Introduction: Widening the Nineteenth Century

SUKANYA BANERJEE, RYAN D. FONG, AND HELENA MICHIE

Concepts

STUDIES of the British nineteenth century, we know, have outstripped chronology, pressing against conventional markers in order to claim relevant sections of the centuries that precede and follow. The "long" nineteenth century, as we have come to understand, is a necessary reminder of the fact that literary and cultural movements cannot be straitjacketed by neat temporal markers and that periodization is, by nature, a labile, dynamic process. What, then, can be gained, in focusing on the "wide" nineteenth century? What kind of a heuristic does "width" proffer? What happens to the term "British" when we widen "its" century? (After all, it is an implicit understanding of a British-mandated century that forms the point of reference for our efforts at widening.) And, is widening, with its suggestions of inclusiveness, necessarily a salubrious undertaking? What is gained, and what is lost? What is at stake?

Where do we locate the original, the home, for what has been stretched, unbound or rebound, opened up?—Ross Forman

Sukanya Banerjee is an associate professor of English at the University of California, Berkeley. In addition to several articles and essays, she has co-edited *New Routes for Diaspora Studies* (Indiana University Press, 2012) and is the author of *Becoming Imperial Citizens: Indians in the Late-Victorian Empire* (Duke University Press, 2010), which was awarded the Sonya Rudikoff Prize for best first book in Victorian studies. She is currently working on a book, "Loyalty and the Making of the Modern: A Transimperial System," that examines how and why formulations of loyalty became critical to the understanding of modernity in nineteenth-century Britain and its empire.

Ryan D. Fong is an associate professor of English at Kalamazoo College, where he also teaches in the Women, Gender, and Sexuality Program. He has published essays in *Victorian Literature and Culture*, *Victorian Studies*, and *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies* and is working on a book manuscript on indigeneity, empire, and Victorian literature.

Helena Michie, Agnes C. Arnold Professor in Humanities and professor of English at Rice University, is the author of five books in Victorian studies and the study of gender and sexuality. Her most recent book, *Love among the Archives: Writing the Lives of Sir George Scharf, Victorian Bachelor* (Edinburgh University Press, 2015), with Robyn Warhol, won the North American Victorian Studies Association's 2015 Best Book of the Year prize. She teaches courses in feminist theory, literary theory, and Victorian literature and culture as well as classes and workshops on professional writing.

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It is questions such as these that prompt our interest in the wide nineteenth century. We wish to examine the interpretive and methodological possibilities that emerge when we expand our objects of study beyond what has been ordained by the temporal—and spatial—purview of the British nineteenth century, which is to say that we wish to put further pressure on the geotemporal linkage that has largely tethered studies of the nineteenth century to the geographic confines of Britain. More specifically, as Victorianists, we are invested in considering how the appellation "Victorian" marks less a certain period of monarchical reign than it does a political, aesthetic, and sociocultural assemblage and, thus, works as a lever for widening the nineteenth century.[1] In our efforts at widening, we do not view the nineteenth century as a container of endless possibilities. In fact, for the purposes of a special issue of *Victorian Literature and Culture*, "Victorian" helps determine how far, or how much, we can widen. But in that process, the term "Victorian" itself becomes a more tensile one, reacquainting us with its dispersed provenance, its applicability, and a resonance that is as varied as it is abiding.

Victorian England is not one thing but many. Its name is legion.—Robert D. Aguirre

We acknowledge the strides that our field has already made to study "Victorian" Britain beyond its geographic boundaries. The conjoined influence of postcolonial studies, feminist theory and historiography, and studies of transnationalism and diaspora has made it impossible, at least over the past two decades, to study Victorian Britain in its insularity.[2] Such terms as "transatlantic," "world," "global," or "cosmopolitan" have consistently gestured to relays and filiations that exceed the boundaries of Britain.[3] Moreover, as historians such as Antoinette Burton, Catherine Hall, and Bill Schwarz, among others, have pointed out, the empire was never simply "out there": not only did the traffic of people, commodities, and capital to and from the imperial metropolis render Britain an irreducibly heterogeneous entity, but it also played a key role in shaping British identity along multiple registers.[4] Recent studies by Elleke Boehmer, for instance, attest to the ways in which the metropolitan residence and writings of Indian poets such as Sarojini Naidu, Mohini Chatterjee, and Manmohan Ghose significantly informed the mood and trajectory of British Aestheticism and Decadence at the fin

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de siècle.[5] Indeed, Edward Said's call to consider how the Victorian novel structurally and thematically literalizes the unmistakable imprint of empire upon Britain has met with an increasingly robust response that extends beyond studies of the novel to those of poetry and periodical publications as well.

In studying the wide nineteenth century in terms of expanded contact, encounter, and exchange, therefore, we acknowledge that we are not breaking wholly new ground. What we wish to explore further in this collection of essays, however, are the possibilities of expanding the ambit of nineteenth-century study by moving beyond the established tropological frame of "contact," inasmuch as that tends to privilege British itineraries of travel or metropolitan points of destination. While Britain remains an important nodal point for us—we cannot wish away its political centrality, nor do we intend to—the wide nineteenth century is one that is multisited and polyvocal. Therefore, even as several of the essays key in on a "metropolitan" text or perspective as a starting point, they point to larger frameworks that can expand our points of reference and study. As we see it, the challenge before us as a field is to configure frameworks for studying texts, events, and places that are *not* funneled through British "initiative" (i.e., whose study is not occasioned by the observations of British writers, travelers, administrators) but that are, nonetheless, part of, or integral to, the world of the British Empire.

Such an undertaking requires us to widen our linguistic and cultural resources in order to study—indeed, to even *know* of—texts that exist beyond the pale of metropolitan recognition. In fact, three of the essays in this volume (Forman, Reeder, Roy) profitably call out the limitations of the metropolitan (monolingual) range of inquiry. One aspect of widening the nineteenth century, therefore, is to gesture to a widening of our linguistic resources and archives. Over the years, nineteenth-century studies have provided a forum for staging generative interdisciplinary conversations between literary studies and women's, gender, and sexuality studies, history, and art history (as witnessed in programs of the annual conferences organized by the North American Victorian Studies Association [NAVSA] and the Interdisciplinary Nineteenth-Century Studies Association [INCS], for instance). However, these collaborations, worthy as they are, have mostly remained within an overarching anglophone context. What would be the outcome of extending the conversation to disciplines and fields that offer a wider linguistic and cultural range than what anglophone or even the Anglo-American academy privileges, which

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is to say, non-European languages, or what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak refers to as the "languages of the Southern hemisphere"?[6]

This is not necessarily to suggest that we take it upon ourselves to learn new languages (although such an endeavor is never too late nor redundant, as Victorians themselves would tell us). It is, however, to squarely acknowledge the fact that the paucity of linguistic diversity remains a roadblock for Victorian studies. To call for a more polylingual field of research (and collaboration), then, is to seriously engage with the possibilities and fruits of translation in ways that expand the nineteenth-century world not just beyond Britain but beyond Europe as well. It goes without saying that we readily read Karl Marx, Walter Benjamin, Jacques Derrida, or Michel Foucault in translation. However, we hold back from reading translated texts from other parts of the world, especially those marked the "non-West" or the "global South." Part of the reason for this avoidance is that we just do not know of these other texts or literary traditions. But if we are more likely to read a work of theory in translation, it is also because of an assumption of the "universality" of theory, an assumption that casts a theoretical work (albeit written in a different source language) as more familiar and relevant than literary or cultural texts, which, though written in the same source language, are viewed all too often in terms of their "particularity" or "otherness." It is significant, for instance, that the first version of Dipesh Chakrabarty's highly influential essay, "Climate Change and Four Theses on History," was originally written in Bengali for a journal published in Kolkata.[7] The later, English-language version, which was subsequently published in *Critical Inquiry*, is so widely cited in the Anglo-American academy that we completely overlook the essay's antecedents. This is hardly to call for a return to origins, linguistic or otherwise. Far from it. Rather, it is to take stock of what kinds of translation gain prominence, alongside a consideration of which source languages get ready purchase. In this case, Chakrabarty's academic standing as well as *Critical Inquiry*'s standing as a journal no doubt play an important role in the essay's status. However, Victorianists would perhaps find it much easier to incorporate Chakrabarty's theoretical essay in syllabi and reading lists than they would, say, a nineteenth-century Bengali novel in translation, which would require a far greater effort in terms of rationale, knowledge, and space-clearing. But, surely, the suppleness—and strength—of our theoretical frameworks can only be secured by the richness of our archives? Lauren Goodlad's insightful monograph on Victorian liberalism was built, in fact, on the very gap between nineteenth-century British social

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and political structures and Foucauldian theory (which was modeled more on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France).[8] It is this knowledge of the "particular," then, that can interrogate, embellish, or challenge our theoretical assumptions about the nineteenth century, an undertaking that Parama Roy's and Ross Forman's essays in this issue embark upon by drawing from resources from South Asia and Brazil, respectively.

A few caveats are in order here. First, the non-West, or the global South, should not be relegated to the function of providing "particulars" in the service of "theory"; indeed, the question of who can lay originary claim to theory is itself a broader discussion worth having.[9] Second, and with specific reference to Victorian studies, to think of non-English or vernacular languages as "particular" is to attribute a universal status to Victorian Britain (and English). Our efforts to widen the nineteenth century work precisely to lateralize the British point of view or experience, to situate it as one alongside and adjacent to other cultural moments and experiences with which it is nonetheless intimately connected, if iniquitously so.[10] In fact, given Victorian Britain's imperial hegemony, an effort to lateralize necessarily remains an ongoing effort—a work in progress, if you will, and ours marks but the early stages. But it also explains our move away from an emphasis on "encounter" alone, notwithstanding the continued relevance of Mary Louise Pratt's insightful and influential rubric of the "contact zone."[11]

Conversely, to advocate for translation, as we do, also runs the risk of mimicking the colonizing move (which the theory of the "contact zone" pushes back against), inasmuch as translation, as Laura Lomas reminds us, rehearses, howsoever unwittingly, a colonial will to transparency and subjugation.[12] In that respect, to acknowledge what Walter Benjamin terms the "untranslatable," to maintain the significance of what must remain opaque—"opacité," as Edouard Glissant puts it—becomes as important an element of translation as what it tangibly delivers.[13] Such an acknowledgment shifts the pivot of the nineteenth-century world even as it makes that world more legible. Indeed, coming to terms with this double-edged nature of translation—the fact that it yields and simultaneously withholds—is to recognize that translation is not just an act of relay and dissemination but also, as Subramanian Shankar suggests, one of interpretation.[14] It not only expands what we know, but it imparts a knowledge that comes with acknowledging the limits of knowing. For Victorianists, to negotiate more closely with translated texts from across the empire, as well as with sites and theories of

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translation, then, twins epistemology with hermeneutics. If nothing else, it allows for a fuller reckoning of their subjects of study, who were routinely multilingual, subjects for whom it would not have been very unusual to be familiar with a range of languages, be it Latin, French, Persian, Swahili, or Hindustani.[15]

What stops widening from becoming encroachment?—Jessie Reeder

To widen is not simply to include but to overhaul conceptual categories that prevented inclusion in the first place.—Sukanya Banerjee

In moving toward linguistic diversity we will no doubt lean strongly, as we should, on the valuable work of our allies working in languages outside of English or comparative literature programs. Most of these programs in the Anglo-American academy, however, remain Eurocentric in their orientation. Yet it is also the case that opportunities for language training, especially at the K–12 level (at least in the United States), are outgrowing *their* Eurocentrism even as budgets for language training are shrinking (Mandarin and Japanese are more widely taught now than they were before). The anomaly of this inverse proportionality can perhaps be attributed to increasing demographic changes. In other words, a more polylingual Victorian studies—dare we say, a more "Victorian" Victorian studies—would appeal to more, indeed, resonate more with, the more polyglot generation of students and scholars in the making. Yet we, as a field, seem unprepared for that wider linguistic future. A closer collaboration with colleagues in comparative and the "foreign" languages and literatures is certainly an urgent imperative, especially because they are embattled by budget cuts. A recent MLA newsletter, in fact, emphasizes the need to strengthen language requirements in our English programs by way of shoring up language departments.[16] But it is equally important to cast a wider net to more fully account for the varied linguistic and cultural histories that constituted the Victorian world.

It is time, then, to think of collaborations with colleagues in institutional and academic units whose purview extends beyond Europe or North America, to areas that had their own nineteenth century in ways —material, historical, and political—that are not unconnected to how we have framed the period so far. Why should our sense of temporality be hemmed in by geographic boundaries? In other words, it might be

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time to collaborate with disciplinary formations such as area studies, which are marked by their cross-disciplinary and primarily non-European focus.[17] To bridge the gap between nineteenth-century studies and area studies—to twin, in other words, the temporal axis with a spatial one—is one way to "lateralize" Victorian Britain, to think of widening in coeval terms. But in calling for a closer collaboration with area studies, we are also wary of the freighted history that it bears. In fact, the very feature that recommends area studies to us (its non-European orientation) emanates from the institutional history of area studies, particularly in the United States. The study of "regions" demarcated as East Asia, Latin America, Middle East, Africa, South Asia, and so forth was incorporated (and funded) within the post–World War II curriculum of U.S. universities as a knowledge-gathering resource designed to enhance the geopolitical leverage of the United States in the Cold War period. To be sure, the intended instrumentality of area studies attracted considerable critique, even from its practitioners. In 1973 Roger Chilcote published a critique of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) for not being "radical" enough.[18] Chilcote's critique was directed against the professional association and not the field of study per se. But the terms of the critique—that the research the association seemed to make room for favored U.S. interests and scholars more than Latin American countries or academics—spoke directly to, and against, the tacit founding principles of area studies in U.S. institutions.

Moreover, apart from its problematic role in maintaining a certain geopolitical (and academic) order, the spatial compartmentalization presumed and foisted by the area studies model also proved to be problematic or, at the very least, insufficient. Studies of transnationalism and diaspora, studies of the Black Atlantic, Indian Ocean studies, hemispheric studies, to name just a few alternate frameworks, pushed for interconnected, extraregional, and fluid histories that the more terrestrially bound and comparatively discrete regional demarcations underwriting area studies seemed to foreclose. Here, too, scholars identified as area studies specialists themselves advocated for a "riotous heterogeneity" (e.g., James Scott) in configuring regions that did not adhere to statist boundaries or geopolitical exigencies.[19] In fact, even as—or because—areas studies lost much of its raison d'être after the "cessation" of the Cold War, the field was open for reinvention in ways that sought to retain its methodological rigor but also to expand its epistemologies and frames of reference. For instance, in the opening issue of the reincarnated version of the journal *Comparative Studies of Africa, South Asia, and the Middle*

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East, one of the respondents to the journal's revised (2013) mission statement posed a question that was as speculative as it was prescriptive. "Can regional studies offer a new site of engagement," Udaya Kumar asked, "with spatial specificity *and* connectedness at the same time?"[20] In the same issue of that journal, Tani Barlow, herself an editor of an important journal on East Asia studies (*positions*), noted the extent to which a newly imagined area studies could afford to take the risk to redefine, or provide hospitable venues for, allied or emergent fields, as indeed *positions* had done for postcolonial studies and queer studies.[21]

Rehearsing the disciplinary trajectory of area studies, as we have just done, might seem tedious. However, in our efforts to widen the nineteenth century, we should, it seems, make place for area studies. For one thing, the autocritique and aptitude for reinvention characteristic of area studies certainly provide a regenerative model worth reflecting on. But, perhaps even more important, the plural knowledges and epistemologies that area studies offers bring home the heterogeneity of the "British" nineteenth century; it reminds us that Britain did indeed claim substantive areas of the world in ways that consequently render "Victorian" an irreducibly plural term.

Our engagement with area studies should not, of course, remain purely instrumental, focusing on the linguistic, cultural, or empirical resources that it can proffer. Rather, as Spivak cautions, "We must take the languages of the Southern Hemisphere as active cultural media rather than as objects of cultural study sanctioned by the ignorance of the metropolitan migrant."[22] In that spirit, thinking through and with the textual, cultural, and linguistic density of area studies encourages us to even rethink "area" itself. In so doing, we might find ourselves not as beholden as we currently are to nation-centered cartographies or post–World War II political imaginaries. Though anachronistic to the nineteenth century, these geopolitical demarcations nonetheless inform our approach to it. In this instance, eschewing anachronism would not be a move toward preserving (Victorian) authenticity. Rather, it would be to find that simple but powerful terms such as "near" and "far" (which, as we will presently describe, played an organizing principle in our workshop discussions for this volume) acquire different referents and resonances. How would the relation between geography, affect, and critical praxis change if we reminded ourselves of the configurations that constituted the commonplace reality of the Victorian world? How could a reminder of "areas" such as "the Holy Land," "the Levant," "the Raj," immensely fraught and problematic as they may be, work, nonetheless,

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to dislodge our settled understanding of geocultural distance? Of the notion of "difference" itself? How might the complex, sedimented histories that these configurations bespeak widen the nineteenth century?

Who was nearby? Who was far away?—Lynn Voskuil

In fact, in choosing to frame the nineteenth century as wide in this collection, we as editors wanted to mark a deliberate move away from such terms as "global" and "transnational," since these terms not only implicitly assume a metropolitan positionality, but they also respond to the more statist cartography of the twentieth century. From our perspective, the "transnational" does not bear signal relevance as a heuristic for the simple reason that the nineteenth-century world, least of all that of the British Empire, was not neatly apportioned into isomorphic nation-states. To even think of Victorian Britain as a clearly defined nation is to elide its considerably more "messy" imperial appurtenance. The nineteenth century was always-already transnational in ways that render a transnational approach, one that concertedly looks above and beyond the nation, less apropos. It seems more useful, if not germane, to think, instead, about the transimperial flows, networks, and formations that constituted the nineteenth-century world and that, in fact, provide a genealogy of nationhood, for the nation-state is, for better or worse, one of the most abiding, if not capacious, legacies of the nineteenth century, and we avert our critical gaze from it perhaps at our peril.[23]

To be sure, there is a rich body of scholarship that has marked a departure away from the nation in various contexts, be it through tracking aesthetic movements and practices (Brent Hayes), the forging of a collective indigenous identity (Chadwick Allen), or through a differently conceived agglomeration of place and community, as in the conception of the "Indian Ocean world" (Isabel Hofmeyr). In the context of Victorian literary studies, more specifically, Caroline Levine issued an important call to move away from "nation" and to think, instead, of "networks," a call that has been generative in widening the nineteenth century beyond the traditional boundaries of time and place.[24] We acknowledge the importance of these theoretical interventions. However, the endpoint, if we can call it that, of these theoretical journeys—alternate networks or forms and vectors of solidarity and cohesiveness—is also not

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the only place our essays end up inhabiting. Our attempt to widen is not guided by the pursuit of an alternative to the nation, for such an endeavor *can* be delimited by the single-mindedness of its evaluative criteria. We do offer alternate spatial configurations (Robert D. Aguirre's essay in this collection on the "Pacific Coast"). However, we also want to guard against thinking about widening only in terms of expansion or connectedness, for these can often engender an illusion of (ready) access that the term "global," for instance, has been critiqued for fostering. Widening, we contend, is equally about the kind of inclusion that a knowledge and awareness of (isolated) specificity enable: texts, objects, or subjects that cannot so easily be inserted into a network. Widening is also to account for states of radical singularity or conditions of immobility. Lauren Goodlad's essay in this volume points to "place," which in its peculiarity and rootedness can actually open up possibilities of narratological and ontological widening. In fact, we have substituted the quotidian term "wide" for more geographically inflected terms precisely because we do not want to commit to a particular longitude, latitude, or configuration. "Wide," which denotes shape, is as much about recognizing the many shapes of the nineteenth century as it is about enhancing our methods to do so. "Wide" is an adjective that can become, without too great a stretch, a verb, "to widen," signaling a sometimes messy, slow, and even creaky process.



[Widening] is a slow process; it takes a long nineteenth century; it takes all the decades and centuries we have endured since.—Helena Michie



It is in that spirit, then, that this special issue also engages with the nonhuman, in the essays by Parama Roy and Lynn Voskuil. Focusing on the world of plants, animals, and even the extrahuman (gods) endows the nineteenth century with a commodiousness that is important to register. However, to do so is important not only as a matter of record but also because Victorians were so invested in cataloging and classifying various forms of being, a task that informed the professionalization of disciplines such as anthropology or geology. Yet the classificatory impulse notwithstanding, the age of empire and industrialization also brought humans into new relations with the nonhuman—be it machines, commodities, or the physical environment—in ways that belied these discrete

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classifications. By tracking these various kinds and moments of interface, we can rewrite the narrative of "contact," which is otherwise formulated along the (antagonistic) split between the colonizer and colonized. Without taking anything away from the politically charged theater of empire, an alternate narrative of contact can, for one thing, consider the extent to which contact between the human and nonhuman repositions the colonial world in ways that cannot be read along the simple binary of colonizer/colonized. More broadly, engaging with nonhuman actors allows for an expanded or revised understanding of Victorian terms such as "native" or of dualities such as "home" and "away." Focusing on plants as protagonists, Voskuil's essay, for instance, refines our understanding of the term "cosmopolitan."

Emphasizing the interrelationship between the human and nonhuman, the "social" and the "natural," has been key to an ecological perspective. Our decision to include nonhumans in our exercise of widening is inspired by this strand of ecocritical thought. Indeed, the recent "ecological turn" has spurred specific interest in the nineteenth century, for, after all, it ushered in the "carbon age" and a "fossil economy." It also provided the vocabulary—the term "ecology" itself is of Victorian provenance—to consider the long-standing impact of humans as geoagents.[25] As Nathan Hensley and Philip Steer have pointed out, "Given that the Victorian Empire's world-spanning configuration was the first political project in history to be powered almost exclusively by fossilized plant life, it follows that the carbon-saturated atmosphere we breathe today is, in both metaphorical and brutely chemical senses, the atmosphere of the British Empire."[26] Victorian studies has made considerable headway in responding to a key provocation of ecotheory: to include the nonhuman within our critical purview ("ontological flattening" or, as we think of it, "ontological widening"). However, we have a longer way to go in terms of fully addressing that other provocation of the ecological turn indexed in the observation by Hensley and Steer: the imbrication of ecology and empire. "Empire" runs the risk, yet again, of becoming an empty signifier in our ecologically informed inquiry, even though the terms of that inquiry bestow an inescapable significance on the concept. How might the canvas of the wide nineteenth century, as we have limned it so far, prompt or enable an attentiveness to the specificities of a *multiply* habited empire? How might that realign our understanding of ecology, of empire? How might ecology look from other parts of the Victorian empire?

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As the increasing tempo of these questions indicates, we are keen to widen the reference points for "wide" itself. In so doing, we understand that our use of "wide" may serve to constitute the critical horizon of our discussions, rather than serve as its descriptor. Indeed, this collection is not meant to be an exemplar of what a study of the wide nineteenth century should look like: it is by no means meant to be a singular and prescriptive solution to the conceptual issues laid out above that would ensure sufficient width. It is, on the other hand, exploratory and experimental—both in the approaches and arguments that each individual essay articulates and in the format of the collected essays themselves. We intend this discussion to be a starting point—or, in some cases, a continuation—of threads of conversation that can enhance our contours of study and be performative in this regard. This special issue is an exploration of how scholars trained in literary studies, who identify (although perhaps not always completely) as Victorianists or who call themselves, among other things, Victorianists (some of whom work exclusively with materials in the English language and some of whom know and work in a variety of languages), might put into practice this process of widening. While geographical diversity—or rethinking geography—was important for us, we also wanted to avoid being blinded by the dazzle of a representational array. We wanted to avoid what we termed as the "UN model of geographic representation," because such a model can leave core ideas unwidened; or, in its inclusionary zeal, it can flatten important differences. In order to think widely about wideness itself, therefore, we chose to begin with essays that not only explore different parts of the world (albeit not exhaustively) but also operate at a metalevel, offering new analytical frameworks, methodologies, and languages that account for the period's spatial complexities. Through our discussions we arrived at the fact that wideness is as much about depth as it is about breadth. We discovered that in order to think widely, we also need to think recursively. Therefore, while we were inspired by the critical moves of current ecotheory, we also felt the need to go back to disciplinary formations that seem discredited (area studies) or to go back to central challenges thrown up by fields such as postcolonial studies that seem to have been waylaid by the universalizing (and, as we argue, metropolitan-centered) claims of the "global" or "transnational." If one thing we can say about the Victorians is that they were an inventive lot, who, for better or worse, found new worlds and new ways of living in that world, then

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perhaps we, too, need to be inventive in our imagining of the many worlds—and the century—they so variously inhabited.

So widening then is a grappling with the legacy of what's left out and what is centered—a project not of self-congratulatory expansion (how Victorian) but of reflection and vigilance.—Ryan D. Fong

But I want to go wide and deep.—Lauren Goodlad

As we discovered in working with each other as an editorial team and in the workshop with our contributors, such a process (as we describe below) entailed a widening of our own methods and practices as scholars, readers, and writers. While widening is an inexhaustible process, and the results that it produces at any one time must, perforce, be deemed "narrow" (in order for the process to continue), we found that our critical approach to the process cannot be narrow, neither in terms of the conceptual frameworks we draw on nor in terms of the scholarly practices that we are trained to make visible.

Process

This special issue, then, is the latest version of a conversation between and among the editors that has been unfolding—although not continually, evenly, or predictably—for ten years. This conversation was in part initiated and sustained at two conferences: the Long Nineteenth Century Conference in 2015 at Rice; and the Long, Wide Nineteenth Century Conference sponsored by the Dickens Project at the University of California, Santa Cruz, in 2015. Some of the contributors to this volume were at one or both of these; all of us carried the conversations begun there into our larger networks.

As length lengthened and widened, as length and width added new dimension to our teaching and scholarship, we decided to try to host a collection of essays that would extend our conversation and take it to different places. We say "host" rather than "edit" because, from the beginning, we imagined a process and a format for a collection that would be less like an edited collection and more like—well, there were many words for what we wanted, none of them quite right: a dinner party, an event, a parallel playtime, or, to turn the idiom a little, a workshop. Since we had all enjoyed and benefited from playing with the format of conferences, we knew that we wanted something more than a series

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of excellent essays that responded to a theme or a call; we wanted a more intimate, sustained, and even embodied sense of conversations among the contributors, including the editors. What follows is a brief account of how we tried to achieve these ambitions through attention to process. Although, as will become clear, our model is not one that could be replicated under the current conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is our hope that it will serve as inspiration for other experiments with academic form and format, especially once in-person gatherings of the kind that we imagined and describe below become possible once again.

We considered a variety of approaches but finally decided that we would organize a two-day writing workshop that would include all the essay writers and the three editors. We gathered—eight of us in person and one, by necessity, virtually—at Rice University in April 2018 after the authors had completed the first draft of their essays. Although we were open to improvisation, surprise, and accident, we had from the beginning three goals in mind: to spend substantial time discussing each essay, to provide a structure that allowed for discussion across individual essays, and to experiment with what it might mean to write together.

The first goal is, of course, the most familiar one: borrowed in large part from creative writers, although subject to change and revision in current writing pedagogy, the workshop model has morphed into the familiar work-in-progress format we see in our departments and now even at conferences. Our second goal took some choreographing. Rather than having an open format in which each author "workshopped" a paper for the group, we chose to break the larger group of six authors and three editors into triads (two authors and one editor) for intensive discussion of two papers at a time. While we knew this could produce an intense and focused conversation, we also realized that it would necessarily limit the range of critique. For this reason, we introduced a second round of triads, organizing the first around papers that seemed to the editors to be "near" each other in topic or method and the second around those that seemed "far" and that could produce, we thought, more surprising connections and a helpful sense of distance.

As might have been predicted for a collection that simultaneously utilizes and questions spatial terms, "near" and "far" did not turn out to be self-evident categories. We tried to resist reducing "nearness" to geography, and so tried to come up with pairings that might be built around conceptual, methodological, and even stylistic nearness. Our decisions about the "far" pairings operated in the same way. As a result, these labels became less expressions of transparent meaning than opportunities that allowed all of us to engage with the question of what makes

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essays like or unlike one another and to thematize in our responses the problem of difference. Had we had time in our two-day schedule, we would have added more rounds of triads, thus ensuring that all contributors had an opportunity to be paired with all others.

The three of us as editors were committed to the third goal of exploring a shared writing process—a form of what we call "parallel writing," in which we would write together in a common space, sometimes sharing that writing and sometimes not. We thought that this process would not only emphasize the importance of writing but also expand and deepen ideas of collaboration, breaking down boundaries of secrecy, privacy, and possessiveness that mark our very individualistic field's traditional approach to writing and scholarship. Helena has had some experience leading writing workshops with colleagues that begin with prompt-based timed writing that can be read aloud by participants. We decided that we would use this approach to get to know each other (in some cases better), to come up with ideas for the content and format of the collection, and to serve as a basis for discussion throughout the two days.

Helena's experience suggested that the prompts need to be structured in such a way that people's comfort with them and with the process of writing in a room of strangers and professional colleagues develops over time. The first day, we all wrote in response (six minutes apiece) to three prompts. The first, "Victorian England," gave people something to write against, something about which they had no doubt already thought long and hard. The second, "widening," with its somewhat awkward and unfamiliar verbal form, prompted participants to think about process as they brainstormed the central term of the collection. And the third, "collaboration," was intended to open up many forms of possible forms of writing and thinking together that could perhaps help us with the workshop and the collection. Although structuring prompts risks being instrumental—we were careful not to deceive ourselves that this was "free writing"—we felt the words were capacious enough that they could accommodate many different ideas and approaches.

My first thought is that I don't know how to do this.—Jessie Reeder

How does collaborative writing actually work in practice? This will be my first time sitting in a room with a group undertaking this kind of project, so there is excitement and trepidation. Still, what is the goal—agreement, discussion, raising questions?—Ross Forman

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And they did. Some members of the workshop managed to write astonishingly articulate mini-essays. Others wrote notes. Some clacked away on laptops or tablets; others used paper and pens. It was impossible, as we each wrote, to ignore the embodied process and presence of our colleagues: to register the speed of writing, the occasional sigh, the moments of movement and stillness, the sense of anxiety, playfulness, and adventure. We were probably all conscious of Jessie Reeder, who had Skyped into the workshop, projected on an enormous screen while she was writing. While after the first prompt some colleagues were surprised by and perhaps uncomfortable with the opportunity to read their words aloud, this part of the process became routinized. Moreover, over the three prompts, the writing itself changed: participants took more risks with style and content, departing more and more from the genres and syntax of academic writing. Although we had not planned this element of the workshop, writing also became an important part of the near/far discussion triads. We decided as a group to leave time at the end of every session for written reflection; this writing was shared within the smaller group. By the end of the two days, writing together seemed normal, if not always natural.

The social part of it intrigues me. If space is interactive—as I have come to think, in concert with some environmental geographers—then what emerges in the space between us at this table, in this room? Will there be other inhabitants of the room once we finish this exercise? This weekend? The "writing" part of this phrase is less open to me as a key word—more opaque and perhaps a bit frightening. I have never done collaborative writing before, and when I last tried experimental writing (way back in college), I resisted it and the teacher who made me do it. Although we are writing together, perhaps creating something new together, we are writing singly at the moment.—Lynn Voskuil

I love to write in the same room as someone else, writing.—Helena Michie

[Collaborative writing] is also its own kind of widening, as the private sphere of one's own cursor opens up and onto other cursors [. . .]. It's the opposite, the healthy opposite, of the pinched, private-property world of commodity academia, where your writing is what you own, your calling card, your brand, or even your CV.—Robert D. Aguirre

The workshop, then, left written traces on laptops, tablets, and paper notebooks; it produced and, indeed, became an archive containing—what, exactly? Were these words ephemera? Were they something like a by-product of a process designed to produce more familiar kinds of

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work? Were they simply some version of a warm-up exercise prior, say, to working out? Were they work themselves and, if so, of what kind? Did they have use or value; should they have a life beyond the context of the workshop? Did these pieces of writing have a name or a genre?

The answer to the last three questions, we all felt, was yes, although we still struggle with the last, perhaps least important one. While, as we noted above, we do not understand this work to be "freewriting," we are not entirely comfortable, except instrumentally, with "informal writing," the term we have settled upon using in our conversations as editors. We know and understand this writing to be responding to and creating a form, to be in several senses formal writing. And we all agreed we wanted to live with and honor that form, for it to be part of the form of the special issue, given its profound role in shaping the final versions of the essays published here. How we wanted to execute that inclusion was still very much an open question when the workshop concluded, but we all understood that the essays and the introduction itself would be substantially informed by the writing and thinking that we did together and, thus, understood the necessity of finding or creating a form for this collection that could include them.

Format

In navigating this shift from the workshop to this printed collection of essays, it became apparent that the question of how to make this informal writing, collective thinking, and vibrant conversation visible within these pages presented a number of significant challenges. After all, the standard forms of scholarly writing in our field are not only ones that privilege, if not fetishize, individual authorship, but they also are resistant to foregrounding or even displaying the presence and contributions of multiple voices. In the few examples of collaboratively written books that we have—with Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *Madwoman in the Attic* being perhaps the most famous case in point—there can be a persistent sense (often deliberately cultivated) that the authors are speaking in unison, despite the fact that the processes of composition most certainly included moments of dissension. And even in works that explicitly work to make these points of disagreement and difference explicit—such as in Helena's own collaboration with Robyn Warhol in *Love among the Archives,* in which the authors tried to register not only disagreement but temporal and spatial asynchronies—there can still be a strong tendency to read any unmarked sentences or passages as indicators of

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uncomplicated consensus. It is a powerful and abiding fantasy, and one that may even be governing how you, our readers, are interpreting this very introduction, in which each of the three editors were primarily responsible for drafting a single section (Sukanya Banerjee, "Concepts"; Helena Michie, "Process"; and Ryan D. Fong, "Format"), but whose final version was produced through much sharing, questioning, and conversing—sometimes in person at various conferences that we were all attending, but most often through the split screen of our video chats as we sat at desks across three different states. (How prescient we now seem in a moment when this latter situation has become our new normal!)

> *To collaborate is to work together to create a thing you couldn't create on your own. Collaborative writing is the work of thinking a new text together. [But] how does one collaborate on the page? Will sentence structures change? Will vocabulary be widening? Will styles shift and modulate? Will* my *style change? Will* your *style change?*
> *—Lynn Voskuil*

Of course, none of us produces our scholarship in cloistered solitude, but our writing and publication formats are not generally set up to showcase what sections of an essay, for instance, came into particular focus through the help of an earlier reviewer's or reading group's comments. Nor do we demarcate what specific interventions central to our book projects, for another example, emerged from a discussion in the classroom with our students. We rarely document the late-night conversations with colleagues and friends about our research or the productive question-and-answer sessions at a conference panel, and we do not have ready forms and genres of writing that would enable us to do so. Citations are kept confined to the foot of the page or to the ends of articles, chapters, or books; while numbers interrupt textual flow, words are usually cordoned off, even when a conversation or exchange makes it to the status of citation. Sometimes indicators of these moments and relationships make their way into the acknowledgment sections of book manuscripts, but these aspects of our writing processes rarely make it into the actual analyses and arguments. As a result, the lived and embodied experiences of interaction and conversation, which constitute some of the most significant aspects of our intellectual and writing lives, remain largely invisible in the final product, with these processes settling and calcifying into the stable object of the published page.

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To be sure, a lot of our "monographs" are in practice polyglossic. We share work, we offer advice, we go to conferences, we read and cite the work of others, we have coffee.—Lauren Goodlad

Given our process in the workshop at Rice and our shared editorial understanding of its essential role in our work of widening the spatial frameworks and critical methodologies of Victorian literary studies, we became committed to playing with format and form in this collection to highlight this sense of interaction and polyvocality, despite the challenges described above. We wanted to make apparent the fact that these individual essays and the collection as a whole developed from the condition of having many voices and persons in an actual room and to register the productive disagreements, moments of clarification, and instances of nuanced diversion that were produced in these conversations. We also wanted to provide a way to register and make concrete the long temporality that characterized the generation and gestation of these essays and this collection. Within the workshop's informal writing exercises, we found a ready archive that captured and reflected on these unfolding processes and have included selections from them throughout this introduction and in the essays that follow. Here, as you will have already noted, we have several pull quotes that are excerpted from the informal writing that was created in response to the prompts on Victorian England, widening, and collaborative writing. In the individual essays that follow, this pattern will continue with the incorporation of quotes from the writing generated after each workshop session, in the "near" and "far" triads that included two authors and one of us. These pull quotes, we hope, will help mark some of the connections and productive differences that emerged from the conversations in these small workshop sessions, which subsequently informed the processes of writing, revision, and editing that went into shaping the final version of the essays in this collection before you now.

Collaboration does not banish quantification and jockeying for preeminence. Surely we cannot function as a Borg, a hive mind.—Parama Roy

We also hope that including these short excerpts of prose that encroach on the space of this introduction and the essays will concretize the sense of

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process that we described above for you, our readers. Our intention is that the selection and inclusion of these "pull quotes" (already suggesting an uncomfortable wrenching from one context to another) will suggest, if not lay bare, the assumptions and modes of thinking that have undergirded our editorial decisions, both in the ways that we created and participated in the triads during the workshop and in the ways that we responded to individual essays in subsequent drafts. In choosing this particular format, we wanted the pull quotes' interruptive and paratextual quality to provoke responses of both synthesis and dissonance, in ways that open lines of metacritical thinking about the multiple approaches we might use to widen our field and to understand the term "width" itself. In our many discussions as editors about the selection of the quotes as well as their placement, these dynamics manifested in the many framings that these parallel and interrupting texts might have—as artifacts of our time together in Houston, as haunting traces that bring an occulted past (to use the idiom of Lauren Goodlad's essay) into the reading present, as parasitic or symbiotic entities that are connected but separate from the object to which they are attached, as instantiations of the dialogic features that surround and exist within all our writing. That they might be understood and read in these varied ways seemed, to us, to be incredibly generative and in line with our efforts to encourage a critical and self-reflexive process of conceptualizing width in ways that simultaneously interrogate the stakes of any widening—of the page, the period, and the world.

Finally, we hope that by including the multiple voices of our contributors and editors across this introduction and the ensuing essays, our inclusion of the pull quotes might also encourage you as readers to disrupt the usual pattern of engaging with essays in collections such as this—of reading this introduction and then focusing on selected essays that are most topically relevant to your scholarly interests. While we know that this mode of selective, if not instrumental, reading will still inevitably occur, we wanted the pull quotes to indicate a larger network of thinking across the collection and inspire readers to undertake various itineraries of reading—and potentially even multiple itineraries of reading—across the six essays. Certainly, it is possible to read each essay in isolation—and we understand why some readers may want or feel it necessary to read in that way—but our vision is that you consider these pieces in relation to one another and to reflect on the larger methodological interventions that all of the included essays are investigating.

Certainly, the most obvious itinerary of reading would be to follow the essays in the sequence that we have published them. Within this

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ordering, each essay is followed by an essay with which it was paired during our workshop triads. Beginning with Lynn Voskuil's essay, the collection then pivots to Robert D. Aguirre's, with whom she was paired in the "near" triad. Aguirre's essay is then followed by Parama Roy's essay, with which it was paired in the "far" triad. This pattern continues through the collection until Jessie Reeder's final essay points back to Voskuil's at the start, forming the final pairing in a "far" triad. So, while we chose these two essays as our beginning and endpoints, they also point to each other in ways that create a chain or circuit we hope connects the issue's various parts. Thus, to follow this particular itinerary of reading would be to work in closest alignment with our writing and editorial processes (and the pull quotes in those essays will speak most concretely to the ways that "nearness" or "farness" was confirmed or complicated in the workshop process), but it is not one that we would wish to mandate nor one that we could ever enforce.

Indeed, it is also possible that you might perceive other pairings or even triads: Voskuil's and Roy's shared interest in the nonhuman, for instance, or Forman's, Reeder's, and Aguirre's shared attention to the geographical space of the Americas. In each of these and the other myriad itineraries that you might chart and navigate, we hope that the connections you draw across the essays will allow you to reflect on and more clearly articulate your own formulation of width in the nineteenth century. For although we have attempted to be "wide" in a number of ways here, we still recognize that six essays, nevertheless, present an inevitably narrow set of possibilities for imagining such width. We in no way posit this set of essays as complete, definitive, or normative. Rather, we understand your involvement as a reader to be an additional axis upon which this project works, and we hope that that the essays and the interlocution among them will encourage you to undertake your own projects of widening, in adding to what we understand to be a multifaceted and diverse conversation taking place within our field.

Notes

A project so many years in the making will inspire gratitude that is long, wide, and deep. This special issue would not have been possible without the support given from many people and places. Rice University, in particular, has offered resources of many kinds, and the editors are especially grateful to the Rice English and History departments and the

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1. For a similar use of "assemblage" in describing "Victorian," see Hewitt, "Why the Notion of Victorian Britain *Does* Make Sense," 397.
2. For a powerful critique of the tendency to do so, see Freedgood, "Islands of Whiteness."
3. See, among others, Agathocleous and Rudy, "Victorian Cosmopolitanisms"; Baucom, *Out of Place*; Flint, "Transatlantic Currents"; Goodlad, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*; Hack, *Reaping Something New*; Lecourt, "That Untravell'd World"; Lootens, *The Political Poetess*; Marcus, "Same Difference?"; Mukherjee, "Introduction"; and Plotz, *Portable Property*.
4. See Burton, "Who Needs the Nation?"; Hall, "Thinking the Postcolonial"; Schwarz, "The Expansion and Contraction of England."
5. Boehmer, *Indian Arrivals*.
6. Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, 10.
7. Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History," 197. To be clear, as Chakrabarty indicates, the Bengali version is the earlier (and first) version of the essay we know as "The Climate of History." In other words, the difference between the two essays is not just one of language.
8. Goodlad, *Victorian Literature and the Victorian State*.
9. See Comaroff and Comaroff, *Theory from the South*.

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10. Such an effort is certainly in the spirit of "provincializing Europe," as Dipesh Chakrabarty has put it. While the call to provincialize Europe is yet to be fully addressed (even in Chakrabarty's own work), we use the frame of the nineteenth century to establish a coevality between Britain and its colonies, rather than view the colonies as ex-centric in relation to Britain (see Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*).
11. In her essay "Arts of the Contact Zone," Pratt describes the contact zone as the "space where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of power" (34). Pratt's subsequent emphasis on the multilingual nature of the contact zone is particularly relevant for us.
12. Lomas, "Translation and Transculturation," 161.
13. Qtd. in Lomas, "Translation and Transculturation," 161. This point is at the nub of Emily Apter's argument in *Against World Literature*.
14. Shankar, *Flesh and Fish Blood*, 140.
15. Annmarie Drury's *Translation and Transformation in Victorian Poetry* and Yopie Prins's *Ladies' Greek* offer valuable insights into how the act of translation, and its histories, can reorient our view of the Victorian literary imagination itself. The digital humanities project *One More Voice*, which focuses on "recovering non-European contributions from nineteenth-century British imperial and colonial archives," offers an impressive range of translated texts (Wisnicki et al., "Introduction").
16. *MLA Newsletter* 50, no. 3 (2018), www.mla.org/Membership/MLA-Newsletter/Newsletter-Archive.
17. Engaging area studies also heeds the call to "undiscipline" Victorian studies (see Chatterjee, Christoff, and Wong, "Undisciplining Victorian Studies"). For a discussion of translation and area studies in relation to Victorian studies and postcoloniality, see Banerjee, "Postcolonial."
18. Chilcote, "Latin American Challenge," 43.
19. Qtd. in Harootunian, "'Memories of Underdevelopment,'" 30.
20. Kumar, "Mission Statement Responses," 150 (italics ours).
21. Barlow, "Mission Statement Responses," 146. A special issue of *GLQ* (2016) on area studies, *Area Impossible*, coedited by Anjali Arondekar and Geeta Patel, is evidence of the forward-looking collaborations envisaged by Barlow.
22. Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, 9.
23. For a discussion of "transimperial" in relation to such terms as "global" or "transnational" with reference to the nineteenth century,

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see Banerjee, "Transimperial," 917–24. For a discussion of the important (and pernicious) connection between empire and nation in the nineteenth century, see Freedgood, "Islands of Whiteness," 298–99.

24. Levine, "From Nation to Network," 659.
25. For a compelling account of the nineteenth-century provenance and usage of the term "ecology," see Griffiths and Kreisel, "Introduction."
26. Hensley and Steer, "Ecological Formalism," 3. See also MacDuffie, *Victorian Literature*; Miller, "Climate Change and Victorian Studies"; and Taylor, *The Sky of Our Manufacture*.

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