

- Faculté des lettres et sciences humaines
- www.unine.ch/lettres

Sém. Ang. II/TC/TG : Victorian Things (2AN2119)

Filières concernées	Nombre d'heures	Validation	Crédits ECTS
Pilier principal M A - littératures	Séminaire: 2 ph	Voir ci-dessous	5
Pilier secondaire M A - littératures	Séminaire: 2 ph	Voir ci-dessous	5

ph=période hebdomadaire, pg=période globale, j=jour, dj=demi-jour, h=heure, min=minute

Période d'enseignement:

- Semestre Automne

Equipe enseignante

Prof. Patrick Vincent

Contenu

Since Thomas Carlyle's blistering attack on the so-called 'Age of Machinery' in Signs of the Times (1829), the Victorian period has often been considered, and often also criticized, as an age more interested in material than in spiritual concerns. The Great Exhibition of 1851 at Crystal Palace, where over 100'000 objects were exhibited, perfectly exemplifies the Victorians' fascination with things, as does literary realism in fiction, with its emphasis on middle-class economic life and on ordinary objects. At the same time, canonical novelists such as Charles Dickens and George Eliot displayed an ambivalent relation to consumer culture, informing Marx's influential critique of the commodity in Das Kapital in 1867. Modernity's troubled relation between subject and object, in other words, was clearly a source of anxiety during the Victorian era, with objects seemingly threatening to replace human relations.

In this seminar, we will examine the ambivalent representation of objects in Victorian literature and culture, focusing in particular on three very different texts by female novelists, asking how objects contribute to these novels' meaning and form. Since Asa Briggs's Victorian Things in 1989, historians and literary critics have been increasingly interested in Victorian material culture. In 2001, Bill Brown published an influential theoretical manifesto, "Thing Theory", informed by Marxist theory and the Frankfurt School, but also by other disciplines including sociology, anthropology and museum studies. This in turn gave rise to many articles and books studying the representation of things in Victorian literature. In addition to the novels, significant primary texts by authors such as Carlyle, Ruskin, and Morris, and secondary criticism on these authors, we will also read some foundational texts that contributed to "Thing Theory" by authors such as Marx, Benjamin, and Latour.

The aim of the course is to teach students how to think about objects from an interdisciplinary perspective. In addition to a research paper, students will be asked to research and present an object specific to Victorian culture.

Forme de l'évaluation

Ev. Interne : One in-class presentation of a Victorian object (30%); research essay (10-12 double-spaced pages) (70%).

Documentation

Any edition of the following:

- Elizabeth Gaskell, Cranford (1853)
- Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Lady Audley's Secret (1862)
- Ella Hepworth Dixon, The Story of a Modern Woman (1894)

All other reading will be placed on the Moodle course platform.

Forme de l'enseignement

Seminar (participation and weekly readings are required)