CHINA AND THE VICTORIAN IMAGINATION

What happens to our understanding of “Orientalism” and imperialism when we consider British–Chinese relations during the nineteenth century, rather than focusing on India, Africa, or the Caribbean? This book explores China’s centrality to British imperial aspirations and literary production, underscoring the heterogeneous, interconnected nature of Britain’s formal and informal empire. To British eyes, China promised unlimited economic possibilities, but also posed an ominous threat to global hegemony. Surveying Anglophone literary production about China across high and low cultures, as well as across time, space, and genres, this book demonstrates how important location was to the production, circulation, and reception of received ideas about China and the Chinese. In this account, treaty ports matter more than opium. Ross G. Forman challenges our preconceptions about British imperialism, reconceptualizes Anglophone literary production in global and local contexts, and excavates the little-known Victorian history so germane to contemporary debates about China’s “rise.”

ROSS G. FORMAN is Assistant Professor in the Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies at the University of Warwick.
Nineteenth-century British literature and culture have been rich fields for interdisciplinary studies. Since the turn of the twentieth century, scholars and critics have tracked the intersections and tensions between Victorian literature and the visual arts, politics, social organization, economic life, technical innovations, scientific thought – in short, culture in its broadest sense. In recent years, theoretical challenges and historiographical shifts have unsettled the assumptions of previous scholarly synthesis and called into question the terms of older debates. Whereas the tendency in much past literary critical interpretation was to use the metaphor of culture as “background,” feminist, Foucauldian, and other analyses have employed more dynamic models that raise questions of power and of circulation. Such developments have reanimated the field. This series aims to accommodate and promote the most interesting work being undertaken on the frontiers of the field of nineteenth-century literary studies: work which intersects fruitfully with other fields of study such as history, or literary theory, or the history of science. Comparative as well as interdisciplinary approaches are welcomed.

A complete list of titles published will be found at the end of the book.
CHINA AND THE VICTORIAN IMAGINATION

Empires Entwined

ROSS G. FORMAN
For Richard Forman, with sky hooks
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Abbreviations

HO     Home Office Papers, National Archives, Kew
LCP    Lord Chamberlain’s Plays Collection, British Library