

Call for Papers
The Victorians Institute Conference
NC State University + Methodist University
Raleigh, NC
Sat-Sun, October 7-8, 2023
<https://victoriansinstitute2023.wordpress.com/>



Hard Times

“Hard Times” was a frequent Victorian refrain, perhaps most famously in the title of Charles Dickens’s 1854 novel but also in Stephen Foster’s 1854 song “Hard Times Come Again No More”; in the title of Hubert von Herkomer’s 1885 painting; and throughout the century as an experience of socio-economic difficulties, political oppression, and personal suffering.

Our own times might equally be characterized as hard times, with a lingering global pandemic and its profound repercussions on economies, domesticities, and mental well-being. In higher education, hard times have persisted since the economic crisis of 2008, as universities face enrollment dropoffs, budgetary pressures, and the unsustainable casualization of academic labor.

Despite these grim associations, hard times can also prompt creativity, solidarity, and resilience. Whether we are examining the nineteenth century or feeling its echo resonate in the present, Victorian studies seem well positioned to reflect upon hard times. What can we learn from the past? How do we live, teach, and thrive in hard times? And where can we go from here?

The Victorians Institute thus welcomes scholars and students to join a conversation on this theme at the VI’s 2023 conference on the campus of NC State University in Raleigh, NC, from October 7-8, 2023. The conference keynote speaker will be **Dr. Talia Schaffer**. We invite submissions for individual papers, panels, roundtables, and other formats on any subject, potentially including:

- Victorian art and literature in hard times
- Charles Dickens’s *Hard Times* and other Victorian industrial/“Condition of England” novels, and works of art depicting Victorian industry
- Victorian works of Realism/Naturalism in art and literature
- Economic stress past and present
- Socio-political unrest
- Changing perceptions of Empire, colonial woes, wars, and rebellions
- Victorian food and agricultural crises
- Victorian natural resource, climate, ecological, and environmental crises
- Creativity and resilience in hard times
- Different experiences of hard times, according to class, race, gender, sexuality, and ability
- Responses to hard times in science, technology, and medicine
- Reflections of hard times in Victorian mourning and other material cultures (fashion, food, the decorative arts, architecture, monuments/memorials)
- Hard times in urban, military, professional, and domestic spaces: slums, prisons, factories, hospitals/asylums, the laboratory, the battlefield, the workhouse, the sickroom, the courtroom, the schoolroom

- Hard times and the Victorian/Victorian Studies and Humanities classroom: interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and undisciplinary perspectives on pandemic and pre/post-pandemic pedagogy
- Disease, illness, famine, afflictions, and infirmity
- Personal caregiving by individuals, families, and community networks
- Alcoholism and drug addiction
- Prejudices and oppression

Applicants should submit a **250-word abstract and a one-page CV** for an individual paper or a full panel, or a description of their proposed session in another format. Submissions should be uploaded to this Google form <https://go.ncsu.edu/vi2023> by April 30, 2023.

VI would also like to encourage undergraduate student participation in its conference. Undergrad participants should apply with a faculty sponsor, either in a group as an undergrad research panel, or for consideration in the general pool. In either case, faculty sponsors should coordinate applications and explain their preferred format.

VI offers some travel subventions for graduate students whose institutions provide limited or no support. If you would like to be considered, please send a brief letter explaining your request and what support you currently receive. The deadline for travel applications is September 1, 2023.

The 2023 Victorians Institute Conference is jointly hosted and sponsored by NC State University and Methodist University. Find general info about the Victorians Institute and the *Victorians Institute Journal* at <http://victoriansinstitute.org/>



Hubert von Herkomer, *Hard Times*, 1885, oil on canvas, City Art Gallery of Manchester.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hubert_von_Herkomer_-_Hard_Times.JPG