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Victorian Studies Association Newsletter



NUMBER 33, SPRING 1984

Ontario, Canada

THE VICTORIAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

Number 33, Spring 1984

Ontario, Canada

Edited for the Victorian Studies Association of Ontario

Editor: Bruce Kinzer, Department of History, McMaster
University, Hamilton, Ontario

Copy-editor: Rea Wilmshurst

Please send submissions to the editor
c/o Mill Project, 27 Birge-Carnegie Library
Victoria College, University of Toronto
Toronto, Ontario M5S 1K7

C O N T E N T S

News of Members	5
Communications	6
"The Women of England": A Review Essay about Recent Books on the History of Victorian Women	8

This issue brings to a close my fourth and final year as editor of the *Newsletter*. A number of institutions and individuals have contributed to its production during this period and I would like to thank them here. They are Allan Austin and the University of Guelph, who looked after the printing and distribution of the *Newsletter* in my first two years; the English office and Printing Department of Victoria College, which performed the same service these last two years; J. M. Robson, who has generously allowed me to make use of the facilities available at the Mill Project; Michael Laine, who has helped me with various matters related to the *Newsletter*; and Rea Wilmshurst, who has served as both typist and copy-editor.

The *Newsletter* now passes into the hands of Patricia Morton, Department of History, Trent University, whose acceptance of the editorship members of the Association will have good reason to appreciate.

NEWS OF MEMBERS

Kristin Brady (University of Western Ontario) will deliver a paper entitled "Hawthorne's Editor/Narrator: The Voice of Indeterminacy" on 30 March at the spring meeting of the North-east MLA in Philadelphia. Her book, *The Short Stories of Thomas Hardy: Tales of Past and Present* (Macmillan and St. Martin's Press, 1982), will appear in a paperback edition in May of this year.

J. B. Conacher was a visiting professor in the Department of History, University of Sydney, in September and October of 1983 and also gave seminar papers at the Australian National University, Canberra, and at Monash University.

Barry M. Gough (History, Wilfrid Laurier) has recently had published his book in the Pacific Maritime Studies Series entitled *Gunboat Frontier: British Maritime Authority and Northwest Coast Indians, 1846-1890* (University of British Columbia Press, 1983). Professor Gough observes that the volume "is on a very Victorian subject: the Royal Navy and law and order in the farthest west."

Paul Phillips (History, St. Francis Xavier) presented a paper on "The Protestant Churches and Urbanization in Nineteenth-Century England and America" to the History Department colloquium at the University of Toronto on 23 January 1984.

John Unrau (York University) informs us that his book, *Ruskin and St. Mark's*, is due to be published this spring by Thames and Hudson (London).

COMMUNICATIONS

Deryck Schreuder, the Association's "man in Australia," reports that a most successful British History conference was held at the University of Adelaide in August of 1983. Deryck's article, "Gladstone by Gladstone," appeared in *The Critical Review*, No. 25 (Winter 1983).

The North American Conference on British Studies will meet at the University of Toronto on Friday-Sunday, 19-21 October 1984. J. S. Morrill of Cambridge University will deliver the keynote address--"England's Wars of Religion, 1637-1662"--and other speakers will address topics covering all periods of British History. For details of programme, registration, and hotel reservations write:

Professor Richard J. Helmstadter
 Department of History
 University of Toronto
 Toronto, Ontario M51 1A1
 Canada

The Eighteen Nineties Society: Call for Membership and Articles

This is a reminder for anyone interested in the late-Victorian period that there exists in London, England, The Eighteen Nineties Society which is involved in organizing public lectures, literary exhibits, the publication of a journal and of a series of books under the heading *The Makers of the Nineties*.

The Society was originally founded in 1963 as the Francis Thompson Society but expanded its field in 1972 to include all figures and movements of the period. The Society puts out a journal (*The Journal of the Eighteen Nineties Society*) annually and welcomes scholarly submissions of biographical, bibliographical, and critical interest. Occasionally there are special issues such as the one on Thomas Hardy in 1978. The journal is sent only to members and is not on sale to the general public.

The Society's other major publishing venture has been its series, *The Makers of the Nineties*, under the general editorship of Dr. G. Krishnamurti, who is also the Society's honorary secretary. Books already issued include a number of *Life and Work* studies: Brocard Sewell's *Olive Custance*, Margaret Maison's *John Oliver Hobbes*, John Adlard's *Owen Seaman*, and Karl Beckson's *Henry Harland*. Others are: *The Chameleon: A Facsimile Edition*, introduced by H. Montgomery Hyde, and Theodore Wratislaw's *Oscar Wilde: A Memoir*, with Introduction and Notes by Karl Beckson and Foreword by Sir John Betjeman. The forthcoming publications include *The Letters of Arthur Symons*; *In Minor Key: Uncollected Stories of George Moore*; *Stephen Phillips: His Life and Work*; *Herbert P. Horne: His Life and Work*; *Makers of the Nineties: A Biographical Dictionary*; and also some further reprints of rare period publications.

Membership applications (£4.00 or \$10.00) and any other correspondence should be sent to Dr. G. Krishnamurti, 97-D Brixton Road, London SW9 6EE.

VICTORIAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

7 April 1984

Glendon College
2275 Bayview Avenue
Toronto

- 9:20 a.m. Senior Common Room: REGISTRATION
Coffee will be available
- 10:15 a.m. Room 204: LECTURE
U. C. Knoepfelmacher (Princeton)
"Gravity-in-Likeness: Lewis Carroll and
George MacDonald on Growth and Death"
- 12:00 noon Senior Common Room: SHERRY
- 12:30 p.m. LUNCH
- 1:30 p.m. A Victorian Entertainment
Presented by the Victorian Cabaret Players
- 2:00 p.m. Senior Common Room: BUSINESS MEETING
- 2:30 p.m. Room 204: LECTURE
Albert Tucker (Glendon-York)
"The Victorian Liberal State and the Problem of
Military Power"
- 4:00 p.m. Senior Common Room: DRINKS

"THE WOMEN OF ENGLAND": A REVIEW ESSAY
 ABOUT RECENT BOOKS ON THE HISTORY OF VICTORIAN WOMEN

Barbara Maas
 History, Ruhr-Universität Bochum,
 West Germany

In international comparison, England is one of the leading countries in the academic field of women's history, second only to the United States. Although women's history is a relatively young field of scholarship, stimulated by the resurgence in the women's movement and by the new interest in social history during the late 1960s, it is already impossible to do full justice to the wealth and range of work on women's history as it has unfolded over the last two decades. The rapid growth of the field is amply illustrated by the development of historical research in one sector only, namely Victorian women.¹ This essay will consider some very recent studies and textbooks about the role and status of Victorian women and the efforts of organized feminism in nineteenth-century England.

At the most basic level, one of the urgent tasks women's historians had to perform was the discovery and subsequent publication of source material relating to women. The researching of women's pasts confronted feminist historians with tremendous difficulties, because the neglect of women's issues in traditional, politically-oriented history had resulted in the loss or obscurity of material on or by women. A consequence of the lack of interest in the lives and activities of the female population in the past was that sources relating to women had not been collected and catalogued. In many instances they remained hidden in family papers. In the case of women's organizations and the women's movement, where documents were plentiful, they had not been deemed important enough for publication. Over the past two decades, however, women's historians have uncovered a wealth of source material, especially on Victorian women, which in recent years has been made available to the student of women's history in a number of publications.

One of the most wide-ranging and ingenious collections of documents on Victorian women is the volume edited by Erna Olafson Hellerstein, Leslie Parker Hume, and Karen Offen, entitled *Victorian Women: A Documentary Account of Women's Lives in Nineteenth-Century England, France and the United States* (Stanford, 1981). In their compilation of documents, the editors have not restricted themselves exclusively to Victorian women in England, but have adopted a cross-cultural, transatlantic, comparative approach, which incorporates evidence on nineteenth-century women in France and the United States as well as English sources. Despite a slight bias towards American documents,² the selection is well balanced and superbly organized into four parts, following the female life cycle: (1) girlhood, (2) the personal life of adult women, (3) adult women and work, and (4) older women. According to the editors, this structure, which deviates from the more traditional approach of fitting women's history into preconceived categories of social change and historical periodization, has been chosen explicitly to confront the reader with the Victorian view that women's destiny was biologically determined. Drawing heavily on unpublished manuscript material, diaries, and female correspondence as well as parliamentary papers, periodicals, advice manuals, plus medical and legal records, the editors enable the reader to explore the relationship between prescriptive role concepts for women on the one hand and women's experiences on the other hand, i.e., between image and reality.

The basic assumption of *Victorian Women* is that England, France, and the United States formed a transatlantic community of culture in the Victorian age and underwent similar social, economic, and political changes. Although such changes as the separation of home and workplace, the decline in fertility, the increasing politicization of women, the professional invasion of the private domestic sphere, and the polarization of sex roles did doubtless occur in all of the three countries mentioned above, there was often a considerable time-lag and the effects on women of different nationalities or classes varied considerably. Despite the editors' stress on a uniform transatlantic culture, many documents in *Victorian Women* point in the opposite direction and illustrate differences in women's experiences and in social attitudes towards women, rather than similarities. A case in point is the shaping of girlhood experiences through religion. Although religion had a primarily disciplinary function for Victorian girls and often was repressive in all three countries,³ the nature of the discipline was far from identical. Because of the difference in religious systems, external authority supervised and formed the conscience of French girls, whereas in England and the United States evangelicalism taught girls to internalize religious norms. Other examples provide further evidence for national peculiarities. Wet nursing, for instance, was far less popular among working women in England than in France; the degree of surveillance of girls differed in the three countries, with American girls enjoying most freedom; women's education was most advanced in America at a time when it had only reached discussion stage in England, while France lagged even further behind; in England and France, domestic servants were usually young unmarried women, whereas in America they were recruited from the black and immigrant section of the female population, regardless of marital status.

Despite some minor incongruities, *Victorian Women* is an excellent documentary collection, which provides the reader with a wide-ranging, magnificently organized body of sources. Its outstanding merits lie in the challenging and stimulating comparative perspective, the provision of a substantial amount of heretofore unpublished archival material, the extensive editorial annotations on events and personalities, and the informative introductions to each part of the book, which help interpret the documents in their historical context.

Published one year later than *Victorian Women*, Janet Horowitz Murray's *Strong-Minded Women and Other Lost Voices from Nineteenth-Century England* (New York, 1982) is yet another volume of documents illustrating aspects of Victorian womanhood. Murray's collection of sources deals with English women exclusively and covers a variety of issues: the debate on the ideal of femininity; the controversy about women's intellectual capacities and the development of female education; attitudes towards women's work; female work experiences; and women in the domestic sphere.

In contrast to Hellerstein et al., Janet Murray makes use of printed sources only, drawing from periodicals, memoirs and autobiographies, published letters, and one or two household manuals. Authors represented include such well-known figures as Isabella Beeton, Sarah Stickney Ellis, John Stuart Mill, Frances Power Cobbe, and Emmeline Pankhurst. Murray does, however, provide some new material, such as newspaper articles and excerpts from the work of Ann Richelieu Lamb, an early Victorian feminist. Another positive aspect of her collection of sources lies in the fact that she includes the voices of literary personalities, ranging from Charlotte

Brontë and Elizabeth Browning to Charles Dickens. It is nonetheless true that many of Murray's sources have been readily accessible for some time and quite a few have been taken from recent reprints, for example Margaret Llewelyn Davies' two volumes of letters from working women.⁴

As far as the structure of the book is concerned, Murray adopts a thematic rather than chronological arrangement of texts. Her volume is divided into five parts (The Womanly Woman, Woman's Sphere, Woman's Mind, Woman's Work, and Unwomanly Women), the organization of which is somewhat confusing and obscured by misleading or vague subtitles. Although *Strong-Minded Women* thus suffers from a number of weaknesses, it does provide some new and useful material for students of Victorian women.

Two other documentary collections on Victorian women have a more limited, specific scope than those discussed above, in that they concern themselves with the development of nineteenth-century feminism. Patricia Hollis' *Women in Public, 1850-1900: Documents of the Victorian Women's Movement* (London, 1979) and Carol Bauer and Laurence Ritt's *Free and Ennobled: Source Readings in the Development of Victorian Feminism* (Oxford, 1979) both focus on women in the public sphere and consequently emulate the priorities of the Victorian women's movement in their selection of topics. Relying on printed primary sources such as autobiographies of well-known feminists, articles from leading periodicals and from the feminist press, programmatic feminist pamphlets and books, advice literature, and parliamentary debates and papers, both volumes indicate the major reform activities of nineteenth-century feminism (from educational reform to Josephine Butler's crusade against the Contagious Diseases Acts) and present feminist perspectives as well as conservative counter-arguments.

Hollis divides her documentary collection into the following topics: images of women, surplus women and emigration, women at work, education, birth control, law, prostitution, public service, and politics, integrating conservative and feminist attitudes into each of these chapters. *Women in Public* not only illustrates the dialectics between conservative prescription and feminist response, feminist claims and conservative reaction, but also documents divisions and divergent standpoints within the women's movement itself. Hollis presents the separatist as well as the egalitarian position within the ranks of feminist educational pioneers, the former aiming at a special education for women, which would prepare them for their domestic future, the latter insisting on equal educational standards and curricula for both sexes. Other issues that created tensions among the feminists were the question of votes for married women and the problem of party affiliation, which ultimately led to a split in the women's suffrage movement.

On the whole, Hollis' *Women in Public* is a well-structured, intelligently composed selection of documents, which enables the reader to explore all the different aspects of the Victorian women's movement. The same holds true for the Bauer and Ritt collection, a volume organized much like Hollis', except for a stronger emphasis on the scientific legitimization of the Victorian ideal of womanhood through biology, medicine, and anthropology. Both volumes represent a most valuable contribution towards understanding nineteenth-century feminism in England.

One of the central concerns of nineteenth-century feminists as well as twentieth-century women's historians has been the education of girls. Particularly in recent years, extensive research has led to an explosive increase in information about the state and development of formal education

for Victorian girls as well as their informal socialization in the home.⁵ The following three books under review explore various aspects of the theme, using different methods and approaches.

In Victorian England the debate on women and education centred around questions which involved basic conceptions about femininity and domesticity. It was not so much a question of whether women should be educated at all, but rather to what extent and purpose. Should girls be educated to make better wives and mothers or should their education prepare them for a career? Was domestic science to be included in their curriculum or should they receive the same education as boys? Were girls suited for elementary school only or should they gain admission to universities? The controversy over girls' education involved fundamental concepts of Victorian society, i.e., ideas about women's nature, sphere, mission, and intellectual capacities. One aspect of the debate, namely the arguments against higher education for women, is the theme of Joan N. Burstyn's study *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood* (London, 1980).

Although Burstyn begins her opening chapter by discussing social changes brought about by industrialization, her book is mainly a study in the history of ideas. After describing middle-class business and family life, bourgeois values and education in general, Burstyn looks at the state of girls' education in early Victorian England and comes to the conclusion that all modes of female education, whether at home under maternal guidance or by governesses, or in private schools, were extremely unsystematic and taught social rather than intellectual skills.

Burstyn's central argument is that Victorian education for girls served as a means of social control and was based on an ideal of womanhood which was designed to protect separate spheres and male supremacy. Three chapters of her book are devoted to a long discussion of the Victorian ideal of womanhood, which confined women, as moral guardians and helpmates of men, to the domestic sphere, where their main tasks consisted of bringing up children, running the household, and providing peace, tranquillity, and comfort for the husband. The majority of Victorians believed that the ideal education for the ideal woman would prepare her for marriage and motherhood and enhance her femininity. Higher education was considered a threat to femininity and a waste, too, because women were believed to have far less creative and analytical power than men. This belief in female intellectual inferiority was legitimized by religion and, during the second half of the nineteenth century, by such scientific disciplines as biology, medicine, and anthropology. Burstyn's strength lies in the sophisticated analysis of medical and religious arguments against higher education for women. According to Burstyn, the medical profession and the clergy formed the vanguard of an opposition movement, which was called forth by feminist reform activities in mid-Victorian England.

Although she argues mainly within the "oppression model," which sees women as victims in history, and points out that medical and religious arguments were developed explicitly in order to prevent women from entering the realm of knowledge and power, i.e., the universities, Burstyn does not carry her analysis one step further and consider the politics of denying women access to higher education. It would be worthwhile to explore the relationship between medical arguments, for instance, and the professional interest of medical men in excluding women from universities and therefore from entrance into the medical profession. Unfortunately, Burstyn shies away from addressing and answering such questions. Given the nature of

her source material, which consists largely of articles in periodicals, this is not surprising, because sources like these would hardly enable her to investigate the above-mentioned issues. However, as a study in the history of ideas her book makes a valuable contribution towards an understanding of the intellectual climate challenged by nineteenth-century feminists, who were themselves a product of it. Although the arguments against higher education for women changed and were flexible to a certain extent, the basic elements of the underlying Victorian ideal of womanhood remained intact until the end of the nineteenth century.

Whereas Burstyn's book focusses on negative attitudes towards women's higher education, Deborah Gorham's study, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (London, 1982), concerns itself with the socialization of Victorian women during adolescence. Gorham addresses the question of how female middle-class infants and adolescents learned gender roles in Victorian England and what effects the prescription of gender roles had on the experiences of individual women.

The study is divided into three parts and commences by placing the Victorian conception of girlhood in the wider context of Victorian ideas about womanhood, domesticity, and the middle-class world view in general. As Gorham sees it, the ideal of femininity was a "modern" psychological concept for enforcing female subordination, a substitute for brute force or biblical arguments. The characteristics which the dogma of femininity ascribed to women were innocence, purity, gentleness, self-sacrifice, and emotionalism, traits which relegated them to the domestic sphere, where they were expected to provide a refuge from the harsh world of business. Girls, Gorham suggests, played a very special role in the idealized concept of the home as well as in the ideal of femininity. Thus, girls could personify some aspects of femininity, for example, purity and innocence, more effectively than adult women. Within the familial context, girls were defined in their relationship to male family members only.

Gorham draws heavily on literary sources such as Victorian poetry and fiction in describing images of girlhood. She succeeds in painting a vivid picture of the Victorian imagination, which saw daughters as moral and emotional uplifters of their financially or morally distressed fathers--the image was that of the "redeeming" daughter--and which idealized the sister-brother relationship as one free of conflict and rivalry, as emotionally intense but without sexual implications. Coexisting with these positive images of girlhood were negative images, which depicted girls as lazy, bad-tempered, disobliging, husband-hunting, and sexually impure creatures. According to Gorham, both images remained constant throughout the nineteenth century, though they were most prominent in the mid-Victorian years.

In the second part of her book, Gorham considers the ways in which the Victorian ideology of femininity and girlhood influenced advice literature on female childhood and puberty. On the basis of an impressive range of medical treatises, advice manuals, children's books, and periodicals, it is cogently argued that during early childhood advice manuals urged middle-class mothers to minimize and soften "natural" sex differences. Gorham offers two explanations for this weak emphasis on sex-role differentiation. She argues that in a pre-Freudian era early childhood was considered of minor importance for the forming of a person's character. Moreover, Victorians were firm believers that sex differences were innate and unshakable anyway. It was during puberty that individuals allegedly developed distinctive sexual characteristics and should consciously learn

how to adopt sex roles. Gorham's account of Victorian advice on female puberty lays particular stress upon professional medical views, which held that menstruation was the central event in female adolescence and caused the psychological manifestations of femininity. With the onset of puberty, described by doctors as a time of crisis, girls' range of activities was severely curtailed. They had to accept male superiority and dependence on men, and learnt the basic skills for their future roles as wives and mothers. This remained the dominant pattern of female adolescence throughout the century, although towards the end of the Victorian period girls gained a somewhat greater measure of independence from the family.

In the third and central part of her book, Gorham analyzes the girlhood experiences of individual Victorian women. Using a collective biographical approach, and dividing her material into the three groups of early, mid- and late-Victorian girlhoods, Gorham looks at a number of diaries, memoirs, and autobiographies by such fairly well-known Victorian women as Florence Nightingale, Frances Mary Buss, Constance Maynard, and Anne Jemima Clough. Unfortunately, the source material Gorham uses for this major part of her study has some severe limitations. Not only is her sample of individuals rather small--it amounts to only fourteen--but her selection is somewhat unrepresentative in that it concentrates on the girlhood experiences of rather outstanding, mostly professional women, who were later engaged in nursing, writing, teaching, or even science. The fact that ordinary, conventional Victorian women are neglected in this analysis is a problem that stems largely from the type of sources Gorham uses, namely published material. She makes use of only a very small amount of unpublished manuscript material, access to which might better illuminate the girlhood experiences of less exceptional Victorian women.

Despite these shortcomings, Gorham's collective biography of Victorian girls gives an intriguing insight into their experiences of adolescence and elucidates the different influences which shaped these experiences. Her research reveals that different modes of education, family circumstances, religious background, individual temperament, and the prescriptive literature all had an impact on the character of adolescent girlhood.

The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal is a brilliant and innovative study which analyzes the interrelation between prescriptive ideas about girlhood, experiences of middle-class female adolescents, and social reality in Victorian England. Gorham's collective biographical approach proves to be fruitful, despite the bias towards outstanding women, and it is to be hoped that the book will stimulate further research in this area.

The last book on the subject of female education in Victorian England under review here is Carol Dyhouse's *Girls Growing Up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (London, 1981), which constitutes one of the most successful attempts to place the concept of femininity within the wider context of female upbringing and education. Dyhouse uses an impressive array of primary sources from the 1860-1920 period, including autobiographies and memoirs, children's literature, prescriptive literature for girls, periodicals and fiction, and reports of Royal Commissions on education and School Inquiry Commissions, in order to reconstruct the socialization of middle- and working-class girls in the family and in school.

Dyhouse finds ample evidence that the family acted as the primary mediator of sex-role stereotypes and initiated girls into femininity. It was within the family that middle-class girls learnt their first lessons in the sexual division of labour by observing adult patterns of behaviour--in most cases, men were the major breadwinners, whereas women stayed at home--and by participating in highly sex-specific activities such as housework, cooking and child-minding. These lessons in femininity and female duties, contends Dyhouse, were later reinforced by formal schooling. Two of the five chapters of *Girls Growing Up* are devoted to a detailed discussion of the various educational provisions for middle- and working-class girls. Dyhouse comes to the conclusion that the majority of schools attended by middle-class girls in the 1860s and 1870s were small, private establishments which cultivated femininity. Even the new high schools and colleges for middle-class girls, which were established later on in the century under the influence of educational reformers, were in many ways conservative and can by no means be described as feminist institutions. The structure and the curricula of the new girls' schools, many of which were sponsored, organized, and controlled by men, reinforced the traditional concept of womanhood instead of liberating women from the constraints of repressive notions of femininity. The same trend occurred in the development of educational provisions for working-class girls, strong pressure being exercised to introduce such subjects as needlework and infant care into elementary schools.

The frequent attempts to feminize the curriculum of girls' schools were backed up by the consensus among medical authorities, biologists, and evolutionary thinkers, who defined adolescent girlhood as a period of stress and crisis during which girls needed special provisions and protection. This definition of female adolescence had important implications for the structuring of girls' schools, implications which feminists tried to counteract. However, later nineteenth-century feminists fought a defensive battle, Dyhouse convincingly argues. Although they challenged biological definitions of femininity and redefined the Victorian concept of womanhood, they did not envisage a radical restructuring of family roles or sex-role stereotypes. Dyhouse refrains from criticizing late-Victorian feminists for their limited visions, which she sees as historically shaped and conditioned. In her assessment of the new girls' schools, she is somewhat more critical, but nevertheless fair and circumspect. Her view is that these new institutions were in many ways conservative and traditional, but at the same time they provided women with a wider space for self-development and gave them access to their peers and to new reference groups. Although they were by no means feminist in outlook, they created an atmosphere in which feminist ideas could be developed and discussed. Moreover, they gave a small group of women the chance to gain academic knowledge and self-confidence, enabling them to question orthodox stereotypes and roles.

Thoroughly researched, brilliantly argued and well balanced, *Girls Growing Up* exemplifies the advances made by historians of women in recent years.

Another book that deserves considerable praise is Barbara Taylor's *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (Toronto, 1983). In a refreshingly personal introduction, Taylor, herself a professed socialist feminist, explains her approach and her terminology as well as her feminist standpoint. She criticizes the socialist movement--past and present--for its strategy and concepts, which lack a utopian,

imaginative vision that includes a transformation of the sexual order, of the cultural and personal life. Barbara Taylor claims that it is present-day socialist feminism that offers this utopian revolutionary potential and carries on the legacy of nineteenth-century Owenism. She challenges the assumption that socialist thought "progressed" steadily from "primitive" utopianism to scientific socialism. As Taylor sees it, this transition was not necessarily progressive. In terms of women's liberation it meant a step back, a narrowing of feminist impulses and a shift away from feminist commitment. In her study, she sets out to analyze the liberating potential of Owenism within an historical context.

The opening chapters of *Eve and the New Jerusalem* delineate the ideological roots and the central concepts of Owenism. Taylor focusses on the contributions of the late eighteenth-century popular democratic tradition, radical egalitarianism, and romanticism, all of which shared the same political fate and fell victim to counter-revolutionary trends and the fear of working-class radicalism. The utopian ideas characteristic of these movements, however, re-emerged in Owenite social theory. Owenism rejected religion, marriage, private property, competition, and selfishness, and favoured communal ownership and the abolition of all forms of oppression, whether racial, sexual, or class. Owenism treated femininity as a social creation, not as a natural fact.

Whereas in her first two chapters Taylor adopts the approach of intellectual history, her next chapter has a biographical outlook and examines the life-stories of some famous early feminist socialists like Anna Wheeler, Fanny Wright, Eliza Macauley, and Frances Morrison. Taylor shows that, despite Owenite sponsorship of meetings of working women in the early 1830s, most of the Owenite women who gained some fame had a lower middle-class background, several coming from wealthy families. She points out that only a small minority of the leading socialist feminists were working-class women. The minority status of working-class women among socialist feminist leaders was paralleled by the minority status of socialist feminist women among the Owenite leadership in general: only a few of the early socialist feminists, i.e., less than a dozen, ever reached positions of power and influence within the movement.

The discrepancy between theory and practice runs like a red thread through Taylor's study. In a chapter entitled "Working Women and the Owenite Economic Offensive, 1828-1834," Taylor demonstrates that during this unique working-class period of Owenism, when working women played a particularly active role in forming unions, the sexual division of labour and power remained unaffected. Women were usually organized into separate lodges with the men's lodges taking the joint leadership initiative. There still existed a widespread hostility among workingmen to female unionism and female work, an attitude the underlying social and economic reasons of which Taylor explores in a case study of tailors and tailoresses.

Proceeding chronologically, Taylor deals next with Owenism in the 1840s, which saw a shift in Owenite strategy towards community experimentation and the dissemination of propaganda on free thought, women's rights, marriage reform, etc. During this phase of cultural reconstruction, the woman's question was revived again by feminist socialists. One strand within socialism at that time was millenarianism, a radical theology or heretical counter-creed, which reinterpreted the Scriptures in a feminist way and constructed a new, mystical image of womanhood. Some of the more bohemian socialist sects had the vision of a female messiah and feminists

like Catherine Barnby proclaimed the gradual elimination of psycho-sexual differences and the ideal of androgyny. Hers is the most explicit critique of the traditional concepts of masculinity and femininity to be found within Owenism.

Mainstream Owenite demands were somewhat less exotic than the above-mentioned sectarian dogmas, but with their endorsement of egalitarian marriages, improved education for women, communalized housework, and social as well as economic independence for women, they possessed a strong utopian potential. In practice, women played an important part in socialist culture, which proclaimed the joint participation of both sexes. Taylor paints a vivid picture of the feminization of Owenite radical culture with its family-oriented recreation programme and its acceptance of women into all Owenite assemblies and branches, most of which guaranteed women the right to vote. However, despite these promising undertakings, the power structure remained male dominated and women were marginalized.

The same holds true for the situation in the communities, which were created to put socialist ideals into practice. Taylor claims that most of the communities failed to meet the expectations of socialist feminists so far as improvements in the position of the female residents were concerned. In a detailed analysis of the longest-lived community, Queenwood in Hampshire, Taylor demonstrates how the idealized Owenite visions of a reduced sexual division of labour and a flexibility of sex and work roles remained largely unrealized in practice. The major innovation that was carried through was the communalization of domestic housework, but it was still done sex-specifically by women only. The exclusive female responsibility for certain tasks, in addition to their work in the fields and in domestic industry, created a double workload and fostered discontent among female communitarians.

In her concluding chapter, Taylor analyzes the factors that brought Owenism to an end in 1845. Its energies became dispersed among several causes, including the women's movement. An important dimension of Owenism, however, namely the vision that linked women's freedom with class emancipation, declined and remained lost for some time.

Barbara Taylor's study is a uniquely valuable contribution to the history of nineteenth-century feminism and socialism. Taylor bases her findings on a broad and varied body of sources, which comprise Owenite works and the radical working-class press, the writings of early feminists, Home Office papers, minute books of socialist organizations, and rules, reports, and proceedings of co-operative associations. A substantial part of her material consists of unpublished primary sources that had not previously been used by researchers. Integrating social history, intellectual history and collective biography, *Eve and the New Jerusalem* is a very important pioneering work on the development of Owenism and its feminist utopian potential.

Another aspect of nineteenth-century feminism, namely organized feminism and reform, is highlighted by Lee Holcombe's book, *Wives and Property: Reform of the Married Women's Property Law in Nineteenth-Century England* (Toronto, 1983). Holcombe traces the progress of feminist reform efforts regarding married women's property from its beginnings in the 1850s until the passing of the Married Women's Property Act in 1882 and places it in the wider context of nineteenth-century legal reform in general.

Holcombe's main thesis is that the victory of feminist reformers in the case of the law relating to married women's property is attributable to

the fact that they were not swimming against the tide, but were part of a larger judicial reform movement which sought to fuse common law and equity. In her opening chapter, Holcombe gives a detailed and informative description of the English legal system in general and proposes to use the Married Women's Property Act as an example of the trend towards legal reform in Victorian England.

After having defined some of the basic notions of English law, the study proceeds as an overview of the historical development of common law and equity in relation to married women's property. Both systems reflected the economic and social realities of women's position in medieval times and became increasingly unsatisfactory thereafter. Whereas common law proved extremely inadequate because of a shift in the types of property from real (which was protected) to personal, the rules of equity had a strong class bias and met the needs of wealthy families only, who settled property on married daughters. Even under equity, however, women were discriminated against in that their contractual and testamentary capacity was severely limited. To abolish these grievances was one of the primary tasks of Victorian feminists.

The main focus of Holcombe's study is on the extra-parliamentary feminist campaign relating to married women's property, on the public and the parliamentary debate about the issue, and on the parliamentary proceedings which led to the Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882. Holcombe argues that the political situation in parliament as well as the attitude of parliamentary leaders were decisive in bringing about reform, an interpretation that is somewhat at variance with her earlier statement that the Married Women's Property Act was the major victory of Victorian feminism. Indeed, Holcombe's focus is clearly not so much on feminism as on parliamentary proceedings and politics. Although she produces lengthy biographical narratives about notable personalities, among them many feminists, who supported the reform of married women's property law, one gains the impression that feminism ultimately played only a marginal role in bringing about the reform. On the whole, Holcombe's book is a thoroughly researched and very scholarly contribution to the field of legal reform in Victorian England, which provides solid information about women's legal status.

The books under review in this essay represent only a few examples in a burgeoning field of scholarship. They illustrate that women's history has become a scholarly discipline which deals with an enormously wide range of topics and makes use of a variety of methods and approaches. The range and quality of much recent work indicates that a major step has been taken towards the realization of the ultimate goal of women's historians, i.e., the rewriting of the history of humankind.

NOTES

¹Of the many important books on Victorian women published in the 1960s and 1970s, the following are of special significance: J.A. and O. Banks, *Feminism and Family Planning in Victorian England* (Liverpool, 1964); M. Vicinus, ed., *Suffer and Be Still* (Bloomington, 1972), and, by the same editor, *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women* (Bloomington, 1977); P. Branca, *Silent Sisterhood: Middle-Class Women in the Victorian Home* (London, 1977); D. Morgan, *Suffragists and Liberals: The Politics of Woman Suffrage in Britain* (Oxford, 1975);

A. McLaren, *Birth Control in Nineteenth-Century England* (London, 1978).

²Of the documents included, fifty-nine are English, sixty-one French, and ninety-three American.

³In some instances, however, religion became an emotional outlet for girls and provided them with a sense of self.

⁴Margaret L. Davies, ed., *Life as We Have Known It* (1931; rpt. London, 1977), and *Maternity: Letters from Working Women* (1915; rpt. London, 1978).

⁵To mention only a few titles: J. Kamm, *Hope Deferred: Girls' Education in English History* (London, 1965); M. Bryant, *The Unexpected Revolution: A Study in the History of the Education of Women and Girls in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1979); and S. Fletcher, *Feminists and Bureaucrats: A Study in the Development of Girls' Education in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1980).