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UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD



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Talk!

The Inaugural Belcher Colloquium in Victorian Studies

25th June 2020

St Hugh's College, Oxford

The Victorians' prodigious capacity for correspondence is a commonplace. Less frequently considered is their extraordinary investment in conversation. Talk saturated Victorian social and intellectual life, in drawing rooms and on street corners, in pubs and clubs, in debating societies and mutual improvement associations, during summer reading parties and winter walks, at learned societies and political associations. In many respects Victorian letter-writing was largely an adjunct to this more general culture of conversation, as were the lecture, the parliamentary debate, and the political speech. But unlike the letter, talk is evanescent and so difficult to reconstruct, and with a very few notable exceptions it has been neglected by scholars. This one-day colloquium, hosted by St Hugh's College, Oxford, in conjunction with the Belcher Visiting Fellowship in Victorian Studies, aims to accelerate efforts to redress this imbalance, and seeks proposals for papers.

Topics might include: clubs and club life; the house party; literary conversation pieces; textual forms (the interview, the 'causerie', 'table talk') and their relationship to gossip; representations of talk; correspondence as conversation; learned discussion and knowledge formation; slander and the policing of conversation; treasonous talk; slang, dialect and accent; talk at trial - recounting of conversation in testimony; networks of conversation.

The colloquium hopes to address questions such as the status of conversation; the gendered nature of talk; changing styles and locations of conversation; shifting models of the 'art of conversation'; conversational etiquette; the role of discussion in the creation of knowledges; the relationship of conversation to other elements of Victorian orality; ephemerality and the afterlives of conversation.

A published collection of essays is planned. Participants will be responsible for travel to and from Oxford, but the Belcher Fellowship funding will cover the costs of accommodation and meals at St Hugh's.

Expressions of interest (including a 200-300 word abstract) are invited by 1st November 2019 to Martin Hewitt (Belcher Visiting Fellow, St Hugh's College and Anglia Ruskin University), martin.hewitt@anglia.ac.uk or Patrick Leary (Wilmette Museum), pleary@gmail.com.