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The Victorian Studies Association Newsletter

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NUMBER 22, NOVEMBER 1978

Ontario, Canada

THE VICTORIAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

Number 22, November 1978 Ontario, Canada

Edited for the Victorian Studies Association of Ontario

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EDITORIAL

In its first few years, the Victorian Studies Association Newsletter was directed by joint editors; we are pleased to be reviving a tradition. Regardless of precedent, we suspect it will keep the two of us busy simply replacing the editorial energies of Ann Robson.

News reaching us in response to the annual request for information about activities shows the geographic range as well as the intellectual complex of interests in our membership. As Michael Collie reminded us in his retrospective article last March, the Association was established as a forum for exchange of ideas between people in Ontario, Eastern Canada, and nearby parts of the United States. Moving the editorial office to Guelph further confirms this regional spread. We hope you will all (to quote Browning) "help the Guelfs". Please continue to send us news of conferences, publications, theses completed; and also please submit notes and queries and longer articles.

You will notice a slight change in format - both sides of each page are now used, in the interest of economy. We are also changing the mailing policy, sending to offices rather than homes, where possible, to utilize IUTS.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge here the help given in the past by the Deans of Graduate and Undergraduate Studies at York University, and in the present by the Chairman of our own Department.

Allan Austin

Elizabeth Waterston

FORTHCOMING

Victorian Studies Association of Ontario

The Victorian Studies Association of Ontario will hold its annual conference for 1979 on Saturday, 7 April, at the Glendon College campus of York University.

The 1979 VSA Annual Conference (April 7) will present

James Cameron

"Dickens and the Angels"

Asa Briggs

"Victorian Things"

REPORTS OF CONFERENCES

VSA Annual Conference: Glendon College, 15 April 1978

The Conference followed what has now become established as the traditional pattern: a morning and an afternoon session, each with a paper and subsequent discussion, combined with pauses for refreshment (including the usual excellent Glendon lunch), a business meeting, and a closing entertainment. The papers were given by Dr. E. S. Shaffer of the University of East Anglia and Dr. P. M. H. Mazumdar, Hannah Professor of Medicine at the University of Toronto. The entertainment took the form of a remarkable rendition of excerpts from that great Victorian dramatic work the D.N.B., scintillatingly delivered by Professor J. M. Robson and a cast of thousands.

At the business meeting there was some general discussion of Professor Michael Collie's brief history of the Association, published in the last Newsletter. Members felt that Professor Collie had not only provided an admirable review of the Association's past but made some important suggestions about its possible future, and while there was no strong desire for radical change in the pattern of the Conference and local meetings there was broad support for an increased effort to bring such activities to the attention of other Victorianists in the province and in neighbouring areas.

New officers were elected for 1978-80: President Jane Millgate; Secretary-Treasurer, Judith Grant; Members of the Executive Committee, Maurice Elliott and Trevor Levere. Since the retiring President, Trevor Lloyd, is going on leave, Al Tucker agreed to serve in his place as immediate past President. Elizabeth Waterston and Allan Austin have taken over from Ann Robson as Editors of the Newsletter, and Bill Westfall continues as the third committee member for another year.

The Disraeli Colloquium

Those who initiated, organized, and saw (to its close) the Disraeli Colloquium, held at Queen's University, 22/23 April, have every reason to be pleased. Even the weather smiled upon the venture. The success of this Colloquium may be attributed in part to its overriding concern: the collecting and publication of the letters of Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881). One of the most colourfully extravagant men of Victorian England, Disraeli's startling talents made him as famous a man of letters as he was a politician. The diversity of his genius has contributed much to making the Disraeli Project at Queen's thoroughly interdisciplinary. It is now a project which has attracted scholars from literature, history, economics, philosophy, politics, library, and computer science.

Those fortunate enough to attend this Colloquium, held at the Donald Gordon Conference Centre at Queen's, heard interesting papers from scholars belonging to England, Canada and the United States. The keynote speaker was Lord Blake, Provost of Queen's College, Oxford and author of the well-known life of Disraeli. Lord Blake's approach was a discussion of the "unanswered questions" which still tease Disraeli scholars. Another distinguished Englishman, Sir Robin Mackworth-Young, Keeper of Her Majesty's Archives at Windsor Castle, gave a fascinating account of how in the past much royal archival material has disappeared forever. Dr. H. C. G. Matthew of Oxford University, who is the editor of the Gladstone Diaries, and Dr. J. M. Robson of the University of Toronto were the speakers on the afternoon of the first day. Their papers bore the titles: "Disraeli, Gladstone and the Politics of mid-19th Century Budgets", and "Home Letters and Disraeli". Dr. F. E. L. Priestley, Chairman of the Editorial Board, was the after-dinner speaker. On Sunday Mrs. Barbara North, Curator, Hughenden Manor, High Wycombe, charmed the audience with her account of Hughenden based upon Mrs. Disraeli's household records. In the afternoon Dr. M. Levinson of Computing and Information Science at Queen's led his hearers "Kicking and Screaming into the Twentieth Century". Professor R. O'Kell of the University of Manitoba spoke about themes related to Coningsby, Sybil, and Tancred. Finally Professor John de Bruyn from Lambuth College, Tennessee, discussed the connection between Disraeli and Sir Arthur Helps.

As well as hearing from visiting scholars, those in attendance heard the principal investigators: J. A. W. Gunn, J. P. Matthews, and D. M. Schurman--all from Queen's

University--discuss the project and describe the format that the published letters are to have. Here, as elsewhere, in the Colloquium, audience reaction was lively and significant.

As a scholarly happening, the Disraeli Colloquium should take place perhaps every second year until the Disraeli letters have all been published. Such "speaking together" serves obviously to publicize one of the great literary undertakings of our time in Canada. As well as providing a wider currency for the work of the investigators, such a colloquium encourages discussion of puzzling and confusing issues. Together with the Disraeli Newsletter, such discussion stimulates the critical commentary which a project so richly endowed as this one deserves.

A. M. Ross

NEWS OF MEMBERS

James D. Benson (York) has an article "Romola and the Individuation Process" in the Colby Library Quarterly, 14:2 (1978).

Ted Chamberlain (Toronto) has published Ripe was the Drowsy Hour: The Age of Oscar Wilde (New York: Seabury Press, 1977). He presented a paper, "Scientific Description and Cultural Prescription: A Discussion of some Relationships between Cultural and Scientific Explanation in the late Nineteenth Century," at the NEMLA conference (SUNY, Albany) in March.

Michael Collie (York) read his paper "Love and Crime in the Fiction of George Gissing" at the Victorian Studies Association of Western Canada in Regina in October. His next book, The Alien Art: A Study of the Novels of George Gissing, will be published shortly by Dawsons in England and by Archon in the U.S.

Esther Fisher (Toronto) is working on a doctoral thesis, "Lascelles Abercrombie: His Life and Work" under the supervision of E. W. Domville.

Arlene Golden (SUNY, Buffalo) has been appointed Co-ordinator of Women's Studies for 1978-79. She has published "Edith Wharton's Debt to Meridith in The Mortal Lease" in the Yale University Library Gazette (October, 1978) 100-108. She will present "The Dryad in The Drawing Room: The House of Mirth and Reynold's Mrs. Lloyd," at the Women and Society Symposium at St. Michael's College, March 23-25, 1979, and will chair "Marriage and Literature" at the same symposium.

Professor Golden is currently working on a book considering women as property in Victorian fiction and society.

Judith Skelton Grant (Ryerson) has an article, "Glimpses of J. S. Mill's Views in 1843," in The Mill Newsletter 13:2 (Summer, 1978), 2-7.

Bruce Kinzer (Toronto) has two forthcoming articles: "The Un-Englishness of the Secret Ballot," in Albion; "The Politics of Agitation and the Politics of Cabinet Making: Cobden, the Ballot Society and the Coming of the Ballot," in Canadian Journal of History.

C. T. McIntyre (Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto) has written the introduction for, and is the editor of Sir Herbert Butterfield's Essays on Christianity and History. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

Juliet McMaster (Alberta) presented "Bluebeard at Breakfast: An unpublished Thackeray Manuscript" at the annual meeting of the Victorian Studies Association of Western Canada in Regina. The presentation included a fragment of a blank verse play by Thackeray, in which Rowland McMaster played Bluebeard, and Christopher Gordon-Craig played Bluebeard's friend, Butts. Professor McMaster's monograph has recently appeared in the English Literary Studies monograph series.

Furgal Nolan (Toronto) is writing a two-volume work Mark Pattison at Oxford: A Biography. Volume I, The Early Years 1813-1850 has been completed. Volume II, The Later Years 1850-1854 is in progress. He read "The Literary Imagination in Canada" at the College of Further Education in Randers, Denmark (January, 1978). He has a review in "Letters in Canada", University of Toronto Quarterly (Summer, 1978), and is currently working on a doctoral thesis "A Study of Mark Pattison's Religious Experience 1813-1850" at Oxford.

Paul T. Phillips (St. Francis Xavier), on leave 1978-79, is preparing a comparative study of social Christianity in England and North America. His article "Religion and Society in the Cloth Region of Wiltshire, 1830-1870," is forthcoming in the Journal of Religious History.

Edgar Wright (Laurentian) has an article "Disraeli and Lady Nevill: An Understated Friendship" in the Newsletter Disraeli Project, 3:1, pp. 39-48.

George Wing (Calgary) has recently taken over the editorship of The Victorian Studies Association of Western Canada Newsletter.

ARTICLE

By David Latham (English, York).

"Rossetti vs. Ruskin: The Rhyme and the Reason".

Despite all the attention given to the hyperbolic attacks and defences excited by Dante Rossetti's Poems (1870), the complaint lodged against Rossetti's technical skill remains unchallenged. I address this note as an answer to John Ruskin's charge that Rossetti left his best known dramatic monologue flawed with an improper rhyme.

Ruskin had praised much of Rossetti's early verse but he disappointed Rossetti when he refused to persuade Thackeray to publish "Jenny" in The Cornhill Magazine. Ruskin found the moral character of its persona "anomalous" and "disorderly" but also insisted that "Jenny" did not rhyme with "guinea:"¹

Lazy laughing languid Jenny,
Fond of a kiss and fond of a guinea.
(ll. 1-2)

Ruskin had discussed his opinions privately with Rossetti in 1856. Although fourteen years passed before the poem was finally published (after Rossetti had retrieved it from his wife's coffin), Robert Buchanan's infamous response² was virtually an elaboration of the same two complaints Ruskin had made. Buchanan faults Rossetti for his naughty fleshliness and for his bad rhymes.

In his analysis of the misguided principles responsible for the first fault of the Fleshly School, Buchanan notes that "poetic expression is greater than poetic thought, and by inference that the body is greater than the soul, and sound superior to sense" (889). He goes on to say that while Rossetti demonstrates "extreme self-control, and a careful choice of diction," such qualities are not enough to conceal the fact that "he is just Mr. Rossetti, a fleshly person, with nothing particular to tell us or teach us" (891). Buchanan then smirks at the irony that "the man who is too sensitive to exhibit his pictures, and so modest that it takes him years to make up his mind to publish his poems, parades his private sensations before a coarse public and is gratified by their applause" (891).

Next Buchanan turns to the Fleshly School's sloppy habit of forcing words into bad rhymes. Citing such examples as rhyming "wet" with "haymarket" and "lieth" with "death," Buchanan conceded the "value of bad rhymes used occasionally

to break up the monotony of verse, but the case is hard when such blunders become the rule and not the exception, when writers deliberately lay themselves out to be as archaic and affected as possible" (895).

Algernon Swinburne answers the charge against Rossetti's immorality by explaining that the artist must transcend popular fashion to free himself to explore all areas of human activity: "Neither the work nor the workman is to be judged by the casual preferences of social convention."³ And Buchanan's charge against Rossetti's rhymes does not hold up against Buchanan's own contradictory distinctions. The qualities that Buchanan attributes to Rossetti's poetry--the superiority of sound over sense combined with the careful choice of diction--would seem to deny the danger of a few impure rhymes destroying Rossetti's technical mastery over his material. But Ruskin's complaint about Rossetti's rhyme is not that of a bitter rival but that of a concerned friend and most influential supporter.

If the twentieth century's movement toward a relaxation of social strictures has borne out Swinburne's defence for absolving Rossetti from the charges of indiscriminate fleshliness, we must turn back to the eighteenth century to absolve Rossetti from Ruskin's charge against the bad rhyme. We must return to Dr. Johnson to find a man of letters as street-wise as Rossetti. In "A Short Song of Congratulations," Johnson congratulates a spiritually bankrupt heir who, having finally come of age for his inheritance, expects to lavish his guineas on the whores of the street:

Call the Bettys, Kates, and Jennys
Every name that laughs at Care,
Lavish of your grandsire's guineas,
Show the spirit of an heir.

(ll. 9-12)

I suspect that both Johnson and Rossetti knew of some such slang expression as "a Jenny for a guinea." Buchanan also may have been familiar with the rhyme. Quoting the Jenny/guinea couplet, he admits that these "first two lines are perfect" (894). Ruskin, whose knowledge of women was derived from classical sculpture, would be the last to hear such slang. But he should have known that, in the example of Dr. Johnson, Rossetti had for his rhyme a respectable precedent.

Notes:

1. Oswald Doughty, A Victorian Romantic (London: Frederick Muller, 1949), p. 413.

2. Thomas Maitland (Buchanan's pseudonym), "The Fleshly School of Poetry," Contemporary Review (October 1871). All quotations from this review of Rossetti's Poems are from Victorian Poetry and Poetics, ed Houghton and Stange (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968).
3. Algernon Swinburne, "Under the Microscope", in The Complete Works, ed Gosse and Wise (London: Heinemann, 1925-27, XVI, p. 432.

BOOK REVIEW

By John M. Robson (English, Victoria College)

John R. Reed, Victorian Conventions, Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1975.

Many of us, when young, aspire to know all. A long time ago, a friend of mine elected to read the entire reference collection of the Toronto Public Library: I don't know how far he got, for he disappeared from view, but when he finally emerged, it was as a geographer, so presumably he went a long way. Often our impulse, when older (and now I'm obviously thinking of academics) is to capture and organize at least part of the chaos of fascinating information. A distinguished teacher of mine pointed to his file drawers, saying, "I've got at least two books in there." (He didn't.)

John R. Reed, however, has got at least one book out of his files, which must have been (must still be) bulging. He has read and read, noted and noted, sorted and sorted, and we have his Victorian Conventions as a result. Every user of the book should be thankful, for there is much of fact and judgment from which to learn, and (given the genre) remarkably little of tedium. I say "user of the book" because I suspect (and indeed recommend) that few will read it through; it should be consulted through the chapter headings and index, not least because (as Professor Reed admits) there is a considerable amount of minor repetition. The matters dealt with in the chapters include "Women," "Male Types" (a curious and unexplained discrepancy there), "Marriage," "Coincidence," "Duelling," "Deathbeds," "Swindles," "Madness," "The Return," "The Orphan," "Inheritance," "Disguise" (much the longest and, I think, the best chapter), "Gypsie," "Memory," and "The Occult."

That list should give some sense of the richness of the work--and also of the conceptual and methodological problems that bedevil the scheme. Reed, no Linnaeus, is more taxing than taxonomical. For example, the chapter on the orphan has, as sections, "Dickens' use of the convention", "Variations of the convention," "Deeper meanings", and "Reversing the convention." It's as though, in classifying dogs, one were to categorize types as short-haired, eighteen inches high at the shoulder, filthy, blue-tongued, and answering to the call of "Spot." And this is not the greatest problem, for one is not sure of the largest category of all: Victorian literary conventions, but Reed makes frequent reference to the relations between life and literature, and clearly believes (like all sane people) that distinctive features of the life and guiding ideas of a period will be reflected in the distinctive features of that period's literature. The flaw doesn't lie there (though the title is in that respect misleading): it lies in the author's unwillingness to wrestle with the definition of "convention" and (though he tries a few falls with this twisty opponent) with the specifically "Victorian" manifestations of (what he thinks of as) conventions.

With no desire to be (but a confirmed habit of being) unfair, let me instance the chapter "Women." Of course "women" is not specifically Victorian, literary, or a convention. (A monstrous regiment, yes, but not a convention.) Reed's argument depends on his division of the chapter into "Woman's place," "Woman as saint," "Griselda," "Destructive women," "The Magdalen, or Fallen Woman," "Magdalen redeemed," and "Sentimental type." One is hard-pressed to see the principle of grouping, or of selection. We are told (p. xi) that literary conventions "may involve character types, situations, sequences of actions or mental conditions." Or, in another place (p. 474) that one is dealing with "stylizations of character types, social situations, and, for lack of a better designation, what I may call emotional predilections...." Readers will, of course, bring their own terms, such as theme, thesis, images, patterns, topos, etc., etc., and I don't see that "convention" helps any more than these--at least as it is here expounded. (I should add that there are some interesting, if not fully developed or articulated, ideas about the reasons why certain elements are treated in certain ways.) And, finally, the divisions of "women" could, again obviously, be seen as deriving from other periods--indeed Reed admits that they do so derive (and that they continue to be found in contemporary literature); what he does not adequately show is that the examples he cites characterize the Victorian period.

Nonetheless, I shall be using the book as a "commonplace" guide, and recommend it to others on those terms.

RESUME

This is a resumé of "The Ironic Mode in Biblical Criticism: Samuel Butler's The Fair Haven" presented by E. S. Shaffer at the VSA Annual Conference.

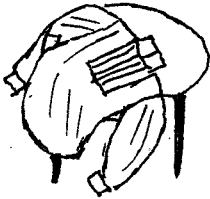
The forms of Samuel Butler's irony derive from the long history of theological polemics, often closely allied with literature, as in Erasmus, Pascal, Bayle and Swift. Irony was of particular importance to those in fear of retribution from the authorities at whom their "clergy-banter" was directed. Butler's power derives in part from his strong sense of the presence of Victorian authorities who required challenging; by then, those authorities were of the scientific establishment as well as of the religious establishment. Butler had at his disposal not only the armoury of traditional controversy and Enlightenment rationalism, but the newer and more subtle ironies of the German higher criticism. In his early pamphlet, The Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ (1865), and more fully and elaborately in The Fair Haven (1873), as well as in the central narrative of the loss of faith in The Way of All Flesh and in Erewhon Revisited (1900) Butler displays his knowledge of the conclusions and methods of the higher criticism, derived through English intermediaries and the popular controversies over Renan. But the higher criticism had not only served to undermine traditional forms of religious belief, it had been turned to the uses of apologetics by the Romantic thinkers who found value in the mythological imagination of the human race. This school of thought flourished in Germany from the early work of J. G. Eichhorn on the myths of Genesis to the full-scale claims to have revealed the myths governing the New Testament as well as the Old in D. F. Strauss's Das Leben Jesu; in England, Coleridge was the foremost representative of this mode of apologetics. Butler's irony is, then, both affected by and used against the newer, Romantic defences of religious belief which flourished in so many forms during the Victorian period. In this light, the complexities of the ironic mode of The Fair Haven, which so many contemporaries, steeped in the new apologetics, took as a straightforward and touching story of the crisis and restoration of faith, can be seen for what Butler by his own profession intended it, a comprehensive attack on all the prevailing modes of shoring up the authority of the religious establishment.

VICTORIANA

The following illustrated page concludes Sara Keith's series on Victorian Costume.

FIN DE SIÈCLE

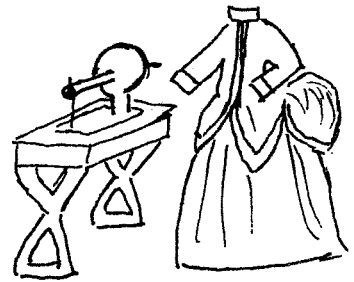
From the Song of the Shirt to the Song of the Shirtwaist



1840

Distressed Needlewoman

The needle woman (1840) carried out mass production by hand for slave wages. The invention of the sewing machine (ca. 1850) enabled housewives to sew elaborately for themselves using patterns in women's magazines. Needlewoman is styleless 19th century, Polonaise dress (1870) has gores skirt with fullness box-pleated center back. Blue plaid polonaise with blue velvet trim has puff supported by gathers along reinforcing tapes.



1870

Sewing Machine

People Can Stick Out As Much As Other People



1859



Crinoline 60's



1867

Child's dress in brown silk with brown embroidered trim, pagoda sleeves, broderie anglaise drawers, has 3 yd. cartridge-pleated skirt over net petticoat which duplicates the effect of crinoline (horsehair) petticoats. Woman's blue striped "crinoline" dress with matching capelet, pagoda sleeves, white undersleeves, has 4 1/2 yd. skirt pleated at the waist over circular wire frame about 45" in diameter.

Walking dress of natural color wool with brown embroidered trim. Skirt buttoned center front is 4 1/2 yds. around the bottom but is gores to fit smoothly around the waist. The gores direct fullness to the back, and the wire frame is consequently egg-shaped.



1869 Bustling 70's



1872

Woman's dark red dress with black fringe trim and apron overskirt trimmed with box-pleated black ribbon has large wire bustle frame under. Child's blue bustle tunic with blue silk tab trim, pleated skirt, and overskirt in points, is supported by the shaping of the tunic pieces.

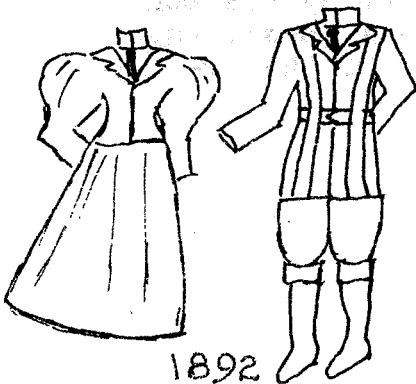


Aesthetic 80's

Toddler's white lace dress with wide collar and pink velvet ribbon trim makes the most of a low-slung sash with big bows. Woman's green velvet cuirasse bodice with tied-back green satin overskirt and black taffeta knife-pleated flounce has no fullness beyond the green velvet pouches in the back.



Jubilee 90's



1892

Woman's mannish shirtwaist suit in natural-color tweed has gigot sleeves and gores skirt with fullness in back. Man's Norfolk jacket and knickers in natural-color tweed, with heavy dark blue knitted socks.

Woman's purple taffeta evening dress with black lace and black velvet trim. The skirt has more gores than the basically similar lady's suit skirt, and is box-pleated at center back. Child's dress, dark green stripe gathered to a yoke and belted. Sleeves are a puff over a coat sleeve. Black stockings.



1894



