



*The* INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR  
**Victorian  
Women Writers**  
*Newsletter*

## *Director's Cut*

CAROLYN OULTON

*Let's try it without the mad eyes this time.* I bet Braddon's daughter didn't talk to her like this every time she took a photo. Novelist Duarte Figueira has been getting some inspiration from the ICVWW archive, and in my mind I too am 'gazing pensively into the middle distance'. Apparently not.

But the lives of Victorian women writers still resonate in so many ways. 'Worked all morning' and 'corrected proofs afternoon.' Yup. Space of your own? You'd be lucky. Although Katie Baker and Naomi Walker might have some ideas.

The 21st century workplace, eh, one day someone will write a book about it. In the meantime there are some wonderful initiatives like the new Neurodivergent Humanities Network (<https://ndhumanities.com/>) to help us all have better conversations. Or you could try your own 'thought experiment' with Austen and Gaskell. Emma Probett reminds us that long before self-help these authors were showing us 'how to enter - and survive - being out in society.'

Some strategies feel like a good idea at the time, like refusing to pay income tax in the name of feminism. Isobel Sigley tells us how that worked out for novelist Beatrice Harraden.

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A genuinely good idea, Gemma Aldridge assures us, was our Postgraduate Archive Study Day. Thank you Graduate College and Learning and Teaching team for funding the all-important bursaries and comestibles! Our favourite moment (apart from the lemon torte) was when our keynote speaker called it the event she wished she'd gone to as a PhD student. Which was basically the idea.

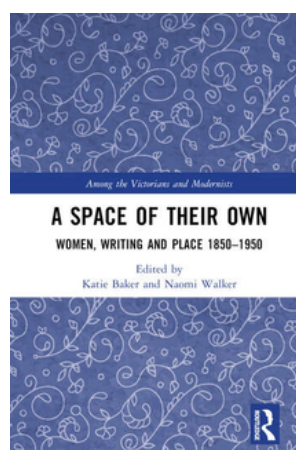
Finally (playing it cool was never our thing) it was incredible being invited to work with the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* on their release of 10 new entries on women authors. Enough to give anyone mad eyes, we think you'll agree.

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## New Releases

### *A Space of Their Own: Women, Writing and Place 1850-1950*, ed. by Katie Baker and Naomi Walker

This collection explores how nineteenth and twentieth-century women writers incorporated the idea of 'place' into their writing. Whether writing from a specific location or focusing upon a particular geographical or imaginary place, women writers working between 1850 and 1950 valued 'a space of their own' in which to work. The period on which this collection focuses straddles two main areas of study, nineteenth century writing and early twentieth century/modernist writing, so it enables discussion of how ideas of space progressed alongside changes in styles of writing. It looks to the many ways women writers explored concepts of space and place and how they expressed these through their writings, for example how they interpreted both urban and rural landscapes and how they presented domestic spaces.



*A Space of Their Own* will be of interest to those studying Victorian literature and modernist works as it covers a period of immense change for women's rights in society. It is also not limited to just one type or definition of 'space'. Therefore, it may also be of interest to academics outside of literature – for example, in gender studies, cultural geography, place writing and digital humanities.

**We want to hear from you! Get in touch with us:**



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@ICVWW

# *Out of the Archives*

## *After Sensation: Discoveries in the Braddon Archives*

DUARTE FIGUEIRA

My now half-written novel set in 1866 Canterbury brings together a left-wing philosopher, a character based on the eponymous but unnamed hero in Andrew Forrester's 1864 novel "The Female Detective" and a 'sensational' woman author of the period. Together the three struggle to solve a series of crimes in the cathedral city.

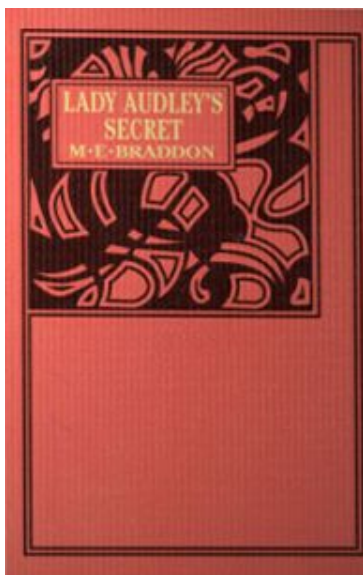
The proximity to my home of the Braddon archive in Canterbury Christ Church University made it inevitable that I would make use of this rich resource to build the last of these characters. I am very grateful to Professor Carolyn Oulton for providing access and to Research Librarian Michelle Crowther for her kind help in guiding me through the collection on each of my visits.

The process of picking through the retained imperfect patchwork of a life is always a mix of inspiring, frustrating, surprising and moving. A lock of hair can jolt you, as can the image of possible guessed-at relatives sitting in a monochrome garden, their gaze a mute challenge for truthful representation. The jerky handwriting in a tender 1894 letter from publisher John Maxwell, Braddon's husband, betrays the decline in his health and foreshadows his death the following year. But what do these objects and papers as a whole tell us about Mary Elizabeth Braddon, her character and what she represented during her long life and career?



*Mary Elizabeth Braddon*  
*by William Powell Frith, 1865*  
*Courtesy of Wikicommons*

At first, there were the frustrations of realising that the archive is but a key adjunct to other sources in the large body of academic and other work about Braddon. Much of the archive dates from later than the period in which my novel is set, when she was already established as the grande dame of the artistic and social circle that met in her fine Lichfield House home, including Robert Browning, Bram Stoker and Whistler. A good portion of it are materials related to her son, the writer William Babbington Maxwell. These include what appears to be a draft for an obituary for his mother, which was extremely useful in framing her journey.



*Lady Audley's Secret  
and Aurora Floyd  
Courtesy of  
Wikicommons*



Her Blackwood's shilling diaries in the 1880s record her social life but not her inner thoughts, but they also reveal a good deal about her working life. It is known that in the 1862-1866 period, when she had her greatest 'sensational' successes with 'Lady Audley's Secret' and 'Aurora Floyd', she produced nine three-volume novels, as well as taking on the editorship of Maxwell's 'Belgravia' magazine. After her 1868 nervous breakdown, possibly precipitated by the overwork she often complained of, the birth of her fourth child and the death of her beloved mother, there was a two year silence.

But the diaries confirm that once her health and energy returned, it never again faltered. The condemnation in the court of public opinion when she and Maxwell finally wed in 1874, which led to many of their staff leaving when they discovered the pair was unmarried, was inconsequential to her journey and appears nowhere in the archive, as one would expect.



What leaps out is the stakhanovite productivity and the commitment of a professional writer in this punishing first age of commercial publishing. The diaries are filled with single entries, such as 'worked all morning', 'finished No. 15' and 'corrected proofs afternoon'. Occasionally, a more significant milestone such as 'Finished Phantom Fortune' (27/7/1883). Yes, she rides, sketches and paints, there are references to dinners and visits, but as her son reveals, this was someone who learnt Shakespeare plays by heart as a girl, taught herself German, Italian and Spanish in later life to be a better writer and knew the 'byways' of history. She was always becoming what she wanted to be, the woman in the picture, writing and gazing pensively into the middle distance.



*Left: Photograph of Mary Braddon  
Above: A small ink sketch by Braddon  
Both images courtesy of  
ICVWW Braddon Archive*

If you have a question or would like to learn more about the Mary Braddon Archives, drop us a message using the email address below!

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If you are working on an archival project featuring Victorian(ish) women writers, we'd love to hear from you! Drop us an email at [ICVWW@canterbury.ac.uk](mailto:ICVWW@canterbury.ac.uk) or get in touch via Twitter or Facebook @ICVWW.

## *Interview with a Guest*

**THIS ISSUE WE SPOKE WITH EMMA PROBETT,  
A POSTGRADUATE RESEARCHER  
AT LEICESTER UNIVERSITY**



### **What are you currently working on?**

I am currently working on a book about the literary connections between Jane Austen and Elizabeth Gaskell's novels against the background of the novel of manners genre. By comparing their works in the context of the novel of manners genre, specifically the literary tradition of writers such as Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and Catherine Gore, amongst many other popular contemporary writers, we can see Austen and Gaskell engaging with the changing boundaries of the world for nineteenth century women. Each of their novels explore a different set of circumstances for the heroine to traverse, making their writings more like a thought experiment, trying to find the balance between freedom and safety, expanding on the previous fictionalised how-to guides of how to enter - and survive - being out in society. Something, I think, which remains relevant today.

### **What drew you towards this project in the first place?**

There are many literary connections between Austen and Gaskell that have been overlooked, in no small part due to their respective reputations, Austen as a writer of romance, and Gaskell as a social reformer. Some of the earliest Victorian reviews of Gaskell's novels make direct comparisons with Austen's writing style, but these have never really risen to the surface of academic research, aside from the many comparisons between *Pride and Prejudice* and *North and South* for centring around the classic enemies-to-lovers trope.

As interesting as these comparisons are, it only scratches the surface. By looking at their novels in the larger literary framework of the novel of manners genre, and specifically the female writers' strand of that large family tree, it provides us with more insight into women's experiences and their thoughts on the boundaries of their own worlds, and the circumstances it took for these boundaries to extend, not only with the privilege of position and money, but the slow-turning shift in perspective where middle-class women could engage in public life.



*Left: Jane Austen,  
depicted by her nephew,  
James Edward Austen-  
Leigh, 1871*

*Right: Austen  
commemoration in  
Westminster Abbey  
Courtesy of Wikicommons*



### **What would your dream research project be?**

I have many dream research projects! Some of which are under way, and some which will need some more time to get off the ground. On the back of finishing my thesis though, my dream project would be working on the 'Gaskell Borrowings' in the Portico Library. While the books have been fully transcribed and there have been some explorations by researchers of what Gaskell might have read from the borrowings - it being the mid-nineteenth century, the entire family borrowed on William's account - it remains an under-utilised source in Gaskell studies. Uncovering more information from the original source, such as doing further listings of the texts that were in the borrowed periodicals - and there were many, the entire family being voracious readers - it would make it much simpler to explore literary, theological, and philosophical links between Elizabeth Gaskell's literary works and the texts that the Gaskell family came into contact with. If, as Alfred Tennyson wrote "I am a part of all that I have met," then writers are a part of all they have read. As a dedicated mother who oversaw her daughters' education, even if it is difficult to pin-point what Gaskell read of this long list, it is not difficult to imagine that what everyone was reading wasn't discussed in the Gaskells' drawing room.

## **Can you tell us a little about the podcasts you co-host, 'All the Year Round' and 'Victorian Leicester'?**

'All the Year Round' is a monthly podcast that I co-host with Dr Hayley Flynn. The title, taken from Charles' Dickens famous periodical, which he in turn took from a manipulated quote of William Shakespeare's, is taken by us in the same vein. The podcast was born from a co-lecture we gave on how Christmas was depicted in periodicals, which I then discussed on a segment for Radio Leicester in December. Every month, we take a seasonal event like Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Halloween, Christmas, New Years, and we talk about how and why these events were celebrated in the nineteenth century. All the Year Round can be found on Spotify, Apple, Amazon Music, and YouTube ([https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL5xB7uirZodvjFovtnr\\_PVRyIVd44eFao](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL5xB7uirZodvjFovtnr_PVRyIVd44eFao)).

Victorian Leicester is a fortnightly podcast that we are deep in the research and development of! Although you may know Leicester predominantly for Richard the III, the King in the Car Park, Leicester has a rich Victorian history. It was one of the most self-sustaining parts of the UK with a foothold in almost every industry imaginable in the mid-nineteenth century which led to a crush of people and a vast mix of different cultures as they came together. Nowadays, the Victorian elements of the city are so ingrained, we pass them daily, and use them daily, but due to alterations or collapse, many of the most important spaces in Victorian Leicester are no longer marked out. Victorian Leicester can be listened to in the comfort of your own home, or as part of a walking tour of the city for locals and tourists alike. You can follow us on Twitter at **@LeicesterPod** and Instagram at **@victorianleicesterpod** for updates on its release.

## **What are your favourite three texts by Victorian women writers and why?**

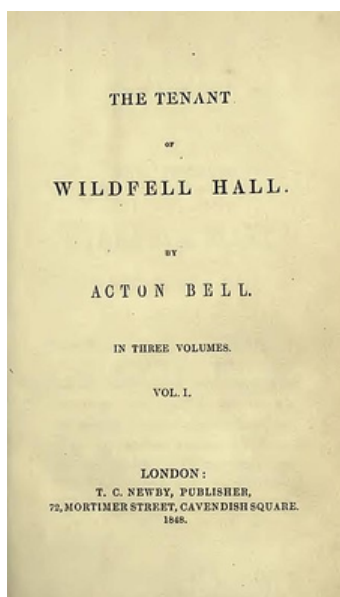
1) *Sylvia's Lovers* (1863) by Elizabeth Gaskell - this novel has everything you could possibly want, a headstrong heroine, loving but ineffectual parents, a petty and introverted community, not one but two doomed romances, press gangs, an execution, a coming of age, and a narrative mystery. It took Gaskell decades to formulate, and it changed its title several times even as she wrote it.



It is one of the richest of her novels that is often under-rated and overlooked as nothing more than a dramatic tragic romance that demands a revisit from modern readers to see the depth of life in the book, and our young heroine.

2. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) by Anne Brontë - although this novel is often unfavourably compared to *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, I find this novel every bit as dramatic. Helen's escape from her husband, her secret life, the death-bed reconciliation is all intriguing, but I love to hear Anne Brontë's voice break through as she stacks reason after reason throughout the novel for reasons not to marry which range from the very sensible to very silly. But even though it can seem quite prescriptive in its didacticism, I like the fact that even at the end with all the wisdom of a 'failed' marriage, there never can be a guarantee of a happy relationship, some of it is faith, and trust, and some of it is improving the rights of women to be able to exit bad relationships!

3) *Mrs Armytage or Female Domination* by Catherine Gore - this is technically a 1836 novel, but it left an impact on Victorian literature which was being discussed around the time of Gaskell's death thirty years later, as one of the most expert pieces of literature of the age. A powerful and overly controlling matriarchy unwittingly becomes the undoing of her family. The novel is a testament to Gore's skill to be able to make such an imposing woman strong, but not monstrous, controlling, but not heartless. It's a unique skill of characterisation that makes the novel an engrossing disaster that you just can't take your eyes off.



Left to right: *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Elizabeth Gaskell, Catherine Gore  
Courtesy of Wikicommons

# *On Women Writers*

## *Introducing Beatrice Harraden*

ISOBEL SIGLEY

I came across a story in Stephanie Forward's collection, *Dreams, Visions and Realities* (2003), when reading for my master's dissertation in 2019. That story was 'A Bird on its Journey' by Beatrice Harraden [1]. It was first published in 1894 and follows a young woman as she arrives at a hotel in Switzerland and begins to tune the piano. The upper-class British patrons of the hotel resent the unpleasant noise that the piano tuning makes, and come to berate the young girl for her conspicuous handling of the instrument, which ruins the refined atmosphere. The story contains an exciting plot twist that ridicules the inauthentic pose of the prejudiced bourgeois guests; without giving too much away, I will say that I found the irony within the story laugh-out-loud funny the first time I read it.

In analysing the tale for my dissertation, however, I was also struck by what the story had to say seriously about working women, femininity, and female emancipation. Harraden seemed to be perceptively critical about the late-nineteenth century women's movement, especially through the inclusion of a hypocritical caricature of the New Woman. As the topic of my research, I was surprised that I had not seen more about this feminist writer and her take on the New Woman in my literature reviews. I suspect many reading this newsletter may not have heard of her before either, so I'm pleased to change that.

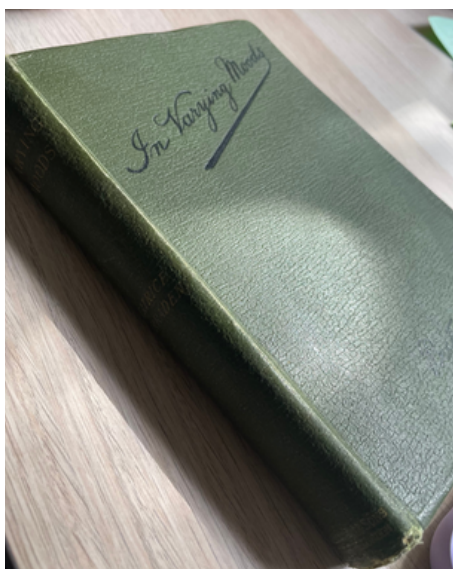


*Beatrice Harraden*  
*Courtesy of Wikicommons*

Harraden was born in London and educated at Queen's and Bedford colleges, where she was awarded a first in the Bachelor of Arts degree in 1884 [2]. In the 1890s, Harraden emerged as the protégé of the controversial writer and journalist Eliza Lynn Linton.

Though Linton's views on female emancipation were largely reactionary, Harraden became a prominent suffragist. Initially reticent to get on board with militancy, she later conceded that it was a 'successful move' when speaking in 1910 [3]. Of her own activism, Harraden once refused to pay income tax in protest against parliament's refusal to grant women suffrage, which led to her belongings being repossessed [4]. Harraden also served as vice-president of the Women Writers' Suffrage League and wrote stories and plays with an explicitly feminist agenda. In a story featured in *Votes for Women*, Harraden follows an anti-suffragist as she attends a meeting where she is quickly converted and stands up – literally – for the cause: 'the Duchess, her face drawn with mental strain, her eyes afire with indignation, her heaty insurgent with the realisation of centuries of accumulated wrong and injustice to her sex, sprang to her feet' to declare that 'the men can't be trusted' [5]. Harraden's deeply involved support for suffrage cements her as an early feminist worthy of recovery alongside the New Women figures and writers like Evelyn Sharp.

Harraden can nonetheless be distinguished from other feminist writers at the turn of the century for several reasons. One of these reasons is that her most famous work, *The Ships that Pass in the Night* (1894) attained astronomical sales figures, with *The Manchester Guardian* reporting upon Harraden's death that the novel was 'extraordinarily successful; edition followed edition until the circulation ran into millions' [6]. This success, largely down to the novel's popularity in the U.S., was unfortunately curtailed by her naïve and premature sale of the copyright to her publishers, which meant Harraden herself saw very little of the novel's revenue [7].



*Images of Harraden's works, courtesy of Isobel Sigley*

The story itself follows the doomed romance of two patients, Bernadine and Robert, in a tuberculosis sanatorium in Switzerland. The content therefore offers another distinction between Harraden and writers like Sarah Grand, whose focus on 'good breeding' in *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) and 'Eugenia' (1893), for example, perpetuates a eugenicist narrative. In contrast, Harraden's story puts two consumptive characters at the centre, sympathetically presented and ostensibly very well received by readers at the fin de siècle, in a manner that therefore challenges prejudices against disability.

It seems then that Harraden was a very determined, humorous, and sensitive activist and writer, whose works were in many ways progressive for their intersectionality and her self-reflective critical thinking: she can mock a New Woman caricature in 'A Bird on its Journey' for hypocrisy and prejudices, she can divert from widespread discourse to place a spotlight on the experiences of disability, and she can carefully review controversial suffragette strategy, all while maintaining sharp feminist principles that would not look out of place in today's climate.

If this brief taster has sparked your interest, check out Alex Tankard's *Tuberculosis and Disabled Identity in Nineteenth Century Literature* (2018) and Margaret D. Stetz's article 'Miss-Taken Identities: The Comedy of Misrecognition in New Woman Short Stories' in *Cahiers Victoriens et Edouardiens* (2022) for more on Harraden's life and literature.



[1] Beatrice Harraden, 'A Bird on its Journey', *Dreams, Visions and Realities*, ed. Stephanie Forward (Birmingham: Birmingham UP, 2003), pp. 143-154.

[2] Fred Hunter, 'Harraden, Beatrice (1864–1936), novelist and suffragist,' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 Sep. 2004.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Beatrice Harraden, 'The Death of the Duchess', *Votes for Women*, 8 November 1912, p. 89.

[6] 'Death of Beatrice Harraden: Novelist and Women's Leader', *The Manchester Guardian*, 7 May 1936, p. 5.

[7] Hunter, 'Harraden, Beatrice', ODNB.



# *ICVWW Study Day 2023*

GEMMA ALDRIGDE

It was a bright and sunny day when I drove the familiar route to Canterbury for the ICVWW Postgraduate study day, the blue sky clear and full of promise. I hadn't been back in over a year and my levels of excitement had me singing along to the radio at top volume. I'd forgotten the thrill of being among academics, discussing books like they're the air you breathe. So being back for an entire day centred on various archives, most of which related to Victorian women writers (my catnip) did not disappoint.

The day included talks by archivists and librarians introducing their collections and the importance that they hold for our sense of self, as well as researchers for whom archives have played an important part in developing their careers. The enthusiasm was contagious and the support for everyone in the room, at whatever stage of interaction with archives, was brilliant to witness.

The keynote speaker, Heidi Kaufman, explained to us in the most hypnotic way how she conducted her own archival research into Maria Pollack and the different ways you can present and explore data using digital technologies. A lively talk from author Anna Mazzola offered an entirely different view of archival research and how it underpins her fiction. And of course one can't forget the notorious lemon torte, the biggest celebrity in the room!



*Photos from the ICVWW Study Day  
Courtesy of Carolyn Oulton*

But for me, the best bit of the day had to be when we got to see the various archives acquired by CCCU library. There is nothing so thrilling for a lover of Victorian women writers than getting up close and personal with everything from a passport possessed by Sarah Grand to the letters of Josephine Butler and the excellent drawings of Elizabeth Gaskell. I am truly grateful to ICVWW for this experience and duly inspired to consider my own research project.

Indeed, the main lesson I learned was that while popular culture would have us believe Victorian women were unlikely to achieve success, this is far from true. As each archive and their author was introduced – Catherine Crowe, Eva Mabel Tenison, Maria Pollack – it became increasingly clear that women writers didn't just survive in the Victorian period but prospered.

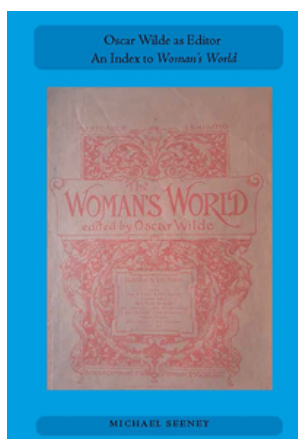
And what better way to end the day than a trip to the Two Sawyers pub, where over drinks and nachos we discussed each other's interests and research, possible topics for investigation and routes into further study. Joined by our keynote speaker and several of the panellists from throughout the day, we were able to talk in more detail about the work they have done and hope still to do. The encouragement and support among the attendees was amazing and reminded me why I love academia so much.

So it was with a mind buzzing with ideas and a full heart that I headed back home in the fading light, the sky still clear and full of promise.

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## Hot off the Press!

### *Oscar Wilde as Editor: An Index to Woman's World*, ed. by Michael Seeney



Oscar Wilde edited *Woman's World* for two years and the magazine lasted for another year after he stepped down. *Oscar Wilde as Editor: An Index to Woman's World* provides for the first time a guide to each issue over all three years. It considers each issue separately, incidentally demonstrating the development of the magazine following Wilde's departure. The book contains extensive notes on contributors and illustrators and is fully indexed.

# Call for Papers and Upcoming Opportunities

- *Gaskell Journal* Graduate Student Essay Prize 2024: This essay competition is open to all graduate students currently registered for a PhD or MA. Entries must offer an original contribution to the field of Gaskell studies, whether to read her work in relation to Victorian social or intellectual contexts, or in the light of critical theory, or to offer a comparative study connecting Gaskell with another author. Essays should be 6000-7000 words, and not under consideration for publication elsewhere. Deadline: 1 February 2024. Please direct any queries to the Editors, Dr Ben Moore: [\*\*B.P.Moore@uva.nl\*\*](mailto:B.P.Moore@uva.nl) and Dr Rebecca Styler: [\*\*rstyler@lincoln.ac.uk\*\*](mailto:rstyler@lincoln.ac.uk).
- (Un)disciplining Within the Nineteenth Century: Historical Hybridity in Self-Reflective Writing by Women (journal article). The Editors welcome essays for this special issue which examine how works of nineteenth-century literature and culture either produced by women (or persons of non-dominant gender identities) or structured around significant female characters engage in self-conscious reflection on and critique of their own impulses. Please send abstracts of 500 words and a CV (2-3 pages) in Word or PDF format to [\*\*shuhitab@gmail.com\*\*](mailto:shuhitab@gmail.com) or [\*\*mmtaylor2@usf.edu\*\*](mailto:mmtaylor2@usf.edu) by 11 June 2023 and mention 'NCGS Abstract Submission' in the subject line of the email.
- Occultism and Popular Culture in Europe: This conference, held at the University of Copenhagen, will explore the many ways that horror, gothic and occultic topics have been communicated, presented, and packaged for broad audiences from the late eighteenth century to today. Those interested in presenting at the event in-person should submit a 200-word abstract and short biographical statement as a single document to Efram Sera-Shriar ([\*\*ess@hum.ku.dk\*\*](mailto:ess@hum.ku.dk)) by 31 August 2023. The conference will also host a series of online events, and the organisers welcome submissions for roundtable discussions, ten-minute flash talks based around an image, film or object, or interview-style conversations between scholars. To be considered, please submit a 200-word abstract and short biographical statement to the above email address.

If you have a CfP or an event that you'd like us to advertise, please get in touch!