



## *English 531: Victorian Literature and Visual Culture*

<https://engl531.blogspot.com>

Professor Russell A. Potter

Wednesdays, 4-6:50 p.m., Craig-Lee 020

In this class, we will read selected contemporary theories of visual culture in the context of a survey of pictorial productions from the Victorian era through our own. We will begin with Robert Barker's invention of the Panorama in 1794, and the search for the "all-encompassing view" that followed. Navigating a passage through Victorian optical entertainments, from the magic lantern and the daguerreotype to the "moving panorama" and early film, from the Phantasmagoria of Robertson to the turn-of-the-century "Cinema of Attractions," we will explore ways of reading and theorizing these diverse visual texts and technologies. We will also examine their social function and value through the response of contemporary viewers, and their role in shaping the twentieth century as the 'age of ideology.'

It's a commonplace to remark that there are no 'unmediated' acts of seeing. Yet for this very reason, the mode and method of "seeing" matters enormously, as there is no "untrained eye" available. Our notion, for instance of taking in a "panoramic view" began, not with an unaided eye upon some mountaintop, but inside a circular building built in London's Leicester Square by Robert Barker, where a cylindrical canvas of vast proportion and carefully calculated perspective, first tricked the public eye. The notion of a visual sense of "being there" has moved through many other technologies since then, from the traveling canvas of the "moving panorama," the subtle light-changes of Daguerre's Diorama, through to the "dissolving views" of lantern shows – all in their way foreshadowing the technology of the cinema. At the same time, these technologies traced a gradual circuit from public to private spectacle, within which each technical mode of seeing shrank, Alice-like, to the scale necessary to enter the domestic sphere. Home lanterns, stereoview cards, and miniature toy panoramas had, in some sense, a relationship similar to that between the DVD and the modern multiplex.

We'll also look at the specific contents of these exhibitions, from exotic scenery (the Holy Land, the banks of the Ganges the Alps, the Arctic Regions), "exotic" peoples within the racialized, hierarchal ideologies of the nineteenth century ("Esquimaux," "Zulu Kaffirs") and their popular understanding (Dickens), freak shows, anatomical museums, fabric replicas of the great masters, miniature cities, and sapient pigs.

Students will engage with this media via our course blog and their own personal researches, culminating with a final essay that connects these visual and textual themes and histories of their choosing.

### **Required Texts**

Selections from Charles Dickens, *Selected Journalism 1850-1870* (Penguin)

Erkki Huhtamo, *Illusions in Motion: Media Archaeology of the Moving Panorama and Related Spectacles* (MIT Press) (available via Adams Library's Ebook Central).

Roger Watson and Helen Rappaport, *Capturing the Light: The Birth of Photography, a True Story of Genius and Rivalry* (paperback and Kindle or used)

Selections from Russell Potter, *Arctic Spectacles: The Frozen North in Visual Culture* (chapters will be made available free online)

Selections from Richard Altick, *The Shows of London* (online free via Adams Library)

Paul Clee, *Before Hollywood: From Shadow Play to the Silver Screen*

### **Recommended Texts**

Denise Blake Oleksijczuk, *The First Panoramas: Visions of British Imperialism*

Lee Jackson: *A Dictionary of Victorian London: An A-Z of the Great Metropolis*

Terry and Debbie Borton, *Before the Movies: American Magic Lantern Entertainment and the Nation's First Great Screen Artist, Joseph Boggs Beale*

Bernth Lindfors: *Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Show Business*

Steve Humphries, *Victorian Britain Through the Magic Lantern*

Brian May, *A Village Lost and Found: An Annotated Tour of the 1850's series of stereo photographs, "Scenes in Our Village"*

## COURSE SCHEDULE

(OL = Online week)

- Week I (Aug. 28) **OL** Introduction to Visual Culture. Readings: Irit Rogoff, “Studying Visual Culture” (linked on blog).
- Week II (Sept. 4) **OL** A Panoramic View. Readings: Oleksijczuk, from the Introduction to *The First Panoramas*; Anne Friedberg, “The Mobilized and Virtual Gaze in Modernity” (linked on blog).
- Week III (Sept. 11) “A Foretaste of these Icy Climes”: The Arctic in Panoramas. Readings: Potter, *Arctic Spectacles*, Preface and Chapters 1 and 2; Dickens, “Some Account of an Extraordinary Traveller” (linked on blog).
- Week IV (Sept. 18) Scoping it out. Eidometropoli, Eidophusikons, Phenakistoscopes, Zograscopes, and Praxinoscopes. Readings: Altick, “The Eidophusikon”; Huhtamo, “The Moving Pictures of the Eidophusikon” (*Illusions in Motion*, pp. 98-104).
- Week V (Sept. 25) Natives on Display Readings: Dickens, “The Noble Savage”; Altick, “The Noble Savage Reconsidered.”
- Week VI (Oct. 2) Illusions in Motion: the moving panorama to 1860. Readings: Huhtamo, *Illusions in Motion*, chapters 3-6 (pp. 65-214). Viewings: The Garibaldi Panorama at Brown (available online).
- Week VII (Oct. 9) Nine-mile-mirrors and Bunyan Tableaux: The heyday and decline of panoramas. Readings: Huhtamo, *Illusions in Motion*, chapters 8-11 (pp. 245-360); Mark Twain, “The Scriptural Panoramist.” Viewings: Moving Panorama of Pilgrim’s Progress (online).
- Week VIII (Oct. 16) – **Note:** I hope to meet today even though it’s meant to be Monday’s class day, unless students have a conflict, in which case we’ll go **OL**. A Picture of Light: Daguerre and his Dioramas. Readings: Altick, “The Diorama.”
- Week IX (Oct. 23) – “A fiendish mirror” – the Invention of Photography. Readings: Watson and Rappaport, *Capturing the Light*; Benjamin, “A Short History of Photography” (online).
- Week X (Oct. 30) – Early extensions of photography: Photographic lantern slides, stereoviews, photogravure. Readings: Excerpt from *Slides: The History of Projected Photography* (online)
- Week XI (Nov. 6) The miniaturization of the mechanism. Home lanterns, toy panoramas, and paper peepshows. Reading: Huhtamo, *Illusions in Motion*, chapter 12, “From Panoramas to Media Culture.”

Week XII (Nov. 13) The birth of film. The “cinema of attractions,” phantom rides, and filmic panoramas.

Week XIII (Nov. 20) ) Extensions of film: Hand-painted color, special effects, and filmic fantasies. In-class viewing: The films of Georges Méliès.

Week XIV (Nov. 27) Old media and new. Film: “A Magic Lantern Life.”

Week XV (Dec. 4) Student presentations.