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Bradley Deane, associate professor of English, researches nineteenth century British adventure fiction

Summary: Egyptian mummy queens, lost cities, charging dinosaurs, and sparring pirates—Victorian popular literature reveals the influence of Britain's colonization of exotic lands.

(July 2, 2009) Wooing Egyptian mummy queens, discovering lost cities, fleeing charging dinosaurs, and sparring with pirates. These are the everyday activities of Bradley Deane, associate professor of English at the University of Minnesota, Morris! Well, to be more accurate, these are the adventures Deane reads and studies as preparation for writing his new book, Better Men: British Masculinity and Popular Culture in the Age of the New Imperialism.

Deane, who earned a doctorate from Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, will travel to England in August 2009 to conduct research at the British Library, an extensive national research library much like the Library of Congress in the United States. While in England, Deane will also research photographs and diaries at the National Army Museum, which collects documents of the British military experience prior to World War I.

According to Deane, the pages of Victorian popular literature reveal a struggle to define and revise masculinity in relation to Britain’s growing imperial power, often in ways that showed the influence of the exotic lands Britain had colonized. For example, stories about manly explorers discovering lost cities were published as Britain colonized Africa. The annexation of Egypt was quickly followed by what we would recognize as mummy stories, though the mummies in these tales were often immortal women courted by British men. The popular and influential poems of Rudyard Kipling, such as “The White Man’s Burden,” “Gunga Din,” and “If—”, also expressed new ideals of manliness for an imperial age.

An Imagine Fund Award will support Deane’s research trip to England. The competitive University of Minnesota Imagine Fund Award program, funded in part by a generous McKnight Foundation grant, supports scholarship and artistic endeavors in the arts, design, and humanities. Deane is one of thirteen Morris professors who received the award in the program’s inaugural year.

Specializing in nineteenth-century British literature, Deane incorporates his research into his classroom to incite interest. He enjoys student insights, fresh and unbiased. He enthusiastically recommends She (1887) by Rider Haggard to all readers as an example of adventure fiction from the time period.

Deane, the 2009 recipient of the University of Minnesota, Morris Alumni Association Teaching Award, also serves as director of the honors program.

Photo: Bradley Deane, associate professor of English
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