



Devin Griffiths

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Date

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Dear Prof. X:

I am writing to apply for the position of X in the Y department, specializing in Z. I am a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Pennsylvania, where I am writing a book entitled *Remembering Analogy: Comparative History in Nineteenth-Century Retrospective Fiction*, portions of which are forthcoming as articles in *ELH* and *SEL*. I received my Ph.D. from Rutgers in 2010. My training in nineteenth-century literature, the literature of science, and cultural studies has prepared me to teach surveys in British and American literature and in Anglophone poetry, as well as to offer specialized courses in nineteenth-century culture and science, poetic theory, literary historiographies, and the digital humanities.

I came to the topic of *Remembering Analogy* through my interest in Victorian naturalism, first as a student of evolutionary biology and later as a literary scholar reading the works of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century naturalists as literary artifacts. The book explores how nineteenth-century imaginative histories—the historical novel, elegy, and the natural history monograph—rewired the modern historical understanding by replacing the Enlightenment’s progressive historicism with a comparative interpretation of the past. This new comparative history showed that changes in social and natural life could only be understood through an analysis of the common and distinguishing features of their constituents. By expanding the category of retrospective fiction to include elegy and the natural history monograph, my book examines the impact of Romantic and Victorian literature on mid-century naturalist writing. I turn to a range of writers, including Walter Scott, Alfred Tennyson, George Eliot, and Charles Darwin, among others, to explore how comparative history shaped the modern social imagination, by emphasizing patterns that transcended social position and species. Each wrote in new genres of retrospective fiction that recast eighteenth-century analogical thinking, once associated with Christian ontology and natural theology, as implicitly secular forms of comparative analysis specific to linguistics, natural science, and social history. My research advances our understanding of how the nineteenth-century novel responded to the challenge of revolutionary history and “deep time” with new strategies of historical inquiry. *Remembering Analogy* reminds us that comparative history’s rich understanding of social and natural interconnection, essential to the late nineteenth-century thesis of “culture,” was dependent on earlier innovations in literary form. I have attached a longer description of the project.

My work on the book developed from a range of personal interests: in the contributions of literature to knowledge formation and scientific writing, in theories of rhetoric, genre and poetics, and in the digital humanities. While at Rutgers I undertook graduate coursework in ecology and evolution and a seminar on the archival history of rhetoric with John Guillory at the Folger Shakespeare Library, both of which introduced me to methods and archives that have been formative in my research. This interdisciplinary work has continued for me at Penn, where I joined a year-long seminar on virtuality at the Penn Humanities Forum and was recruited to help reinvent Penn’s interdisciplinary honors curriculum, Integrated Studies for the Ben Franklin Scholars. I continue to

develop tools for the digital analysis of literary texts, as described on my website, and I am currently preparing articles on information theory as a model for literary form, and on the impact of 19th-century cataloguing practices upon modern technologies of the digital interface. My continued interest in the intersection between the digital tools of “distant” reading and the broader academic contexts of comparative analysis have led me to organize a seminar on “Digital Perspectives on the World of the Novel” for the ACLA this Spring.

I am prepared to offer courses at all levels of the curriculum, from introductions to the major to large-scale surveys of British literature, period courses on nineteenth-century literature across all genres, and more advanced courses on a variety of topics. The historicist and interdisciplinary nature of my research informs all aspects of my teaching. Students in my courses explore the traditional objects and methods of literary analysis while also learning to read the formal protocols of scientific and political discourse. Whether in large lecture-format courses or small seminars, I invest students in the labor that transforms unfamiliar writing into an object worthy of their intellectual commitment. In my teaching at both public and private universities, I have learned how to negotiate classrooms comprised by students with diverse backgrounds and writing skills. At Penn I have offered an undergraduate course on “The Weird Science of Experimental Fiction” that fulfilled a general sector requirement for science and engineering students and introduced them to the notion that fictional literature might produce a kind of empirical knowledge about the world; the course examined the works of E. A. Poe, Thomas Hardy and Virginia Woolf, among others, as engines of discovery. I often use multimedia and web technologies in my teaching, both in and outside the classroom; while not a panacea, technologies such as course blogs, visualizations, and podcasts help me engage my students and channel their imagination. Students immersed in the culture of social media are often receptive to media-driven group work, and these innovations allow me to make the classroom a more dynamic space for learning. In a seminar on Edwardian literature that I taught at Rutgers, for instance, I combined online discussion forums and blogs with a virtual tour of a nineteenth-century surgical theater. This digital environment illustrated how Stevenson deploys the operating gallery in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (the household space of Jekyll’s monstrous regression) to model Victorian divisions of consciousness. A Spring, 2012 honors seminar at Penn on historical fiction and fantasy will draw upon an in-class web publishing and transcription project, based on an unpublished MS provided by the National Library of Scotland, to explore how empire and the bibliographic understanding shaped the historical imagination of high fantasy.

I would be happy to forward a book abstract, writing sample and dossier. I will be at the MLA convention in Seattle, where I will be speaking on “Victorian Pretenders: Oliphant, Stevenson, and the Fugitives of the ‘45” and on “Surviving Darwin: The Alternative Histories of Tylor and Lovecraft,” and I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you there or elsewhere at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Devin Griffiths