

Zoomcast with Michelle Prain Brice, Jennifer Hayward & Jessie Reeder

Speakers: Michelle Prain Brice (guest), Jennifer Hayward (guest), Jessie Reeder (guest) Ryan Fong (host)

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- So hello and welcome everyone. I'm Ryan Fong, and I'm one of the co-founders and organizers of Undisciplining the Victorian Classroom. And as one of the forms of content that we're generating for this site, these Zoomcasts are meant to be a mechanism that will allow us to stage different conversations where we can think together about our classroom practices and about our processes of learning and unlearning as teachers. How can we grow together as a community of scholars and learn from one another? Especially in moving beyond the boundaries of our field and training is one of the key questions that we'll be asking in these Zoom casts and that I hope to explore today with these fine folks. So this is the second in a cluster of Zoomcasts that I'm leading on moving beyond the strict and traditional confines of what we consider to be the literary and how and why this is so important to the work of undisciplining Victorian studies and building anti-racist and anti-colonial practices in our classroom spaces. Today, I'm joined by the three organizers of the Anglophone Chile Project, Jennifer Hayward, who is professor of English at Worcester College, Michelle Prain Brice, a professor at Universidad Adolfo Ibañez and Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso and Jessie Reader, assistant professor of English at Binghamton university. And my apologies to Michelle. I haven't spoken Spanish in quite a while, so I hope I got that correct. We'll be talking about their project, Anglophone Chile, and more specifically about the important role that periodicals and newspapers can play in providing insights into 19th century Chile specifically and Latin America more generally and the ways that we can bring this resource, this incredible resource that they've built, into the classroom with our students. So thank you so much, the three of you, for joining and for having this conversation. I'm really glad to be doing this. So just to get the ball rolling here, I'm wondering if you three could talk a little bit about the start of this project and how it came about.

- Yeah, and first of all, thanks so much for inviting us today, Ryan, to talk about this project which we all three of us are so passionate about. And I'll start the ball rolling by going way back to the 1990s, when I was on my first research sabbatical in Chile and I wandered into the Biblioteca Nacional de Chile, the National Library, the way you do, just to see what resources might be there. I was working specifically at that time on British travelers in Chile. And the amazing staff at the Biblioteca steered me among other resources to the English language periodicals that were housed in the basement of the library. I didn't even know they existed, but I became fascinated, all of us who work on periodicals know the way you start looking for one thing, say information about travel writing, and next thing you know, you're reading a whole series about Anglophone cookery in Chile in the 19th century. So it was just fascinating. And I realized while there that the Biblioteca owns the only full runs of these newspaper titles anywhere in the world. There are a few random issues in the British library, but that's really it. And being from California, which has a geography very much like that of Chile, I knew about earthquakes and how dangerous they are to archives. And so I partnered at that time with the library staff. I raised some money to arrange for microfilming because these newspapers were not even microfilmed. It was just these very fragile copies. And so I then also got the microfilms, and I used the newspapers myself on and off, but nobody else that I ever met had heard of them or was using them. Then fast-forward to 2016 when I was a Fulbright Scholar in Chile and people I met kept insisting I get in touch with Michelle whom I hadn't met before. They kept saying, Michelle is the one who makes everything happen. And it turns out that's absolutely true. So we got in touch, we realized how much we had in common. Michelle has been working for years on the British in Chile and has all kinds of incredible materials related to them. And Michelle and I were then asked to digitize a different and completely unrelated archive. But that experience made us aware of the possibility of digitization, which is nothing we'd done before. We had both used these English language newspapers in our own research. We're both acutely aware of how fragile the physical papers are. And we also know how difficult they are for scholars outside of Chile to access and how unknown they are around the world as well. So we made it our goal to preserve the papers and make them accessible to a global network of scholars and of students. And so at that point, we got in touch with Jessie, who also knows firsthand both how fascinating the newspapers are and how difficult they are for scholars outside of South America to access. And the group of us applied for an RSVP field development grant, Research Society for Victorian Periodicals. We were lucky enough to receive one in 2018. And so that's how the project got started. And I think all three of us would agree. We can't say enough about how wonderful the experience of partnering with Biblioteca Nacional was. The staff of their digital lab trained our team of students and faculty, provided access to their state-of-the-art scanners and image editing machines. And they worked with us every step of the way to ensure that we ended up with archival quality newspaper images. And just one more little thanks, while we're thinking about how grateful we are for everyone who made this project possible. The RSVP officers were incredible at working with us, at planning a scale of project like this, especially Paul Fyfe of the field development grant committee and Iain Crawford as treasurer, who guided us through for humanities scholars the very arcane process of dealing with grant funding.

- Great, great. Yeah, I love the collaborative nature of the project just at its very core. And of course, in order to conduct a transnational project like this, you need that collaboration. It's so important. So Chile and really most of Latin America is not typically thought of in our conversations about empire, especially in the American and potentially British articulations of Victorian studies. So can you talk a little bit more about why it's so important to think about Anglo-Chilean connections specifically and Anglo-Latin American connections more broadly in the Victorian period?

- Yeah, I'll start this one off because I have a lot to say about this.

- Yeah, as I imagine you would with your most recent book.

- Yeah. Yeah, and thank you for asking the question. This is one of my hobby horses, I think. And I'll start with the broad first, I'll start with British Latin American relations more broadly first which I think are so important because those connections in the 19th century were so multi-various and complicated. You know, one of those connections, one of those contexts that helps us think about British Latin American relations is informal empire or neocolonialism or financial imperialism, goes by a lot of names, which is important for a couple of reasons. You know, on the one hand, informal empire is so connected to settler colonialism and administrative colonialism and the pieces of the British empire that I think Victorian studies rightly has been and remains so interested in fleshing out and investigating. But the informal empire side of that is often really overlooked as a major piece of that whole picture. And is really important, I think, to both our research and our teaching to understand that. Latin America is the place to understand British informal empire in the 19th century. It is the sort of major laboratory for that political structure but also informal empire really deserves theorizing in its own right. It's distinct from settler and administrative colonialism and a lot of Victorian scholars I think are surprised to understand what a major, major piece of the late 19th century British economy Latin America was. So that's all to say I think informal empire is hugely important and this is the place to go to study that. But like I said these connections between Britain and Latin America are really complicated, and it's not just about empire. You have literary influence and political influence. You have revolutionaries like Bolívar, Miranda, going and inspiring Europe and you have new nation states looking to places like England and France for political models. And you have Darwin in Patagonia. You have William Henry Hudson and the Pampas. These are all pieces of a story that I think we're only of just beginning to tell. So in terms of Britain, Latin America broadly, I just feel passionately that this is a really understudied and very vibrant set of connections. And then Chile in particular, so many regions in Latin America are important, but in the 19th century, Valparaíso was this major hub, this major port in Pacific and global trade and shipping and immigration. And I also think that Chile's location kind of upends some of the geographic categories that Victorian scholars at least, have grown familiar and comfortable with like the transatlantic in particular, which often defaults to a Northern British United States connection which I think is kind of limited. And then when you do start getting into North-South crossings in the Atlantic, you find that they often didn't end in the Atlantic, that many people went around to the Pacific to Valparaíso. Those who landed in Buenos Aires, that was often only the beginning of an Overland journey elsewhere into Latin America. And so Latin America, South America, more generally but Chile also specifically, shows us the way that the Pacific is drawn into these Atlantic crossings. It shows us the way we name and pursue certain methods based on certain geographies grows complicated when we step outside, and Chile is just such a perfect, perfect place for thinking about that because of its importance historically. And so I'll stop there if others have something they want to say but I could go on for hours about the importance of these regions.

- Great, great.

- Yeah, maybe going back to the informal empire concept. Jessie has written this wonderful book recently, right? I think also this project, what I love about it, it gives us the possibility from Chile and also from South America, to open new fronts for local history, specifically talking about colonialism, right? Because normally at school or at university when you talk about colonialism, it's always about Spain and Portugal, right? So this kind of informal empire,

commercial relations, international exchanges of all kinds, it's very important for us nowadays to go back to traditional historiography in Chile.

- Wonderful.

- And I'll just add, which is implicit in what both Jessie and Michelle has said that we're interested in shifting the idea of the archive which is so under debate over the past couple of decades with the rise of digital technology and also increased awareness of the political functions to which the colonial archive in particular have been put. So questions like what counts as knowledge? What should be preserved? How do we dismantle notions of the neutral or the objective or the innocent archive? And that said, we're well aware of the complexities of seeking to preserve texts produced by agents of informal empire and in some cases by settler colonies in Chile. And these questions of identity and representation as well as questions of the circulation of information in relationship to discourses of power are part of what these Anglophone newspapers enable us to study.

- Yeah, and I think that's an excellent segue to thinking about newspapers and periodicals. And I think that in Victorian studies, of course, the study of newspapers and periodicals is a vibrant area of study, right. But largely within a kind of North-North context, right, as Jessie was saying. And mostly in English--we're a very monolingual field when we're looking at this--but also English from particular places. And so I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit more about newspapers and periodicals as a way into this particular context of Chile, of the region of South America, Latin America. And why those sources are so important and a rich source for us to study when we're looking at this context and why going maybe more traditional routes of looking at novels or poems or more traditional literary forms might not get us to where we need to go to really understand the dynamics of informal empire and these particular sites of Chile and within Latin America more broadly.

- Maybe we can start by talking about the possibility that newspapers gives us to study culture in an interdisciplinary way. That's fascinating for me at least from the Chilean perspective, where, as I was saying before, normally the different disciplines and areas are very separated from each other, right? So this possibility of linking literature, sociology, history, philosophy and also news with as Jennifer was saying. Cooking stories or every kind of different kind of writings is absolutely fascinating and also helps us to understand in a different way the past, our memory. So in that sense also it's very important, or these materials are very important, not only from the heritage perspective, of course that's very important, but also as a possibility of exchanges between disciplines.

- Yeah, absolutely.

- Yeah and you know, I would just add to that by saying, first, I don't want to move past the literary because the literary output of this particular context is already I think, understudied. But those kinds of materials, scholars have tended to focus on things like travel logs in particular and natural history writing and even someone, and novels too, like even someone like Conrad. Those are all written by very specific kinds of people for a very specific kind of audience. One that's really geared towards gazing at, located in, energy directed back at Britain. And they're very useful materials, but these newspapers show you something different. You know, they show you these communities of emigrants who many of whom were still had one foot in London or in global concerns and shipping, and you see all of that in the newspapers but you also see this sort of alternate arrangement of settlers, immigrants, the kinds of British immigrants we're

not usually used to thinking about, who are relocating somewhere where they don't speak the dominant language or necessarily understand local government structures or social customs. And so navigating that with a sort of Imperial mindset, but also sometimes less so. It's a really complicated and an interesting dynamic that's going on in these settler communities, and the newspapers are how you get access to that. So, it's something it's, they're materials, it's an archive that helps flesh out the history of these cities in Chile. They're the roots of these cities as immigrant cities at a sort of level that's beneath or alongside of the sort of higher level theorizations of empire and context that we often get. And just to double back to transatlantic studies. You know periodicals were so essential to the development of that field. And so the richness of that study, I think, these materials deserve that as well. And I also think that literary scholars really have something to offer here, because I did an independent study last semester with a graduate student, a PhD student in history from Chile. And so she's trained as a historian, trained in the Latin American Academy. I'm trained as literary scholar in the United States Academy and so we're coming at, but we're both have a really intense interest in these materials and we're coming at it differently. And she was often complaining that historians and Chilean historians would look at materials like this, look at periodicals to mine them for historical facts or else look at them with a kind of suspicious eye. Like, you know, they're produced, they're constructed, they're not sources of information. And I kept telling her, I think you have a real literary scholar mindset because you're talking about rhetoric and positioning and audience and all of that. And, together, I thought we were able to do some really interesting work with the periodicals as a team. So I don't necessarily think of them as outside of the literary, but as an incredible mine of material and information that allow us to sort of be our own historians, at the same time offering something to the field of history as well.

- Great.

- I would just add that the answer to this question of why these newspapers are such an enriched source of information depends on what kinds of research questions you're asking. But there's so many different questions that can be asked of the newspapers. So for example, we were approached in the US fall by a PhD student in Chile, an economic historian, right Michelle, who could not get into the physical archive because of COVID and she needed the kinds of data, the facts and figures that Jessie was just talking about. She needed literally the price of copper in particular years and so on. And so we were able to give her access to this archive. So that's one kind of research question on a very basic level when working with my undergraduate students reading Benedict Anderson's theory of "imagined communities." And of course he talks about the rise of newspapers as essential in that development of national identity. I can then point them towards these newspapers and say, okay what were these British in Chile doing to rehearse their national identity for themselves? What poems were they reprinting with the newspapers? What serial novels? I'm fascinated by serial novels. And they did the specific texts that they thought were important for their colonial audience to reprint. And those kinds of things. That's a different sort of research question. And then just one other type is newspapers provide ideal repositories of information to be analyzed using the digital techniques of big data. And so we've spoken with the Living with Machines Project at the Turing Institute at the British Library about how they're using the tools and techniques of machine learning, to extract patterns of how humans were talking about their changing relationship with machines over the course of the 19th century.

- That's excellent. Yeah, yeah, and I mean, and just the, all the different kinds of complex bits of information and forms of aesthetic expression and presentation that are in these, these sources. Again as so many of our colleagues know, right, from the British and an American context, but

it's here to right in these different sites. And just as, as they give us this rich insight into life in Britain and readerships and cultural concerns and systems and structures and forms of aesthetic expression. It's like it provides this lens and gateway into thinking about these sites as well. So Jennifer you got us started thinking about this but I'm curious how all of you help your students grapple with these materials in the class and in what context do you teach them? In what context do you hope to teach them if you haven't had a chance to use the database quite yet? But what are some of the ways that that it gets plugged in and how you help students who might just be bewildered by this thing, and navigate the complexities of these resources?

- Because this amount of data can be overwhelming, right?

- Absolutely.

- Not knowing where to start.

- That's the allure--

- Sometimes we don't know where to start.

- That's right, that's right. That's the allure of the novel, right? It's like you have the Penguin edition and it's like you know exactly how to hold it and what to do with it. But it's like, here's this run of newspapers, right? And how do you help students start to navigate that and find points of entry and footholds?

- I can give a couple of examples of how I've used newspapers. So one is just a very standard technique in a 19th century survey course. Students use the digitized newspapers as primary sources for final research projects. What I found really exciting about this is I developed the particular project in tandem with a Chilean professor, Maria Burdoch Crudloff of the Universidad de Chile. And her students worked on research projects in parallel with mine. And then at the end of the semester over Zoom they each presented their research outcomes to each other. So that was really exciting. But we scaffolded the project so that over the course of the semester in this just kind of standard 19th-century survey, students read a variety of texts that provided context on the British fascination with the Americas. And it's all over once you look for it, right? So where is Frankenstein promising to go if Victor makes him a bride? He's gonna to go to the wilds of South America. Where does Walter Hartright disappear to in "Woman in White"? He goes, where is it, Honduras, I think? If an author needs to get a character out of the way for a while, they're often sent to South America. So students started to see this obsession and this fascination. They then developed research topics that engage them in the literature itself to provide a kind of a broader context and then transferred that thematic interest to the newspapers. And I guided them towards topics that I knew were readily to be found, for example, education, sporting clubs, and sporting events, cultural institutions, like churches and schools and other clubs, material on the British empire, of course, and on national identity. Images and the language of advertising is fascinating to students. The increasingly hybrid identities of the British colony as decades wore on, and that can be measured even in how much Spanish starts to creep into first the advertisements and then the articles and so on and so forth. And then finally students produced exhibits on the digital archive platform, Omeka, using images and articles from the newspapers. And as I said earlier, presented those to their Chilean counterparts and vice versa. So that's one example. And an ongoing example is using student research assistants. So I think most of us in the humanities know that it's really difficult to involve especially undergraduates as real partners in research. And this project for the first

time in my career has made me feel that I'm actually able to do that. Students have been trained to work with image editing software and to understand and produce metadata to attach to each newspaper image in creating our archive. They've learned to think about the architecture of a website in relationship to its target audience. They've produced exhibits that draw from the newspapers, highlighting the collections themes and topics. Again, really keeping the different kinds of researchers who might come to this archive in mind. And then a real partnership for me has been working with computer science students. So we've been doing some data analysis and topic modeling using machine learning, a term I don't really even understand. So I talk through the research questions and the titles that we have available. We're using the newspapers currently digitized by the British Library, and our research questions are very basic. Things like where, when and why did the British publish articles about Chile and what topics were of greatest interest to them, especially within different regions. So for example, I have a hypothesis that the Scots were interested in quite different topics related to South America than the English. So my computer science students are using GitHub notebooks that have been shared with us by the British library digital lab and the Living with Machines Project. And they worked on evaluating these notebooks and this code, mining the algorithms to more accurately extract the kind of data we're looking for and going through this iterative process of seeing what results we get, what topics, whether they're coherent topics that are emerging and if not, going back and modifying the code and trying various approaches. So they're learning, they're teaching me, I'm teaching them. It's a real partnership. And I find that really exciting.

- That is exciting. Amazing. Jessie or Michelle?

- Michelle, do you want, I mean I have aspirations about using these materials in the classroom and haven't yet. So I just, echoing what Jen was saying. I think, you know, I've taught Frankenstein so many times and I taught "The Woman in White" so many times, and these characters disappear off the page and these newspapers, I think for me offer students a really exciting opportunity to then actually just sort of get a handle on what life might have been like for someone who disappeared off the page and ended up in Buenos Aires or Valparaíso or Honduras or wherever. And I, like Jen, I would take a huge inspiration from Jen too in scaffolding these kinds of assignments to help students look for something in particular. So I plan to, I'm hoping to get a course in this next year but I plan to start by just bringing in one issue of a paper and spending a lot of time with it, breaking down for students, what and why is a masthead and who is the we when there's this editorial column and where does this information come from and how are they getting the shipping prices and what are, you know, breaking that down for them. And then honestly, hopefully just letting them explore and see what they find. 'cause that's for me, the most exciting part about teaching something really wildly open-ended like this is, I haven't passed my eyes over every page in the archive, so students can show me a lot of what's there. That's what I'm hopeful about.

- Yeah, that's really interesting to think. And kind of a couple of things. One, it seems like a great way to teach students about media literacy, right, which is so important in this day and age. Just kind of how you process that information of the media and how it's constructed. But also, as you were talking, Jessie, that's like, you know, these characters that fall off the page, but not often. People were in those parts of the world, right? Fall off, fall off to whom? Who is this invisible or unimaginable space, right? Or a space of absence and the way these newspapers can serve as a way to fill that in, that presence seems really compelling.

- That's the thing when the Frankenstein's monster says, the creature says, I'll disappear to the wilds of South America. Mary Shelley was writing that at the precise moment when South

America was opening in this incredibly dynamic mercantile, literary political way. It's like, what do you mean it's empty? So let's go look at it.

- Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Michelle, did you have anything?

- No, I was thinking that's fascinating. When you think that, what Jessie was saying, when Latin American countries are conquering their independence, Mary Shelley's monster is thinking about coming to South America, right. So, yeah. The truth is that I'm looking forward to follow Jennifer's and Jessie's experience because until now I haven't been able to include these materials in my syllabus. Because on one side we have the problem of the language with our students. And if you have groups of students who are studying English from here, you have to focus like in the traditional texts. So it's really a challenge for the future years for us.

- Great. So we're, we're coming to a close in our conversation but I'm wondering if we could quickly talk about one last question, which is what kinds of learning and preparation do you hope that our colleagues who are listening to this conversation will do in approaching these materials and hopefully using them as they're collected on your site.

- First of all, I think making visible and accessible this collections worldwide and then get the global feedback too. And learning from our readers too.

- Yeah. It's complicated because on the one hand I am very reluctant to suggest that anybody approaching an archive needs to be an expert in something before they get there. You know, I want these archives to be, we all want them to be, the whole reason we're making them is so that they are open access and free to all to explore and all of those sorts of things. I hope people learn from exploring the archives, but you know, and Jen, I don't know if this is a moment where you want to share either of the sites on the screen or I don't know if we have time for that, but one of the things that we've tried to do alongside simply housing newspapers and making them available is also to present a little bit of background. So, yeah, so what you're seeing on the screen right now is the archive site itself. This is where the newspapers are housed and you can start to see, so there you've got the collections of the papers. So we have those, all the print runs are there and you can, they're OCRd and you can go in and look very closely at every single page of every single issue. But we've also tried to put up exhibits that kind of shows some of the kinds of contexts that can be drawn out of the papers. And that might be important to know about. So there's those. You can see those scrolling by on the screen and then on the sister site, which is just simply AnglophoneChile.org, we've also tried to provide some cultural history about certain things like immigration, like settler colonialism, and we do that not because we want people to be experts in those things before they touch the newspapers, but because I do think it's important to simply be aware of what those contexts are, to be aware of things like, informal empire and British immigration and the histories of Indigenous massacre and displacement and how immigration connected to those things and the history of industrialism and how the British were involved in independence and political structures. And all of those, those contexts are all so important. Ideally, I would love researchers and students who come here to at least know that those are things they can go learn more about, to be aware that those contexts are there. And then as they get into more depth with their research and their learning to then pursue those things and say, okay, what I'm seeing here tells me that I really need to know something about the British involvement in the Chilean Navy and the website here gives me some opportunities to to investigate that further, so I will. So we're just sort of hoping to facilitate people's ongoing learning. I hope I put that well. I don't want to speak for the whole group.

- Yeah, no. In navigating your site and before our conversation, I've been really impressed and just inspired by the way that you have those kinds of cultural contexts and the kind of the scaffolding that you've done for us as instructors who might want to use these materials to who might not even know anything about the Chilean context. And so I think that what you've done are really teachable documents, but also very instructive for me, right? As somebody who's looking to figure out how to present these and to contextualize them in as rich an environment as possible. And just in my own learning and unlearning, I'm finding more and more that it's a process of unlearning as we learn about new contexts. It's like the assumptions that I have about how colonialism or power or the, even the British, might operate in a particular context. It's like you go into this new context and it's like, oh there's this whole new configuration, this whole different set of things that I need to learn about and think about. So I just really appreciate the way that you've scaffolded that and hope that all of our colleagues who are listening will take some time to look at these wonderful resources that Michelle and Jessie and Jennifer have developed for us. And in this really rich database of materials of Anglo-Chilean newspapers. It's a really, really wonderful resource and site. So thank you so much for this conversation. I really enjoyed it. I learned so much. And I hope that everybody who's listening, like I said, will go and look at these websites and use them. Thank you so much for your time. Really appreciate it. Bye-bye.