

2000 Conference

Victorian Encounters: Publishers, Editors, and Readers Birbeck, University of London, 20-22 July, 2000

by Robin Taylor Rogers

The 2000 Conference of the Research Society for Victorian Periodicals, held in London on July 20-22, was entitled “Victorian Encounters: Publishers, Editors, and Readers.” It was jointly sponsored by the Faculty of Continuing Education, Birkbeck and the RSVP. Conference attendees were welcomed by RSVP President Julie F. Codell, Arizona State University, and Laurel Brake, Birkbeck, University of London.

A Plenary Lecture, chaired by Robert L. Patten, Rice University, featured Michael Slater, Birkbeck, University of London, reading “From the Illuminated Magazine to Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper: The Editorial Trajectory of Douglas Jerrold.” Following this lecture was “Electronic Resources for Periodical Research in the 21st Century: A Panel,” chaired by Laurel Brake. Julie Carroll-Davis, Chadwyck-Healy, opened this panel with “Digitising our Journal Heritage. Building the Largest Full-text Journal Archive.” Other presenters included Caroline Kimbell, Gale, addressing “The Times Online and Searchable Nineteenth Century Journals: New and Future Projects from Gale,” Brad Scott, Routledge, on “The Digitalized Wellesley Index,” and John North, Waterloo Academic Press, with “The Open Secret of Victorian Periodicals: Micro and Macro Researching Strategies when using The Waterloo Directory of English Newspapers and Periodicals, 1800-1900.” Gowan Dawson, University of Sheffield, closed this panel with a presentation entitled “University of Sheffield Science Periodicals Database.”

An afternoon panel, “Publishers and Editors,” chaired by Anne Humpherys, City University of New York, featured two presenters. Louis James, University of Kent, gave a paper entitled “George Stiff: A ‘shadow on the wall’ in the world of Mid-Victorian Popular Journalism,” in which he argued that George Stiff (1807-1873) was an important editor and proprietor, yet almost nothing is known of him; while Stiff’s London Journal (1845-1912) changed the face of the Victorian illustrated penny periodical and achieved sales approaching half a million, his Bohemian life kept him teetering between wealth and bankruptcy; he was studiously ignored by society; and when he died penniless, even his place of death was misrepresented. Gowan Dawson’s “Stranger than Fiction: Spiritualism, Intertextuality, and W.M. Thackeray’s Editorship of the Cornhill Magazine, 1860-62” proposed that while contributors to the Cornhill Magazine were famously debarred from broaching controversial subjects such as religion, politics, and sex, William Makepeace Thackeray, in his role as editor, actively encouraged the discussion of Spiritualism and pieced together a particular configuration of contributions in which the different implications would move, intertextually, from article to article. The paper also suggested that by viewing Thackeray in terms of a Foucauldian “editor function”

instead of the usual emphasis solely on his role as author, new aspects of this highly canonical Victorian writer are revealed.

The 2000 Michael Wolff Lecture, chaired by Christopher Kent, University of Saskatchewan, and given by Aled Jones, University of Wales, Aberystwyth, was entitled “The Dart and the Darning of the Sylvan Stream: Journalism and Political Culture in the Late Victorian City.” The Dart, a Birmingham satirical weekly (1876-1911), assumed in 1892 a position highly critical of the city’s endorsement of an ambitious water supply scheme. In doing so, it not only located itself in relation to other regional periodicals, but also focused attention on the private vs. the collective in urban culture and on the imperial reach of the Victorian city.

The first session on Friday morning offered a choice of two panels. “Encounters for New Identities (1),” chaired by Maria Frawley, University of Delaware, began with a paper by Patricia O’Hara, Franklin and Marshall College, Pennsylvania, entitled “Knowing Hodge?: Representing the Rural Labourer in the Late-Victorian Periodical Press.” In “Preaching to the Ladies?: Fashion and Feminism in Florence Fenwick-Miller’s Column in the Illustrated London News,” Barbara M. Onslow, University of Reading, argued that Fenwick-Miller’s “Ladies’ Column,” which ran in the London Illustrated News from 1886-1917, was amongst the most ingenious of its genre, combining frivolity with the incisive commentary of a suffragist in its lively chronicling of “Society doings” and fashion. Karen Steele, Texas Christian University, closed this panel with her paper “Editing out Sectarianism?: The Literary and Political Consequences in Ireland’s Shan Van Vocht.” Focusing on a collection of romances, and reading them together with the political projects outlined in the editorials of the Shan Van Vocht, this paper exposed the political, literary, and commercial consequences of the paper’s gendered imperative—one that sought, unsuccessfully, to unify nationalists across region, class, sex, and religion.

The second panel in this session was “Foreign Encounters,” chaired by Cheryl Cassidy, Eastern Michigan University. “Without free speech, man is not free?: The Radical Russian-language Press in Victorian England,” by Helen Williams, Napier University, Edinburgh, focused on one of the earliest Russian-language periodicals published in Victorian Britain: *Kolokol* (The Bell), published between 1857-1868. Its editors succeeded in maintaining a dialogue with a leadership network within the Russian Empire. Williams’ paper examined the nature of the dialogue and looked at some published contributions from those readers. Deborah Logan, Western Kentucky University, followed with a paper entitled “Fighting a War of Words?: Harriet Martineau and Civil War Journalism.” Barbara M. Freeman, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada, concluded the panel with “Mother Britannia, Miss College Girl, and Old Mother Hubbard?: Cartoons and Gender Play in Canadian Victorian Periodicals.” Freeman’s paper explored the origins of gendered images of femaleness, how they manifested themselves in cartoons that appeared in liberal Victorian periodicals in Canada, and the cultural messages they carried. Their depictions of the mother country, the so-called New Woman, and even male politicians drawn as old women, played on these enduring female stereotypes in order to present certain myths about Canada and its relationships with Britain and the United States.

The second session of the morning offered two more panels. The first presentation of the panel entitled “Encounters for Social Change,” chaired by David Roberts, Dartmouth College, was “John Chapman, the Westminster Review and Marriage and Divorce, 1885-1891,” by Sheila Rosenberg, Independent Scholar. This was a study of how selected articles, by well-known writers such as Mona Caird and Eleanor Marx, came to be published in the Westminster Review. It showed the importance of the networks to which they belonged and the commitment and courage of the editor in pushing forward the radical debate. The next paper, “Christian Johnstone and Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine,” was by Alexis Easley, University of Alaska Southeast. The last paper in this panel was Laurel Brake’s “Government by Journalism?: The Silence of the Star.” According to Brake, gender plays a part in the power of the press (1885-90) in ways unacknowledged in 1886. By comparing press coverage of the heterosexual “Maiden Tribute” in 1885 with that of a homosexual brothel in “Cleveland Street” in 1889-90, the limitation of the power of the press emerges clearly, as articulated in the silence of even the radical Star, as well as the PMG and Truth.

The last panel of the morning, “Editors and Literary Contacts: Dangerous Waters,” chaired by Sally Mitchell, Temple University, Philadelphia, began with a paper by Jennifer Phegley, University of Missouri-Kansas City: “William Thackeray, Mary Braddon, and Emily Faithfull: Editors as Healers of the ‘Disease of Reading.’” This paper explored how Thackeray in the Cornhill, Braddon in Belgravia, and Faithfull in the Victoria opposed the common view of women readers as the most susceptible victims of the “disease of reading” by promoting images of women as critical thinkers who could productively engage in the important discussions of the day. Caroline Sumpter, University of Leeds, followed with “I wonder were the fairies socialists? Political Appropriations of the Fairy Tale in the Labour Prophet and Labour Leader.” Examining the fusion of politics and myth in socialist periodicals’ children’s columns, Sumpter’s paper focused on the dialogic nature of this juvenile reading experience. Exploring published fantasy fictions and subsequent child correspondence, it engaged with the ideological re-invention of the fairy tale by Keir Hardie and his politicized juvenile audience. The last paper of the panel, “Community and Authority in Eliza Cook’s Journal,” presented by Johanna M. Smith, University of Texas, discussed double address in Eliza Cook’s Journal. Focusing first on educational/disciplinary authority in articles on sanitary science and on women’s issues, it then speculated on the sexuality of Cook herself and of Eliza Meteyard’s story “Lucy Dean” in order to suggest a lesbian community for the Journal.

“Encountering New Identities (2)” was the topic for the first panel of the afternoon sessions. Chaired by Sheila Rosenberg, this panel began with a paper by James Gregory, University of Southampton, entitled “The Vegetarian Press in Britain, 1847-1901: Editors, Publishers, and Readers.” Gregory’s paper surveyed the British “food reform” periodicals produced from 1847 onwards: their characteristics, locations and readership, and the wider reform context. Supporting material was provided: a listing of serial titles, including “pro-vegetarian” titles, sample contents of the periodicals, and notes on the editors and publishers. In “A Literature of Its Own?: Towards a Morphology of Cheap Reading in the Mid-Victorian Period,” Ian Haywood, Roehampton Institute, London, argued for a “return to the political turn” in our approach to nineteenth-century periodicals. He urged a cautious approach to “post-modern permissiveness” and asked for a renewed attention to class as a primary constituent of reading formations. The emergence of cheap reading in the nineteenth century is a highly politicized narrative with particular “peaks” at moments

of intense mass agitation. Anti-radicals used the discourse of sensation to malign both mass politics and popular reading, but this misrepresents the unique ways in which cheap periodicals performed an accommodation between the high ideals of “popular progress” and the cultural politics of melodrama. According to Haywood, this achievement has been forgotten in the wake of the Victorian repression of Chartism. Andrew King, Birkbeck, University of London, concluded the panel with “Au Bonheur des Dames to The Ladies Paradise: Translating Zola into the British Mass-Market.”

Linda Hughes, Texas Christian University, chaired the panel on “Women Editors and Readers,” which featured papers by Andrew Maunder, University of Hertfordshire, Constance Fulmer, Pepperdine University, California, and Joanne Shattock, University of Leicester. In his paper “‘I might have done better with it’: Helen Mathers, George Bentley and the Burlington Magazine, 1880-81,” Maunder draws on recent work on gender-as-performance as part of a preliminary examination of the career of the popular novelist, Helen Mathers (?1850-1920). Drawing on Mathers’ letters to her publisher George Bentley and Helen Black’s interview with the novelist which appeared in the “Ladies’ Pictorial” in 1891, he suggested that Mathers’ preoccupation with role playing as woman’s real occupation becomes part of the ethos of her own magazine, *The Burlington* (1881-82). Fulmer’s paper was entitled “Women Who Practiced What They Preached: The Victorian Periodical Press as a Pulpit for Advocating Employment for Women.” In the 1870s and 1880s, Edith Simcox cleverly used religious rhetoric in the mainstream periodicals to mitigate the threat of remunerative work for women and also provided jobs and better working conditions for women, as did Barbara Bodichon and Bessie Parkes and their converts Jessie Boucherett and Emily Faithfull two decades earlier. Shattock concluded the panel with “Amateurs or Professionals: Women Journalists and the Higher Journalism.”

“Images and Audience,” a panel chaired by H el ene Roberts, Independent Scholar, began with a paper by Patricia De Montfort, University of Glasgow, entitled “The ‘Atlas’ and the Butterfly: James McNeil Whistler, Edmund Yates and the World.” Mark Turner, University of Surrey, Roehampton, followed with “Cruising the Yellow Book,” and John Plunkett, Birkbeck University of London, concluded the panel with “Visualizing Victoria: Illustrated Journalism and the Monarchy,” which examined the lavish attention given to Queen Victoria by journals such as the *Illustrated London News* and the *Pictorial Times*. It argued that the advent of the illustrated press helped to reinvent the public position of the monarchy.

“Editors and Empire,” one of the last panels of the day, was chaired by J.O. Baylen, Independent Scholar. Dorothy O. Helly, City University of New York, and Helen Callaway, University of Oxford, presented their paper, “Constructing South Africa in the British Press, 1890-92: The *Pall Mall Gazette*, the *Daily Graphic*, and *The Times*.” Exploring three series of letters from South Africa by Edmund Garrett, Lord Randolph Churchill, and Flora Shaw, the authors showed how different segments of the press constructed an overarching imperial and imperialist view of the region’s mineral wealth, African labor problems, and political tensions between progressive Britons and retrograde Boers. Angela Schwer, Fairmont State College, West Virginia, also presented “The Tropes of Missionary Discourse in Early Nineteenth-Century Missionary Periodicals.”

Margaret Beetham, Manchester Metropolitan University, chaired one of the first panels Saturday morning: "Encountering Fiction." Graham Law, Waseda University, Tokyo, presented "Serial Fiction in Newspapers in the 1840s," and Michael Hancher, University of Minnesota, presented "'Stealing Dickens's Child': Parley's Illuminated Library and A Christmas Carol." The last paper of this panel was "Reviewers and Readers: Dickens in the Athenaeum," by Ellen Miller Casey, University of Scranton, in which she argued that the lengthy reviews of Dickens's novels in the weekly Athenaeum reveal the reviewers' sense of his greatness and their esteem for his morality and expansive sympathy. The frequent and extensive comments on Dickens embedded in the reviews of other novelists from 1836 to 1900 reinforce and expand these judgments.

Also offered during the first session Saturday morning was "Encountering Theories," chaired by David Finkelstein, Queen Margaret University College. This panel began with a paper by Robert L. Patten entitled "Reconceiving Time: The Victorian Almanack," followed by Julianne Smith, Pepperdine University, California. Her paper, "'More common gifts, such as we all possess': Margaret Oliphant and Thomas De Quincey in Blackwood's Magazine," addressed the Victorian failure to articulate a coherent masculine rhetoric which opened a rhetorical space where women writers could flourish. The writings of Thomas De Quincey and Margaret Oliphant in Blackwood's Magazine reveal ways in which the perceived endangerment of style or rhetoric brought about by popular print redirected attention away from formal notions of classical rhetoric and opened the way for women writers to be shaped by as well as to reshape Victorian rhetoric. The panel closed with "'Scissors and Paste': Journalism and the Development of Reading Audiences in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain," by Jonathan Topham, Universities of Leeds and Sheffield.

"Encountering Empire" was the topic for another morning panel, this one chaired by Mark Turner. It opened with "The Empire Writes Back: Native Informant Discourse in the Victorian Press," by Julie F. Codell. Colonial theories assume that the "Other" was silenced and "spoken for" by the colonizer. However, after 1840, over 100 articles by 60 authors from British colonies and non-colonies affected by British imperialism through foreign policy were published in 17 British periodicals. Aware of Orientalist discourses, these authorial "native informants" negotiated Orientalist assumptions, constructed a language of resistance, and suggested changes to British imperial administration. Their political rhetoric mediated between their own nationalistic, indigenous subaltern people and the British public, and they argued from Enlightenment principles and a satiric tone that applied to "orientalist" traits to the British. They addressed British readers directly to instigate changes in imperial policies, as well as to educate them about colonial peoples, cultures, and societies. In "Turning Defeat into Victory: Victorian Press Interpretations of Monuments to Gordon," Jerry N. Smith, Arizona State University, dealt with press interpretations of the monuments to Charles Gordon by Royal Academicians Edward Onslow Ford and Hamo Thornycroft. By examining cartoon imagery from Punch, he demonstrated how Ford's placement of Gordon atop a camel became a call for the reclamation of Empire, turning Gordon's actual defeat into a symbolic victory. The panel closed with a paper by Peter Sinnema, University of Alberta,

Edmonton, Canada: “Around the World without a Gaze: Englishness, Empire, and the Press in Jules Verne.”

Barbara Quinn Schmidt, Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, chaired the panel on “Readers Writing Back,” which featured papers by Judith Knelman, University of Western Ontario, Kathleen McCormack, Florida International University, and Thomas J. Tobin, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh. Knelman’s paper, “Marriage on the Agenda,” described several series of letters to the editor of the Daily Telegraph between 1868 and 1898 on changing attitudes to marriage. While it appears that these protracted correspondences were used to fill the paper when Parliament was not in session, they now serve as a record to what ordinary people, especially women, thought about such issues as paid employment for wives and mothers, the standard of living that it was necessary to offer a wife, and the desirability of constant social companionship between husband and wife. McCormack followed with “‘Correspondence’ in the Mid-Victorian Ladies Companion: Editors, Readers, and Scornful Rejections.” The panel concluded with Tobin’s “The Reader as Editor in John Ruskin’s Defense of Pre-Raphaelitism in the Victorian Press,” in which he asserted that John Ruskin, in his defense of Pre-Raphaelitism in the 1851 London Times, was his own editor. Ruskin subsumed his critics, making them part of the process of his thinking, thus changes in Ruskin’s thinking are best seen not in his books, but in the week-to-week fluctuation in his periodical correspondence.

One of the last two panels of the 2000 conference, “Editors and/as Authors,” was chaired by Michael Wolff, University of Massachusetts. It opened with David Finkelstein’s paper entitled “Receipt Acknowledged: Submissions to Blackwood’s Magazine, 1901-1904,” followed by “‘The Healthy Fact of Working for One’s Bread’: George Eliot, Editor and Reviewer,” by Fionnuala Dillane, Trinity College, Dublin. Her paper argued that George Eliot’s own awareness of the market pressures and genre-driven tensions central to mid-nineteenth-century journalism, as demonstrated in her editorial correspondence and in her 1956 article “The Natural History of German Life,” indicates the significant influence of her time as a professional journalist on her life-long writing career. The panel concluded with “The Reality of Authorship: The Influence of Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine on the Brontë Juvenilia,” by Katherine Frank, University of Washington, which used Charlotte and Branwell Brontë’s juvenile writing, modeled after Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine, as a case study for considering the influence of collaboration and collectivity on Victorian authorship. The siblings’ bold and transparent writing, their literary partnership, and the longevity of their project all help to show the role that collaboration plays in the genesis of literary careers.

Michael Harris, Birkbeck, University of London, chaired “Political Encounters,” a panel which opened with “‘Fear of Anarchy’: International Terrorism, The Times and The Princess Casamassima,” by Christine DeVine, University of Wisconsin-Madison. In the 1880s, while frightening its readers with lurid details of bloody assassinations and explosions, The Times placates its readers by suggesting that working-class revolt cannot happen in England. DeVine argued that

Henry James, in *The Princess Casamassima*, contravenes the all-knowing, middle-class voice of *The Times*. “‘Astonishing Secrets Disclosed to the Well-Informed Mind’: The Politics of Charles Knight’s Penny Magazine,” by Paul Thomas Murphy, University of Colorado, Boulder, explored the first (1832) volume of the Penny Magazine to demonstrate the remarkable consistency and depth of the periodical’s liberal ideology, suggesting that that ideology informs articles on subjects as diverse as lobster shells, breadfruit, the Pyramids of Egypt, sugar, and the Thames Tunnel. This panel concluded with the presentation of a paper by Alex Nalbach, University of Michigan, Flint, entitled “‘The Wily Doctor’: Sigmund Englander and the Intrigues of Telegraphic News Gathering, 1850-1900.”

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