood in 1787 and Olaudah Equiano's memoirs published in 1789, explores the different ways these champions of abolitionism illuminated the antislavery movement.

Revolutions of thought are approached in Rachel Xhemajli's article, which discusses the alternative perspectives on society, duty, and governance offered by evangelicals such as John Wesley and Hannah More, whose works combined biblically infused moral instruction with religious activism and social reform, having wide reaching implications for culture, society and moral thought. Nancy Kuemmerlein specifically considers the response of artists and poets to revolutionary environments, leading them towards subject matter such as the natural world, which embodied the values which were under threat in their societies, seen through Finch's 'Nocturnal Reverie' (1713) and Gainsborough's *The Painter's Daughters Chasing a Butterfly* (1756).

A number of students have chosen to focus their attention not only on British influences abroad, particularly in the East, but also on British perceptions of the East and vice versa. Whilst Nishantha De Silva examines the projection of British colonial power through comparing George E. Wade's statue of Queen Victoria with the reproduction of sixth-century frescos arising from the 1897 Archaeological Survey at Sigiriya, Ahmed Fathelbab analyses and compares nineteenth century Arabic travel accounts, revealing eastern perceptions of Britain, Britishness and western culture.

Wafiyah Ali continues to examine Eastern-Western perceptions. In her article she contemplates the significance of the opium den to Victorian society by considering how a culturally imagined experience of this phenomenon was proliferated in Victorian writing, and how this reflected and challenged Victorian society as a whole.

The impact of Christian religion on such a society's traditions and values is considered by Joyce Markham through her analysis of the representations of Christian traditions seen in William Holman Hunt's painting *The Festival of St Swithun (The Dovecot)* (1866), and Algernon Charles Swinburne's poem 'Benediction' (1893). In a further analysis of Victorian societal values, Andrew Bramwell discusses cultural approaches to the disenfranchised and disabled as seen through the presentation of disabled characters in the Victorian fiction of Charles Dickens. In a similar approach to the disadvantaged, Patricia Salles delineates the effects of Victorian societal and moral values on women through her exploration of Victorian perceptions of prostitution, as seen through paintings such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Found* (1853-), and a book by Josephine Butler, *The Constitution Violated: An Essay* (1871) both of which reveal disparities between Victorian men and women in their attitudes to public health and sexual culture.

Following on, VIDES sees Heather Adams, Lucinda Storm and Dona Cady reflect on the public attitudes towards and perceptions of women which contributed towards a societal dynamic in which discussion of female potential was often side-lined in favour of discussion (or damnation) of female sexuality. Adams discusses controversial and revealing depictions of Emma, Lady Hamilton upon her return from Naples in 1800 with her husband, Sir William Hamilton, and her lover, Admiral Lord Nelson, subsequently Storm considers the reductive depictions of the women we see sequestered to the inconsequential corner of John Singleton Copley's painting *The Death of Major Peirson*, 1781, (1783). In this essay, she explores how the fleeing and cowardly depiction of 'mute' women in Copley's painting gestures towards Mary Wollstonecraft's arguments for changing such perceptions in a bid for equality, made in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Cady further analyses

perceptions of female potential through examining the caricatures of Victorian women “of mind” seen in the work of George Cruickshank and Amelia B. Edwards, which insightfully challenged as well as revealed the gendered expectations of the time.

Returning the discussion of women, sexuality and female potential back into the nineteenth-century, Jasmin Monkcom and Shiraz Vapiwala approach discussions of female sexuality and its depictions in Pre-Raphaelite art. Monkcom analyses the perceived threat of female sexuality, together with the relationship between female beauty and power, as depicted in Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s painting ‘*Lady Lilith*’ (1867) and Christina Rossetti’s poem ‘In an Artist’s Studio’, written in 1856 but unpublished during her lifetime. Meanwhile, Vapiwala examines the ambivalent approaches taken towards female power and sexuality in Arthur Hughes’ 1863 depiction of John Keats’ poem ‘*La Belle Dame Sans Merci*’ (1819). Finally, Nigel à Brassard celebrates Vapiwala’s chosen poet in his examination of Joseph Severn’s portrait depicting Keats and the original autograph manuscript of ‘*Ode to a Nightingale*’ (1819) and assesses their contribution in rescuing Keats from what seemed inevitable obscurity to become one of the most loved and celebrated among the English poets.

Spanning across four centuries and nineteen topics, the students of the MLA in this edition of VIDES display the kind of zeal for seeing and exploring thematic connections between places, perceptions, time periods and societies which has sustained this publication for a decade, and with all our hopes, will continue to do so for many more in the future.