



Victorian Traffic: Identity, Exchange, Performance

Sue Thomas

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Organised around the themes Home and Abroad, Performative Traffic, and Image, Circulation, Mobility, Victorian Traffic: Identity, Performance, Exchange variously addresses the cultural dimensions of traffic in the long Victorian period: cross-cultural experience; colonial and racial imaginaries; everyday, literary, autobiographical and professional stagings of identity; and trade in metaphors, communications, texts, images, celebrity, character types, and quilts. The concept of traffic underpins historical interpretation and theoretical formulations, and the rhetorics of trade in Victorian usage are contextualised. Understandings of identity emphasise the performative and the negotiation of agency in relation to social and cultural scriptings of gender, class, ethnicity and community. The essays have a wide global range and reach. "This collection of essays takes as its theme an enormously important concept for the nineteenth century: traffic, a term that, in a time of unprecedented commercial and imperial expansion, technological developments, population growth and urbanization, acquired new resonance, and came to signify the intensely transactional nature of modernity. One of Ruskins most searing critiques of the spiritual condition of England, an invited lecture he delivered in 1864 on the topic of the Bradford Exchange, is entitled Traffic, and the word clearly signifies for him all that is wrong with post-industrial capitalism. But this stimulating volume encompasses a range of other significations that have additionally come to accrue around the term, relating for example to inter-cultural exchange, to the circulation of ideas and images, to the commodification of identity, and to literature, art and performance in the market place. The scope of the collection is, appropriately, global, including essays on Englands relations of exchange with Australia, New Zealand, North America, the Far East, and the Caribbean. What we are shown ineluctably is that the traffic between Victorian Britain and the reaches of empire, between Home and Abroad, was two-way, a vehicle for cross-cultural encounter, mediation and trade; and that cultural identity is relational, circulatory and always in motion." Hilary Fraser, Birkbeck, University of London

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