

As Potter makes clear in his introduction to the book, this is no “celebratory” (8) account of the BBC as an institution. Instead, Potter’s is a “critical” text (8), and his account of the corporation’s past poses difficult questions about its future too. This raises the question: Who is the target audience for this book? Certainly, as a survey of broadcasting history for undergraduate students and scholars who wish to access a digestible account of the BBC’s past, this is an excellent addition to the existing literature. The publisher may also have hoped to reach a wider readership interested in deepening their knowledge of the corporation during its centenary year. For the former, the lack of detailed footnotes pointing to the wider scholarship will prove frustrating, while both categories of reader will be irritated by the lack of images and the fairly frequent typos. Nevertheless, these issues do not detract from the overall value of a book that manages to tackle a hundred years of BBC history in a way that is equally accessible and thought-provoking.

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ZACHARY SAMALIN. *The Masses Are Revolting: Victorian Culture and the Political Aesthetics of Disgust*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021. Pp. 342. \$42.95 (cloth).
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In June 1858, London was suffering from the Great Stink. A long period of hot, dry weather had worsened the water quality of the River Thames, which functioned as a sewer for London’s human and industrial waste matter. With the sinking water level, the effluent was not washed away by the tide but remained on the riverbanks. The disgusting stench became unbearable. When even the work of Parliament was affected, the House of Commons agreed to commission the building of the Thames Embankment, thus taking a decision that had been in the pipeline for years. For *The Times* this showed that “nausea ha[d] become a principle of legislation” (38).

These events mark the point of departure for Zachary Samalin’s insightful *The Masses Are Revolting: Victorian Culture and the Political Aesthetics of Disgust*. References to disgust are all-pervasive in nineteenth-century realist literature, sanitary reform, political discourse, evolutionary theory, and discourse on imperialism. Organized in three parts and five chapters, Samalin focuses on debates, events, and publications of the late 1850s that at first sight might seem completely unconnected: the Great Stink (chapter 1), literary realism (chapter 2), the emergence of Darwin’s theories of the emotions (chapter 3), (Marxist) social theory and the Financial Revulsion of 1857 (chapter 4), the Obscene Publications Act of 1857 (chapter 5), and the Indian Rebellion of 1857 (conclusion). The years between 1857 and 1859 are revealed as a decisive period in the much larger history of disgust that Samalin traces through the long nineteenth century—from Immanuel Kant’s aesthetics to Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis. Samalin bases his study on a wide range of Victorian texts, informed by twentieth- and twenty-first-century theoretical approaches to disgust by William A. Cohen, Mary Douglas, Winfried Menninghaus, William Ian Miller, Martha Nussbaum, Paul Rozin, and many others.

Samalin’s compelling hypothesis is that this expansive discourse shows disgust to be at the center of what Raymond Williams in the late 1970s called structures of feeling—that is, the affective quality of social experience (*Marxism in Literature* [1977], 128–35). In the mid-nineteenth century, the reference to disgust indicated a critical “tipping point” (252) in cultural crises or conflicts, demanding immediate intervention. The reference to disgust (and the

concurrent call for its exclusion) helped to bring about the “civilizational modernity” marked by “rationality and rationalization” (10). It may seem paradoxical that the idea of civilization would “derive its relative stability and coherence” (255) from an emotion that is closest to human beings’ animal past. But as Samalin convincingly shows, disgust is not a purely bodily response to an object that is potentially polluting. Instead, it is a social emotion that (re)organizes culture and social identities. In the social politics of disgust, the “racialized logic of the primitive” (255) fulfills a crucial function for negotiating the dividing line between the civilized and the primitive, the modern and the premodern, the Self and the Other.

The pun in the book’s title, which is reiterated in the title of chapter 4 (“The Masses Are Revolting; or, The Birth of Social Theory from the Spirit of Disgust”), left me a bit lost. Chapter 4 sets off from a brief remark in Friedrich Engels’s *Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845) on the “repulsive” quality of “the very turmoil of [London’s] streets” (180) and alienation in the modern metropolis. But I was not completely convinced that this link between disgust, political theory, and political unrest really functions as a comprehensive argument for the whole book. It does work well for the analysis of Engels, the Great Stink, and the Indian Rebellion, but it seems less relevant for the discussion of literary realism or Charles Darwin’s *Expression of the Emotions* (1872). I also would have liked to get a more explicit reflection on the “political aesthetics” that the Victorian texts construct. In other words, my impression was that the book would have profited from a more rigorous (or more consistent) theoretical framework. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (2004), which Salamin mentions only briefly, Sara Ahmed describes how speech acts evoke disgust and link disgust to objects and bodies, thus establishing “affective economies” (Ahmed, 8) in which power relations and identities are performatively brought about. Such a theorization of disgust might have been useful to describe more precisely its effect in Victorian culture. At the very least, it might have informed the analysis of what is at stake in the legal debates about obscene art that Salamin discusses in chapter 5.

In concluding the discussion of the Victorian controversy with a glance at the highly contentious debate evoked by the Danish caricatures of the Prophet Muhammed in 2005, Samalin refrains from taking a clear stance on censorship. Critiquing a secular demand to overcome disgust as insufficient and potentially imperialist, he suggests (somewhat vaguely) that “the question of how and why different people come to have such incompatible relationships to their revulsion has remained unstudied in the context of censorship debates” (239). This may very well be the case, and Samalin is certainly right in stressing power relations and cultural differences at the basis of such controversies. And yet, in my understanding, the public expression of disgust at a work of art is always ideological; it is not a mere expression of an individual’s inner emotions (shaped by their respective culture) but a violent political speech act.

The Masses Are Revolting is an inspiring and thought-provoking book that invites questions and discussion. Offering a fresh perspective on mid-nineteenth-century British culture through a comprehensive account of the discursive history of disgust, it is a seminal contribution to both Victorian studies and the history of the emotions that shows how the two fields can be brought into a productive dialogue.

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