

Hostos Community College/CUNY
Department of English
500 Grand Concourse
Bronx, NY 10451

March 30, 2022

Dear colleagues and members of the search committee:

I'm writing to apply for the position of Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Hostos Community College. Since 2015, I've taught composition and literature as an Adjunct Assistant Professor at Borough of Manhattan Community College, and I joined City Tech last fall in the same capacity. As a native New Yorker, this city is my permanent home; as a first-generation American of mixed heritage, the mission and culture of CUNY are intimately resonant with my identity and values. Teaching here has been the chief reward of my early career, and I savor the prospect of deeper, fulltime engagement with a diverse student community. Along with two years at New Jersey City University, I've spent six years as an instructor and advisor in the First-Year Writing Program of the Gallatin School of Individualized Study at New York University, where I obtained my PhD from the Department of English in May 2017. My dissertation and book project, "Writing the Sleepless City: Urban Insomnia and the Victorian Literary Imagination," was completed under the supervision of Catherine Robson, Sukhdev Sandhu, Patrick Deer, and James Eli Adams. My research and teaching interests center on British literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but also encompass global urban studies, critical theory, the history of science, and interdisciplinary approaches to writing—especially at the introductory level.

Over the last decade, I've designed classes ranging from first-year composition workshops to advanced modern literature seminars, undergirding my teaching with the same cluster of concerns that informs my research. Through multiple courses on urban literature, taught on site in New York and London, I've stressed engagement with the environment, whether built or natural, as a route to understanding literary practices and history. *Shadow Cities*, a research seminar I conceived for the Gallatin interdisciplinary program and am currently teaching for a seventh time, pairs conventional textual study with literary "fieldwork": experiments in outdoor writing, urban exploration, and genres of report. Similarly, about half of my NYU London course *Writing London* was structured as a series of peregrinations around the metropolis, retracing the steps of characters from works by Dickens, Conan Doyle, and Woolf. Another seminar I designed and recently taught for a sixth time, *Bedtime Writing: The Literature of Sleep*, includes creative exercises in dream critique, the use of literature as a soporific, and the cultivation of altered cognitive states—all intended to probe the conjunction between intimate life and writing.

I have also taught more traditional surveys, such as *Introduction to the Study of Literature*, the comprehensive *British Literature I and II*, *Major Texts in Critical Theory*, and *Victorian*

Literature, which explored issues of gender, race, and empire. These have accompanied courses covering both flanks of my period: Eighteenth-Century British Literature and others grounded in late twentieth- and twenty-first-century material, including thematic studies of film, dystopian literature, and immigration. I'm conversant with a range of digital tools and platforms, and since the spring of 2020 have taught online in both synchronous and asynchronous modalities. During the recent pandemic, I obtained certification through CUNY in online teaching and trauma-informed pedagogy, along with a microcredential in digital instruction from the Association of College and University Educators (ACUE). While completing my master's degree, I taught writing and literacy as a tutor in the America Reads program at Williamsburg Charter High School in Brooklyn. I would be delighted to adapt any of my existing syllabi for Hostos, as well as to develop new courses in the history of technology, literary philosophy, comparative media, and medical humanities.

While teaching remains my principal focus, I also maintain an active research agenda, which, broadly considered, concerns the mediation of attention, especially the relationship between cognitive states and literary production. My current book project tracks the emergence of insomnia as a named cultural problem in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. While the literature of sleep dates from antiquity, the Victorian era saw an unprecedented proliferation of sleep-related complaints, documented both clinically and creatively. Reading across genres—from medical reports and treatises, to journalism, poetry, and fiction—I argue for the development of a specific strain of recognizably modern insomnia, qualitatively literary and urban: at once the occupational hazard of a rising class of intellectual laborers and an increasingly salient correlative of life in the metropolis. But beyond merely thematizing insomnia or naming it as an affliction, Victorians, I claim, came to experience the city and even literature itself as sleepless. The period thus marks the establishment of a still-prevalent tenor not only within urban literature but in urban life *tout court*.

Research from this project has appeared in the journal *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* as “‘Another Night that London Knew’: Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s ‘Jenny’ and the Poetics of Insomnia.” By repositioning Rossetti’s famous poem about a sleeping prostitute alongside contemporary debates on insomnia, I turn the focus away from sex and onto sleep, arguing instead for an erotics of the vigil. Concentrating on stalled labor, bodily and literary, throws into relief a suite of aesthetic preoccupations—what I term a poetics of insomnia—predicated upon the experience of sleeplessness. The article, based on work I developed at the University of California while participating in the Dickens Universe, was republished in a recent collection from Routledge on urban energetics.

I have presented my research at conferences in the United States, Canada, France, Germany, and the UK, including a national meeting of the American Comparative Literature Association at Harvard, where I delivered a paper on Charles Dickens’s literary management of his own insomnia. In “‘Something Else in Me’: Dickens, Sleep, and the Intractable Self,” I suggest that the author not only converts insomnia from a block to a creative engine, but that sleeplessness comes to be self-consciously understood as a figure for the practice of imaginative writing. These interests in writerly will, self-estrangement, and programs of self-mastery are building toward a second book-length project, tentatively titled “Attention Deficit: A History of Distraction and Information Overload,” on the dynamics of literary focus and the production

imperative. This is also the theme of an advanced nineteenth- to twentieth-century colloquium (Victorian Psychologies of Focus) I taught during the spring 2018 semester, which I would be happy to rework at Hostos.

Throughout my academic career, I have remained active in related literary and artistic domains, and have published journalistically and creatively. I wrote a long-running column on digital literature for *Poets & Writers Magazine* and served as editor for several journals, including *Anamesa*, the flagship publication of NYU's interdisciplinary graduate program. I have advised or mentored undergraduate students at three diverse institutions in New York and New Jersey, and have seen many of them win scholarships, go on to graduate study, or publish works first developed in my classes. Each semester, I serve as primary academic advisor for over twenty undergraduates—mostly freshmen in the First-Year Writing Program—and enjoy working closely with students, both in workshop settings and across the longer arcs of their careers.

Finally—and perhaps most importantly—I've been at CUNY long enough to care deeply about its students, and two dozen sections of English composition have only strengthened the sense that this is home. I would be happy to forward a teaching portfolio that offers an overview of my time on our campuses, including faculty observation reports from a broad selection of colleagues. It would be a pleasure to speak with you in more detail or to provide any additional materials. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'A. Versteegh', written in a cursive style.

Adrian Versteegh, PhD