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Review of: The Lotus And The Lion: Buddhism And The British Empire by J. Jeffrey Franklin

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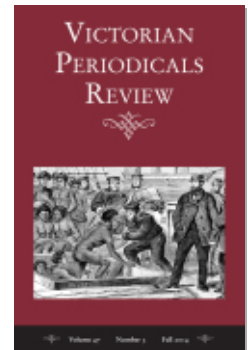
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The Lotus and the Lion: Buddhism and the British Empire (review)

Jonathan Stockdale

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J. Jeffrey Franklin, *The Lotus and the Lion: Buddhism and the British Empire* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), pp. xii + 273, \$35 cloth.

In 1901, Charles Bennett took vows and became Ananda Metteyya, the first British Buddhist monk. After reading J. Jeffrey Franklin's insightful study of Buddhism under the British empire, one will probably be struck less by Bennett's avant-gardism and more by the rather late date for this first coming out, for as Franklin richly documents, the British engagement with Buddhism had been deepening for the better part of a century with far-reaching impact throughout Victorian England.

Arguing that Victorian society was both fascinated and unsettled by the various attempts to assimilate Buddhism, the majority of the book explores the eclectic ways in which these attempts took shape. Franklin devotes chapters to examining the steadily growing commentary on Buddhism within popular and intellectual periodicals and books, the emergence of the field of comparative religions with its particular emphasis regarding Buddhism, the rise of Buddhist-inflected new religious movements such as Theosophy, and at the heart of his study, the widespread presence of Buddhist themes within the popular literature of the time.

Just as Buddhist statues were excavated in India under British colonial rule and installed back in museums at home, Franklin shows that Buddhism itself was effectively removed from its Indian context and reconstituted back in England. In such a setting, Rudyard Kipling could recall moments from boyhood spent playing among the Buddhist statuary in the Indian Museum in South Kensington. Yet such moments led to a vexed relationship between Buddhism and society more generally. On the one hand, concepts such as *karma* provided an intriguing sense of personal responsibility in contrast to Calvinistic theories of predestination, and the notion of a moral order associated with the *dharma* provided a reassuring alternative to the randomness of Darwinian selection. Yet the possibility of retrogression through reincarnation to an animal state—or the notion of the lack of an enduring self implied by *anatman*—were disarming, to say the least. As Franklin mentions regarding the concept of *no-self* and reincarnation within the context of Spiritualism, the Victorians weren't afraid of seeing ghosts: "the fear was of *not* seeing ghosts" (53). Unwilling for the most part to let go of cherished notions of an eternal soul, the Victorian assimilation of Buddhism remained necessarily incomplete.

While periodicals aren't the explicit focus of inquiry, neither are they in the background. Readers of *VPR* will be intrigued to see the debates regarding Buddhism carried out within the *Westminster Review*, *Dublin Review*, and *Fraser's Magazine*. Franklin notes a significant increase in articles with "Buddha" or "Buddhism" in their title for every decade

between 1850 and 1900, a period neatly divided by the naming of Queen Victoria as Empress of India in 1876. New periodicals also emerged alongside the rise of hybrid new religions, including the *British Spiritual Telegraph*, *Daybreak*, and *Light*, while others arose concurrently to investigate the claims of those religions, such as the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychological Research*. Meanwhile, Franklin traces the critical reception both of comparative religion scholars and of literary figures through the published reviews of their important works.

Franklin's project is ambitious, yet accomplishes its aims. As a cultural history of the Victorian encounter with Buddhism, as an application of postcolonial theory to examine the hybridity formed by the colonial encounter, and even as an experiment with the possibility of a Buddhist hermeneutics, *The Lotus and the Lion* rewards on many levels.

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Mark Freeman and Gillian Nelson, eds., *Vicarious Vagrants: Incognito Social Explorers and the Homeless in England, 1860–1910* (Lambertville, NJ: True Bill Press, 2008), pp. 327, \$45 cloth.

Mark Freeman and Gillian Nelson have gathered ten essays from different sources that reported on conditions in the temporary housing provided for homeless people—both men and women—during the late Victorian age. The texts represent three distinct periods of concern: 1860s, 1880s, and 1900s. Three of these reports first appeared in periodicals: James Greenwood, “A Night in a Workhouse,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, 12–15 January 1866; F.G. Wallace-Goodbody, “The Tramp’s Haven,” *Gentleman’s Magazine*, January/June 1883; and Mary Higgs (“Viatrix”), *Contemporary Review*, January/June 1904. The other essays were published in books.

The “vicarious vagrant” who provides the title is the reporter who entered the Victorian underworld in disguise to experience and report on the effects of the Poor Law on those it was created to assist. The editors identify three categories of vagrant: those genuinely in search of work, those who moved around in order to satisfy their need for subsistence, and the “sturdy rogue” who avoided work as much or as often as possible. Following Henry Mayhew’s lead, the reporters featured in this collection believed that descriptive sources were at least as good as statistically oriented Blue Book reports. This was so, they argued, because statistics were cold and impersonal, whereas Mayhew-style descriptions made workhouse conditions palpable. And palpable they are. One reads of workhouse residents put to work picking oakum and then spending the night in vermin-infested rooms.