



Victorian Samplings

Season 3, Episode 6: Teaching and Learning

Hosted by Vanessa Warne, Jessie Krahn, and Natalie LoVetri

With Guests: Leith Davis, Tommy Mayberry, and Claire Battershill

[Light Piano Music Intro- fades to background]

Vanessa Warne [00:13]: Hello, and welcome to a very special episode of *Victorian Samplings*. I'm Vanessa Warne. In this, our first of two bonus episodes dedicated to teaching and learning, we speak to a trio of very talented teachers about how they're engaging their students' creativity, curiosity, and senses. We talk with Leith Davis about how ballad singing builds community in her classroom and deepens student learning; we speak with Tommy Mayberry about their inspiring experiences teaching Transgender Visual Culture using experimental assignments; and we learn from Claire Battershill about Book History education, hands-on making, and collaborating. This episode is for teachers and learners, crafters, and creators; prepare to be inspired.

[light piano music fades]

Vanessa Warne [01:14]: Leith Davis is a Professor in the Department of English, and Director of the Research Centre for Scottish Studies at Simon Fraser University. Her most recent book, *Mediating Cultural Memory in Britain and Ireland: From the 1688 Revolution to the 1745 Jacobite Rebellion*, was published by Cambridge University Press in 2022. Leith is a recent recipient of an Amundson Teaching Fellowship at SFU to support her study of embodied humanities pedagogies, and it's that work that will be the focus of our conversation. Leith, I'm very glad to have this chance to speak with you. Welcome.

Leith Davis [01:53]: Thank you so much for inviting me. It's just a pleasure to be here.

Vanessa Warne [01:56]: Can we start with the concept of embodied humanities? What is embodied humanities?

Leith Davis [02:03]: Absolutely. I started being interested in embodied humanities right from the beginning of my career, I guess, without using that term, as a scholar of media, and particularly, when I started out musical and oral culture. My recent book looks at the shift that was happening in the early eighteenth century, as we moved to a time of print saturation, and I decided to really focus on that in the classroom. And in 2019, I had the opportunity to incorporate the research that I do into a course, and I

began a new course that was called "Wiring the world before Facebook," and it looked at eighteenth century media, and the idea was to involve students in understanding the media ecology and the environment, thinking that they would be more connected to eighteenth century studies because they would be able to see how that time period related to our own time period of media change. So, I flipped the classroom, we started focusing on labs, we had media labs, and the labs became the primary focus around which we collected the texts and studied the texts. There were three labs in this course: there was a lab on ballads and orality; there was a lab on manuscript culture, in which we looked at letters, and the creation and sending of letters, and also writing with quill pens; and then there was a lab also on print culture, and we were able to go to SFU's Maker Lab in the library and to use the press that they have there. So, with these three labs, students would engage in the activity of the lab, and then we would go to the text afterwards. In the case of the ballads and the orality lab, then we started right away, second day of our class meeting, I invited two ballad singers into the classroom, and these are friends of mine and amazing public humanities figures, Jon Bartlett and Rika Ruebsaat. They came into the classroom. I told the students, please don't come with any books. We're going to really engage with the orality practice and see what that's like. And so, Jon and Rika came in, we sat in a circle with no desks, and they began singing. And it was such a wonderful moment in that beginning to see how the students were quite uncomfortable at the start, then once they got used to listening, by the end of the time period that we had together, feet were tapping, people were singing, there was a real, literal connection of everybody through this music. So, in that case, with this ballad workshop, they were both listening to the singers, and they were also engaging in the singing, and part of the course was asking the students to be as reflective as possible about that experience. So, we listened, we sang, and then we also had a time period afterwards when we talked about and reflected on that experience. For many of the students, it was uncomfortable because they weren't used to just hearing a human voice singing, without some music and some background, and for those students, they found it quite alien. Many students also connected because they're closet singers [laughter] and so they enjoyed the singing aspect of it. What we also talked about was the literal physical changes that happen in our bodies individually, as well as collectivity. So individually, there are particular hormones that are produced by each person, oxytocin is one of those, and that works collectively to make people feel more connected. So literally, we were singing ourselves together, as a class. And it offered a great experience to start with, with this sense of thinking about what we are going to be looking at, not as texts that come in a textbook that have been chosen over time, but actually as embodied practices.

Vanessa Warne [06:27]: Leith, that sounds wonderful. I'm thinking about the human voice, I'm thinking about listening, and also about community building, and that's got me thinking about the eighteenth-century coffee house, which I know is important to your teaching practice.

Leith Davis [06:42]: Absolutely. So, the eighteenth-century coffee house was a community environment: it was a location where people could go to learn about the latest news, to have a cup of coffee. It was a place which was open to members of different classes, and that was, of course, a problem for many people. With, for the price of the penny, you could enter into the coffee house, and you could enter into the world of conversation about politics. You would also find at these coffee houses newspapers, manuscript newsletters, pamphlets, ballads, all kinds of media. So, it was really a multimedia environment, must have been incredibly noisy as well, and quite smoky with the coffee that had been brewing all day. So, the coffee house itself was a place of community; it was a place of engagement in the day-to-day activities and the political activities, and for my course, we ended off our embodied humanities experience with a coffee house, and it was an attempt to embody the aspects of the coffee house that we find most interesting. And so, my students created a coffee house. This was an idea by the

way that I completely took and want to give full credit to Erin Keating for this idea, too. So, in the context of our coffee house, the students named the coffee house, they created the signs, they created pamphlets. They studied the discourse on coffee; there were a lot of people that were very unhappy with coffee houses in the eighteenth century, they thought they were places that really brewed discontent, political discontent, they weren't happy with the fact that classes mix together. And so, my students did some research on these pamphlets. They created their own pamphlets about the evils of coffee, or the virtues of coffee. And for the coffee house, we served coffee [laughter], we got the coffee, we got cups that didn't have handles on them, so we were trying to be as authentic as possible, and then the students also took it upon themselves to create entertainment at the coffee house. So, some of my students organised ballad signing, and collective ballad signing; another student put together a poem, and wrote a poem on the coffee house; and we were also joined by a good friend of mine who sang a ballad for the students as well. So, we had print media, we had oral media, and we also had manuscript media because there were letters that were also on display in the pop-up. So, for us, it was, it was the icing on the cake of a wonderful embodied classroom.

Vanessa Warne [09:30]: Leith, I love that all of the senses have been engaged by this kind of work. It's quite extraordinary. I know that Andrew Griffin's work has been important to you in your thinking about teaching, and about teaching with the senses. And one of the things he hopes people will do is, to quote him, "put our bodies through the labours that other long dead bodies have previously performed," and those are Andrew Griffin's words. Did you want to comment on that, Leith? I'm really struck by how your coffee house involved the sense of smell, which we rarely think of as engaging in a learning process.

Leith Davis [10:08]: Yeah, thank you. So, I love that quotation, and in fact, I started off my class, after the ballad singing, the next class that we have, I had given the students that article to read. And so, I was making very clear and transparent that we were engaging in an experiment in this class, of embodied humanities. Now, Griffin, there is talking about the way that re-enacting the labour from the past gives us different information and different kinds of knowledge about the past. Really important, I think, and this was something my students struggled with, we're not absolutely replicating everything from the past. We can't do that, the conditions of labour will not let us do that, for one thing, but we are, we are re-enacting; we are thinking about a different kind of engagement: with our bodies, with materiality, and with the process of learning about the humanities. One of the points that Griffin makes that I really love is that by doing this kind of embodied or engaged- he calls it 'experimental humanities'- then we understand that humanities are not separate from technology. And so, he makes the point, and I would certainly totally agree with this, that by doing embodied humanities in the classroom, we are introducing our students to the ideas that humanities- they are not disengaged, they are totally involved in STEM as well, and that it is an artificial separation to think of humanities and the sciences as these different ways of understanding the world. So embodiment, and I use the term 'embodied humanities,' I prefer that to 'experimental humanities,' which does have a specific scientific connotation and involves using the control group at cetera, et cetera, so I like the idea of embodiment. I would also say with embodiment, that we're looking at two kinds of embodiment: we're looking at embodiment that is understanding our bodies as part of engaging with the past; we're also talking about materiality. So, when we think about ink, for example, we think about the materiality of the ink and where those ingredients come from, we think about ink being something that's made up of oak galls that could be local, but also gum arabic, which is involved in process of colonialism.

Vanessa Warne [12:45]: Leith, I'm very inspired by what you've shared. In case there are people listening who might still feel that university-level Literary Studies should be limited to the close analysis

of the contents of an anthology, what would you like to say about how an embodied humanities approach can enrich both learning and teaching?

Leith Davis [13:07]: That's such a great question. There was so much my students learned, and there's so much I learned in this, as well. So, one of the things that we discovered early on with our engagement with ballads is just how great a number of mediations were done by 'anonymous,' and I think the students recognised, or started to question, "why are we reading particular items in these anthologies, when there's so much out there?" So, they started to do that reflective work of how canonization happens: how particular works are extracted from this media ecology and really put into an artificial encapsulation in anthologies. So, what we looked at put into question ideas of literature, what literature was, it put into question what authorship was, it put into question what originality was, and it also put into question the agency of the people who are consuming the media. For example, my students learned that ballads, broadside ballads, which were cheap entertainment, the Netflix of the time period, they were designed, they were marketed, for people of different classes. As a result, they're often quite ambiguous in -- you're not sure, is this really on the side of the serving maid? Or is this in the side of the gentleman, here? Who is really the agent? So, my students began to also see that our techniques for analysing texts are very text based to start with, and that they don't involve the agency of readers who might have different perspectives. So, it really casts doubt on some of the critical tools that we use to understand literature, and it was definitely an eye opener for me as well, because I realised just how much I was invested in the canonical works. I should also say, it was a very challenging course to teach as well for me, because I also had to learn how to take some risks as an instructor. I felt -- honestly, putting together media labs was a challenging aspect of it, I wasn't used to at all. I had to grapple with the materiality of the labs. I also had to understand, and to think about, if I'm asking students to engage with media in a different way, I also need to be able to mark them in—to, to be able to be flexible in my understanding of their work as well. So, I moved away from the standard essay format. We moved into doing multiple reflections, and we also moved into a format that I allowed them to put together their reflections at the end as the final project, and those final projects were absolutely remarkable. They completely knocked me off my feet; I had students who put so much creativity into their last, end project. So, they would make letters and put them in little caskets. I had a student who made a map of London and the postal routes and put her hand, an imprint of her hand, and, had, her reflections were letters that were going to these different postal routes in London. I had another student who created a periodical essay that was about the course. And I had students who really engaged in embodied kinds of assignments, as well as, of course, people who chose to do the traditional essays, but it challenged me in terms of grading those as well, and I realised I had to be more flexible, and I had to set up criteria. So, it was not just how impressive, materially, you are with your final assignment, but how have you really reflected on what we've learned in the course in your final project. So it was, for me a really interesting and challenging pedagogical process, as well.

Vanessa Warne [17:35]: Leith, this has been wonderful. Thank you for all that you've shared.

Leith Davis [17:38]: Thanks so much.

[Light piano music segue]

Jessie Krahn [17:52]: Hello, Victorian Samplers. I'm Jessie Krahn. I'm speaking with Tommy Mayberry today. Hello, Tommy!

Tommy Mayberry [17:59]: Hi, Jessie. I'm Tommy Mayberry. My pronouns are he, she, and they. So, you can use any of those three series to refer to me with respect. And I'm the Executive Director of the Centre for Teaching and Learning at the University of Alberta.

Jessie Krahn [18:11]: Tommy created a fascinating example of a feminist teaching environment in the form of a second-year course that they developed at the University of Waterloo. There was one particular painting they incorporated into the class: *The Nightmare* by Henry Fuseli. Tommy, could you describe it, please?

Tommy Mayberry [18:27]: Yeah, absolutely. One of my favourite paintings from my own Art History classes when I was an undergrad, and one that, you know, kind of stuck with me into my research as well. Um- Henry Fuseli's *The Nightmare* painting from 1781 is probably a familiar painting to most people, they may not know all of its history, but it's that, it's that large painting of the woman kind of thrown backward on the bed and there's that little gargoyle-looking, incubus sitting on her chest, and there's the black horse in the background with the glowing yellow eye, and the curtains are blowing, and it's this kind of, you know, horrific painting of, as the title is called, a nightmare. And so, you know, a tonne of scholarship and things have gone into it, but it is definitely an iconic painting of the late-eighteenth century, for sure. When I was teaching a course that I created myself, called 'Transgender Visual Culture,' I was teaching it in the Fine Art Department, but my PhD is in the English Language and Literature Department, and so I kind of brought a lot of literature and literary pieces to visual culture in the Fine Art Department. So, it was a very kind of, you know, mixed-media, multimodal, transmodal kind of course. And so, my original dissertation work was actually on William Blake and drag and transgender bodies, and so I have been fascinated since my early undergrad work with William Blake's poetry and painting, and one in particular, I actually did my Master's thesis on, was Blake's "Visions of the Daughters of Albion" from 1793, and there's a painting in that, that Blake, you know, he was good friends with Fuseli and had known him and his work, that Blake kind of did an homage to *The Nightmare* painting where his central character envisions, whose name is Oothoon, is also sort of thrown back on a cloud and is being kind of attacked by an eagle. And so, that piece from Blake's "Visions of the Daughters of Albion," and actually, the whole poem, is kind of where I anchored my course in Transgender Visual Culture since a lot of my work and research was around, you know, doing that bad thing we do with scholars where we say, "this is the moment I'm going to start, right, I'm going to start with William Blake, as you know, part of Transgender Visual Culture," but I was really interested and excited around the way that Blake plays with, and played with, gender and bodies and stuff, and that that painting that he had, that is kind of an homage to *The Nightmare*. It was also a bit of a kind of transgender inversion of the Prometheus myth with the eagle that was, you know, eating Prometheus' liver, I think it was. And so, in the poem, Blake's poem, there's an eagle that's kind of about to be devouring Oothoon, and so she's thrown back in that same posture. And so, I was interested in kind of starting with my students entrenched in visual culture, with Blake and with kind of, you know, late-eighteenth century, Romantic-period, kind of, turn-of-the-century pieces. But I was kind of gesturing back to Fuseli, because Blake knew him quite well; throughout history, and then because what happens, you know, flashing forward, you know, a couple decades, when Mary Shelley writes her novel *Frankenstein*, there's also a scene in the novel *Frankenstein*, where one of the main characters, the love interest, Elizabeth, is also thrown back on the bed, as you know, she faints from the sight of the monster in *Frankenstein*, and she actually wrote what is largely kind of understood and remembered as like a narrative prose description of Fuseli's painting. And so, the way she describes Elizabeth's clothing, and posture, and the wind through the windows, and the monster-kind-of stuff, is -- there's a prose version of that in *Frankenstein*. And so, I was really interested in kind of looking at Blake and Shelley together as kind of this moment we could start to see these

playings with gender and identity, and then transgender because the novel *Frankenstein* as well has a lot of queer and trans interpretations into it, as well. And then what I did is, I was kind of going through my own dissertation research, as well, I kind of traced this image that Fuseli had, kind of, forward through Transgender Visual Culture, and that's kind of how I mapped the course. After Shelley in 1818, I took my students to James Wale's 1931 black-and-white movie of *Frankenstein*, where one of the promotional stills was actually a recreation of that bedroom scene with Elizabeth kind of thrown over, and you can do really interesting visual comparisons between that promotional steal and Fuseli's painting and the description that Shelley wrote kind of the painting, because the monster kind of takes place of the incubus gargoyle and the horse and the curtains and all of that stuff. Flashing forward even more, going to *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* in 1975, you know, another *Frankenstein*, kind of, recreation piece with Frank N. Furter; there's that powerful scene at the end of the "Don't Dream It Be It" when it's, like, the synchronised swimming in the pool, and Dr. Frank N. Furter is singing and he's also thrown back in the life ring, right, like this unambiguously, you know, drag, trans, kind of, body for that, and you know, some of the lyrics, I can't remember specifically, but some of the lyrics actually say like, you know, "the delicate, satin draped frame clinging to her thigh," or "the erotic nightmares and sensual daydreams," and so, it's not a stretch to kind of see those pieces there. And then, going right into, kind of, contemporary drag and trans bodies, Lady Gaga in *Born This Way* in 2011, when she had "The Manifesto of Mother Monster." So again, "Mother Monster" I've done a lot of teaching and connecting to the female monster from *Frankenstein*, that, kind of, never was realised, but in the voiceover prelude at the beginning, Lady Gaga starts the video in that thrown back position as well, and then kind of talks about this race within a race of humanity. And then I go right to drag queens and that dance move called the 'shablam,' or the death drop, where they jump in the air and fall backward, and they land in that position from Fuseli's painting. And so, I've had a lot of fun with kind of the afterlife of this image from 1781 to really get at in my teaching a lot of this kind of cultural moments with the late eighteenth century, early nineteenth century, kind of, onward around Trans Visual Culture.

Jessie Krahn [25:02]: So, what kind of exercises did your students do? Did you ask your students to do a death drop, or to recreate elements of visual culture throughout time?

Tommy Mayberry [25:10]: Riffing off of Bell Hooks, as you know, you should never ask your students to do something you're not willing to do yourself in the classroom: I do not death drop in the classroom, and so that was not something we did. However, what I should say, though, is I created a project for my students that I called the "Research Creation Project," which essentially, was try on something from the course, and you know, you could do something very creative, kind of, object oriented. Because Blake was such a kind of cornerstone of this course, I did have several students who tried their hands at making their own handmade books. So, kind of in the way that Blake did his own printing, and painting, and kind of book stuff, I had students who created books, as well. I did have one student who was quite excited around her own background in synchronised swimming, and the synchronised swimming connections through *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, and so she actually choreographed a synchronised swimming routine that she had cameras set up in the pool, and she filmed herself doing the synchronised swimming routine. And she actually did put the move of the, kind of, Fuseli piece in it, as well, for part of that. I also had another dancer who did a choreographed dance routine for some of that, as well. I also had students who actually did try on drag in different, kind of, performative pieces to the camera or videos, and things as well. So, one of my students did a comparison, so they wrote an essay, it was an essay that they ended up submitting, but they did a comparison between *Frankenstein* and Pokémon with Mewtwo as kind of a Frankensteinian creature, and they were mapping sort of the interconnections between, you know, science and cloning, and all of these sorts of things. And it was a brilliant paper on Pokémon and *Frankenstein*

that came out of the course. As well, so really, really kind of exciting things with, you know, opening the door to try something on in the in this way, and sort of see what, what students were drawn to and connected to.

Jessie Krahn [27:09]: I love when people trace continuities, especially unconventional continuities, across history. Do you think that these exercises where the students are encouraged to notice similarities and differences between present and past pop culture offers particular advantages? Like, what are the benefits of having students create?

Tommy Mayberry [27:30]: Umm, teaching with pop culture has always been kind of a big thing, for me. It was one of the ways that I, kind of, noticed I learned best, when I was able to do unconventional assignments, or I was able to, you know, really latch onto something that was very historical through a contemporary reference, or, you know, and I mean, I grew up with kind of, you know, *The Simpsons* and *Friends* as, kind of, my touch points, and so I remember really understanding and seeing literature in such different ways through what *The Simpsons* would do with, you know, "The Treehouse of Horror" episodes, where they would like make a five-minute version of, you know, like an entire Victorian novel, or something, as well for that, and, kind of, distil it into those pieces. And so, I've really found a lot of power in teaching with pop culture in many ways. And I think, in my course, opening that door for folks to find their own kind of ins was also exciting, because, like I said, at the beginning of our chat, I did that thing where I chose Blake as the starting point, but one of the earlier draft iterations of this was I was also really interested in the Amanda Bynes movie, *She's the Man*, as a Shakespearean adaptation of *Twelfth Night*. As a drag queen myself, and as an academic drag queen, I bring that trans-feminine approach to Drag and Trans Culture, and I'm always aware of not overly representing that side of drag and trans and so bringing in, you know, drag kings or non-binary performers, or, you know, sort of, looking in a wider spectrum. And so, I really like *She's the Man* for that kind of piece for it. I didn't end up going all the way back to Shakespeare and *Twelfth Night*, but that was something I was aware of, and I did actually teach some of the scenes from *She's the Man*. What I was very careful to not do, in teaching this course, was to present it as an unambiguous charted lineage from Fuseli to the death drop, although I think it's really fun that it's called 'the death drop,' right? Like, it has that death piece kind of into it, because of the high stakes, the energy, and then the position you land in with, you know, literally you can see where the drag queen, or drag performer's, knee is and where their arms are, which, you know, like if you Google 'Fuseli's *The Nightmare*,' she could have just done that, right? Like, you know, all the all the centuries ago, and so not to say this is exactly what happened, because, of course, it's not the goal of teaching, you know, a second-year Transgender Visual Culture course wasn't unambiguously to chart that lineage, but to begin building those sort of pieces for it, and so different entry points, no matter how contrived, or fabulous, or, you know, doesn't even remotely make sense, would never hold up, and, you know, a kind of peer-reviewed, publishing, kind of, piece doesn't really matter in the classroom for how you're activating that kind of engaged pedagogy with your students. And so, pop culture was one way to do that, but also opening the door for them to, my students to find their own ways that they were excited by, a connection or by something as well, for it. The one danger of kind of picking a point, and looking at the afterlife, is, you know, perhaps foreclosing on some of the for-life pieces, as well. And so, thinking of this specifically, one of the other things that came up with Blake in my own research, I don't remember if I brought it up in my teaching, because of course, I don't want to, I don't want to overwhelm, but I also don't want to have my whole course be my dissertation research either, you know, just kind of teaching that, but Blake was also with the Oothoon and "Visions of the [Those] of Albion," Blake was also very interested in not just gender, but in kind of Christianity and religion, and so one of the other kinds of pieces, in addition to *The Nightmare* that he was interested in was Bernini's sculpture of the *The Ecstasy*

of *Saint Teresa*, and so, the angel who was, you know, throwing the burning spear through Saint Teresa's heart, and how Saint Teresa was thrown back in the similar kind of thing. And so, I think there's also connections with Fuseli, because *The Nightmare*, of course, has erotic imagery in it as well, right? Like, it doesn't just have to be the dark, fearful nightmare, kind of, stuff. It's, you know, this fear of sexuality, and this fear of, you know, women's sexuality, specifically, as well, and so I think what picking the starting point, but not having it be only forward, right, looking at sort of other pieces that could come before, how it could infuse those because it can be really exciting. Again, thinking of what our students are up to: what they might know or what they might see; I will never not be able to credit my student with the Pokémon connection and *Frankenstein*. But this was-- I was teaching this course before *Detective Pikachu* came out, and then watching *Detective Pikachu* with my partner, it was just iconically *Frankenstein*. Like, I feel like they even quoted *Frankenstein* in a way in that, and so I never arrived at that myself, it was a student who sort of saw those pieces for it. And so, there's something really exhilarating in looking at kind of time in our teaching in both directions, right? You know, kind of picking a moment, and starting, for the syllabus for the teaching, for lesson design, but being open to what you see coming, and what your students might see coming in both directions.

Jessie Krahn [32:52]: If I understand you correctly, the goal is to teach that some of these images are polyvalent, and there's much to be gained from taking these unorthodox vantage points and assessing history from there. I'm also hearing from you that with laterally organised teaching environments, we can learn from our students as much as we teach our students.

Tommy Mayberry [33:14]: Absolutely. And we -- the thrill of doing an assignment, like the "Research Creation" one I did, was I had no idea what I was going to get. You know, I didn't even -- I couldn't even build a rubric to mark their assignments, you know, I had to have them explain to me, and, you know, argue for what grade they felt, they believed, and how it met the course outcomes. Because, you know, the opening the door that widely, I wasn't -- I didn't write final exam questions with, you know, 'must hit on four of these six points' to get the marks kind of thing, right? I was so much more interested in their doing as learning and knowing, rather than in their, kind of, regurgitating as knowing and as having learned. And I think that's also when -- when you were talking about the kind of, the polyvalent stuff, and the course allowed it. You know, this was an elective course, it wasn't a cornerstone course, or a first-year course that, you know, had to have certain outcomes for certain kinds of core learning. So, the course allowed a bit more of this divergence for it, as well. But I could have taught a, you know, completely historical version of, you know, when did Blake meet Henry Fuseli? When would, you know, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, when would Mary Shelley's parents have met Blake? You know, like, we could have done that, and that would have been a really exciting other kind of course, for it. But my outcomes for this course were so much more about building capacity and awareness, and so it didn't really matter if you could answer on a midterm specifically, you know, when or where, but more so kind of exploring those capacities for it. And so, that's also exciting to, kind of, give over different kinds of learning outcomes, and ways to assess to what extent they've been met, that don't always come back to, you know, lower-order Bloom's taxonomy, kind of, pieces. I became a big fan of doing that in my teaching, having final projects where the students either co-create the rubric, together, with me, so we're all agreeing on what are the main points of it, or they do a kind of, you know, a letter to me that explains, "here's how I have demonstrated my knowledge in this course," and I have yet to have a student who is bold enough to ask for, or argue for, "the 100%." I always kind of see the "low-90," kind of, pieces. And then I do see, which I think is another valuable piece to doing this kind of collaborative assessment and engaging openly in this conversation of power dynamics in the classroom, is I have a lot of students who mark themselves really low. And so, when given the opportunity to just say, "here's how I demonstrated

this," it's not as empowering as you might think for students, where they actually feel, you know, based on whatever their own kind of cultural backgrounds are with teaching and learning dynamics, or based on their own awareness of themselves as a, quote-unquote, "B student," or "C student," kind of, thing, where they mark themselves in this. And so the thing that shocked me the first couple of times I did this was how hard on themselves our students are, and how much this kind of assignment can actually really boost their metacognition as a learner, by getting them to think through, "you saw this as a D, and I saw this as a B," you know, that's a big kind of, a big chasm between what I'm noticing in what you're up to, and how you're engaging in the course content and the learning outcomes, and how you're feeling you're sort of achieving those. And so that kind of one-way direction of the teacher having all the power and the students being the ones who have to learn, we learn a lot with and from our students, as well, about how they might be accessing course material or what they might be seeing, as well. And so, I've never had anyone give themselves a "100," although I bet it could be probably quite easy for them to argue for that as well, because I'm not -- I don't have a preconceived map of what a "100" would look like, right? I'm interested in how they're seeing their work meeting the course outcomes. And so, students do need a little bit of that boost at times to see their work and their placement more strongly than then they might.

Jessie Krahn [37:22]: Thank you so much, Tommy. This has been so illuminating, and I have so much to stew on now. I really appreciate you talking with me today.

Tommy Mayberry [37:29]: Thank you for having me.

[Light piano music segue]

Natalie LoVetri [37:44]: Hello, I'm Natalie LoVetri, and I'm pleased to welcome Dr. Claire Battershill to the podcast. Claire is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Information and the Department of English at the University of Toronto. She teaches in the Vic One program for first-year students and the Book History and Print Culture programs. Her research focuses on early twentieth-century book production, particularly work by small, experimental presses. Today, we will be discussing Book History, teaching, and making. Thank you for joining me today, Claire.

Claire Battershill [38:19]: Thanks so much for having me. It's a pleasure.

Natalie LoVetri [38:22]: Claire, can you introduce listeners to bookmaking? What interests you most about the history of bookmaking?

Claire Battershill [38:30]: That's a great question. So, I was introduced to the notion of making books by hand, or handmaking books, of course, as a lot of us probably were, in elementary school, right? Sometimes you get to staple a book together that you've made of your own little stories, or things like that. And I was -- as a reader and an avid person interested in literature, I've always been interested in books as objects, also. Even as a kid, I used to make my own little books and things like that. But it really started as an academic interest for me when I was an undergraduate student, and I had the opportunity to call one of Virginia Woolf's short story collections up from the stacks in the library, and it was one of the Hogarth Press books, and I noticed that it was a handmade object that seems to me to be imperfect. And so, I held Virginia Woolf up as this, like, you know, important author, and she seemed very amazing to me in all sorts of ways, and so to see this book that she had sewn and printed, using handmade paper covers, that was not a pristine object, and it had some little smudges and some other imperfections, I found that really humanising of her for me, and it made me feel intimately connected in some way to the

past in a way that I hadn't quite experienced with an object like that before. And so, that got me really interested in bookmaking as an academic subject, and especially, in its relationship to experimental literature, and the ways in which sometimes, if you're trying to write a story that's a different kind of story, you might need to make a different kind of book to house that story.

Natalie LoVetri [40:04]: That's interesting. Would you be able to describe the look of that publication for us? Or a different publication that you found interesting?

Natalie LoVetri [40:10]: Sure, sure. So, there are a few different handmade books that were published by the Hogarth Press in the early part of the twentieth century, but one of the famous ones is called *Two Stories*. And that book was the first literary publication of the Hogarth Press, and it contained one story by Leonard Woolf, and one story by Virginia Woolf, and the covers have some variants. So, there's different colours of covers: there's a blue one, there's a red and white one. So, these different Japanese papers on the covers, they're not archival papers, so they're flaking a bit at the edges, if you see copies in the library now, which is again, is also like a beautiful expression of the passing of time. They're letterpress printed, and so that's something that also, if we're going to talk a little bit about Book History education, that's something that I get the very great honour and pleasure of doing now sometimes with my students, is taking them to use the letterpress materials at the Bibliography Room at Massey College, and I've done a little bit of letterpress myself. So, they're letterpress printed; they have wood-cut illustrations; they're hand-sewn pamphlets, so they're very small, you can see the thread that Virginia Woolf has sewn, and tied the knots, and all the rest of it. So, they are really --- in they're, kind of, like, slightly -- I think I've described them in publications before as "scruffy," but yeah, so they have a little scruffy aspect, but, to me, they're extremely endearing and beautiful objects, also.

Natalie LoVetri [40:16]: Yes, they do sound beautiful. You touched on the letterpress. Can you describe how you've engaged students with Book History through hands-on making?

Claire Battershill [41:12]: Yeah, so I've done a number of different things over the past couple of years in virtual pandemic conditions, and also on site. So, I have taught for the last couple of years, a class in the Book History and Print Culture program called "Book History in Practice," and what I do in that class is I take a different material topic in Book History every week: so, we think about ink; we think about bookbinding; we think about printing; and in each of the weeks, we'd read an academic article, or a historical piece, about those materials; we look at some rare materials from the library that show examples, for instance, of different styles and types of book bindings; and then we try that activity ourselves. So, we'll do an exercise in bookbinding, and in this case, this year we did some pamphlet making. During the pandemic, I sent out some little bookbinding kits to the students in the mail so that they could do that at their computers. And then for printing here at the University of Toronto, we have a place called The Bibliography Room at Massey College, and the College Printer, Kit MacNeil, along with Stephen Sword, who's a volunteer there, led my students through a typesetting workshop and printing workshop, where they print a quarto using the nineteenth-century presses, and we have a number of different nineteenth-century printing presses in the studio that they get to use. And that's where I learned letterpress, also; as a PhD student, I was in the Printing Apprenticeship program, which is another thing that students who are very interested in letterpress can choose to come in and really learn the ropes in that space.

Natalie LoVetri [43:00]: Claire, why do you feel this type of material exploration is an important element of teaching?

Claire Battershill [43:05]: I think that there are a number of different ways in which it really, I think, illuminates aspects of history that otherwise one might not think about. So, one important component of Book History teaching is to help people think about the labour that goes into books. So, it's to dismantle that myth that the author makes the book alone and help us think about the various different people who are engaged in making books over the course of the production of a texts. So, that might include authors, and editors, and so on, but it also includes printers, illustrators, woodblock makers, lots of different people help in this process, right? And so, when we're thinking about the history of books, understanding that community aspect of things is really important, and I think one of the ways in which that aspects of things can be understood in a different way is to embody that community, so to have one student inking the stone and the other one pulling the print, and to show them the rhythm of the way that the print shop works; to have that kind of embodied experience that that really does show the collaborative nature of the process. So, I think that part of it is really rich in the material learning aspect, right, the community that forms around these practices. And I also think it's really helpful to help students think about time, so learning typesetting shows students how slow that process is, right? And how meticulous and careful and how different it is, in some ways, than the pace of things, the way that we do them now. And so, that reconceptualization of time is something that students really often talk about and think about, and that's been a really fruitful area of engagement for us, as well. So, I think there are so many things that you can learn by doing these material exercises, but those are two of the ones that come to mind right away.

Natalie LoVetri [44:53]: Right, that's lovely. Can you describe what **matière** is? Why is this type of making important?

Claire Battershill [45:03]: Yeah, I'm so glad you asked this question! So, I've been having some really fascinating and wonderful conversations with some colleagues: Sheryda Warrener at UBC, Heather Jessup at Dalhousie, Suzannah Showler, who teaches at the University of Ottawa, and Amy Elkins in the United States; and we've all been talking together about material craft practice, and creative writing, as well, because that's another area that I teach to undergrads and outside of the Book History Program, and one of the things that we, as a group of scholars, have been talking about a lot is thinking about the legacies of Black Mountain College in the United States, which was a progressive educational institution that formed in the 1930s, after the closure of the Bauhaus, and so much here is a historical design exercise that was designed by Josef Albers. And the basic premise of this is that you can learn design, not by imposing external philosophical principles on a set of materials, but instead by learning inductively from the material. For example, the **matière** exercise was that you would gather some, often, like, you know, pieces of paper, or garbage or grass, or any material that you could find, and design something through the material itself. So, thinking of the material as the thing that guides your design, and playing with the material was really important, manipulating it with your hands, thinking about the ways that it could go together with other materials, but not sort of thinking, you know, as you might have done in previous theories of design, like divine proportion, or these kinds of external ideas, but actually trying to design from the materials themselves. And so that's the premise of this experimental design exercise from the 30s, but for me, reading about that, and learning more about Black Mountain, and Sheryda and I took a really excellent workshop by Fritz Horstman, who is one of the folks who works with the Black Mountain Museum in the States. We did a zoom workshop on **matière** and got to play with some materials and things like this, and it really made me think a lot about how when we know a material, right, so thinking, for example, about paper, which is something we think about a lot in Book History, right? When you see how paper is made from water, and from cloth broken down, or from the fibres of a plant, right, and you start to kind of understand the properties of that material, you also know what is possible in terms of

making a book out of that material, right? Because you start to understand how paper behaves, you know, start to learn the importance of grain direction, you also see the kind of textures and meanings of paper as a material that might inform the ways in which it interacts with the things on the page. And so, to me, this seems like a really rich area of exploration that could connect to creative writing, right? So, when you start to think of language as a material, how does that work? And Sheryda is doing some really amazing prompts and exercises in that domain. But also for Book History students, you know, what is that experiential value to the book materials that explains why we do things certain ways: why we fold; why we collate books in the way that we do; or why we kind of construct pamphlets and the way that we might; and why at different periods in history when they're using different materials, they might approach this the sort of object of the book differently. So, I think this just has a tremendously fruitful possibility for educators today, and that progressive idea to have engaging your senses when you learn is something that, I feel like, brings a certain kind of joy and newness to the classroom, in the university setting. We're not necessarily usually used to getting messy in university classrooms, but it can be really fun and enjoyable to do so.

Natalie LoVetri [48:47]: Right. So, thinking about the materials then, and about the matière, is this an experimental process that you would undertake before having students create their own books? How does the process look?

Claire Battershill [49:02]: So, I've done it a couple of different ways in a couple of different classes, depending on the objectives of the class. And so, with the Book History Class that I was mentioning before, I really broke it down, right? So, when we have our week on paper, we have really wonderful relationship with a paper making studio here in Toronto called Paperhouse Studio, and hopefully, I'll share the link with listeners who are interested, but so we have Emily or Flora, from Paperhouse, show us how to make handmade paper. And that's one distinct class and the students get an opportunity to try out paper making, and they take those elements away. And you know, we have a separate day on ink, and a separate day on letterpress, and each of those [are] distinct modules, and the reason they're distinct is because they're historically informed. And then, I'm going to do it slightly differently with my undergrad students in Creative Writing, though, in the sense that I'm teaching a class next year on chapbooks, which are going to allow students to write and make their own chapbooks, and so that's much more of like a project-based learning course. So, they will, in that sense, they will do similar material learning, will do a bunch of prompts and exercises, but the end goal is actually for them to produce their own chapbook. So, I think, depending on the course, I apply this slightly differently, but it has been really fun and interesting to think of some of these more, what are thought of sometimes as more Fine Arts, or Creative Arts processes in relation to Book History, right? I think for me, those come together actually in really intuitive ways, and the two can really inform each other quite beautifully. And I intend to bring my undergrads to the Fisher and show them chapbook examples, and so on, to also integrate it from both directions.

Claire Battershill [50:34]: Wonderful. That sounds like a fascinating course. Claire, what surprised you most about your students work for your course?

Claire Battershill [50:42]: My students made incredible things in both years that I tried this new assignment, which was called a "Material Experiments Assignment," and in that assignment, I invited the students to try any type of material making that they chose that was related to Book History, in some way. And so, I received everything from I had a student who made a wax tablet, there were students who'd experimented with lots of different types of book bindings, so they tried several different stitches, they did

different things like this. And one of my truly amazing PhD students, Rowan Red Sky, produced an artist's book made out of buckthorn berry ink that they had made themselves, and that ended up actually being published in *Maisonneuve*, and I'll share the link to that for listeners as well, it's a really beautiful piece, relating Rowan's experience of thinking about local plant life and about their indigenous background in relation to ink making, and that kind of material practice. And that work was just so much more rich, and beautiful, and layered than I could have imagined, and then related back to the history of painting on birch bark and the history of different colours of green, and it was just a really incredibly rich project that I think, with that sort of more defined assignment, I would never have imagined that coming out of it. So, the students' work in this domain has just been absolutely -- it's blown me away every time, and I think there have been different things that with every different submission of this assignment, which has also been such a pleasure to see.

Natalie LoVetri [52:15]: Claire, thank you so much for sharing this teaching reflection with me today, and for directing our attention to connections between material history and creative making. I really appreciate it.

Claire Battershill [52:25]: Thank you so much for having me. It's such a pleasure. Thank you, Natalie.

[Light piano music segue]

Vanessa Warne [52:28]: Thank you very much to guests Leith Davis, Tommy Mayberry, and Claire Battershill. Their generosity and wisdom allowed us to break from our usual focus on Victorian-era material culture, and roam beyond the temporal limits of the nineteenth century, and I'm very grateful for that. This podcast is the co-creation of Anne Hung, Jessie Krahn, Natalie LoVetri, Lucie von Schilling, and me, Vanessa Warne. We do our work on the territory of the $l\acute{o}k^w\acute{o}n$ and SENĆOŦEN speaking communities of the Songhees, Esquimalt, and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples, and on Treaty One Territory, traditional land of the Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene peoples and homeland of the Métis Nation. *Victorian Samplings* is the podcast of the Crafting Communities Project. Learn more about the Crafting Communities Project by visiting craftingcommunities.net, or by following us on Instagram @Crafty_Victorians. You can email us at CraftyVictorians@gmail.com, and you can follow us on Twitter @CraftyVictorian. The Crafting Communities Project is supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Victorian Studies Association of Western Canada, and the Universities of Alberta, Manitoba, and Victoria. Crafting Communities is a collaboration between Andrea Korda, Mary Elizabeth Leighton, and me, Vanessa Warne. Thank you for listening.

[Light piano music exit]