



The INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR Victorian Women Writers Newsletter



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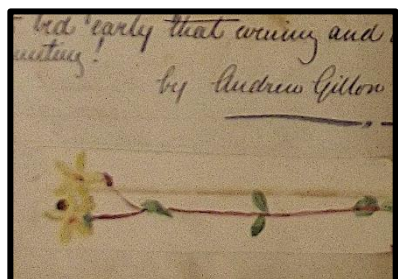
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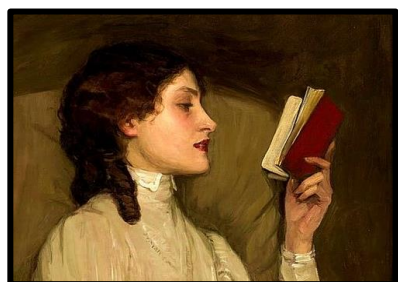
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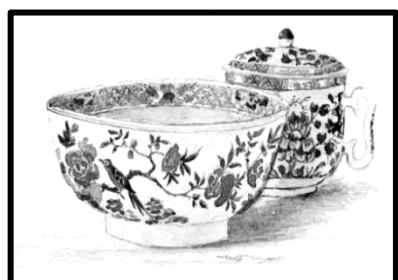
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Welcome ... to the eighth issue of *The ICVWW Newsletter*!

He's a lovely man and I'm about to ruin our friendship. I take a deep breath and say it anyway. "Don't take this personally, but you can never go clothes shopping with me. I don't do that with anyone." There is a stunned silence and then a bewildered voice says, "In what possible context would I want to go clothes shopping with you?"

Ah, gendered behaviour and the hundred ways we are socialised into it ... or not.

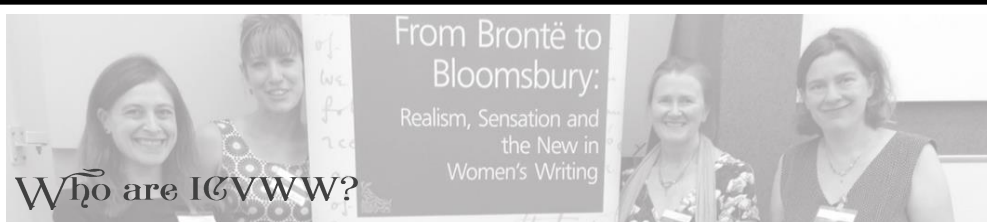
In this issue, ICVWW joins a panel on "fearless writing" to challenge the assumptions that shape our world, from the limits we set ourselves to the way we bond with other people.

Meanwhile, Michelle Crowther finds a letter from Elizabeth Fry glued inside a Victorian memoir (she's a librarian, so that must HURT), and Alyson Hunt decides that maybe we writers are all quite average after all as she shares the results of her "Not Your Average Jo" project. In our guest interview Alexis Easley reminds us that, long before Facebook, women were engaging with new media to write passionately—and yes, fearlessly. Suddenly we want to know more about cross-dressing Eliza Cook, for one. We could meet for coffee once the shopping was safely over.

P.S. This is our last issue with the wonderful Lizzie Sheppard as Format and Design editor, and we're making her put this bit in (because we don't know how to do it). Lizzie, you've helped us tell the world that the past still matters—thank you for everything and here's to your future!



Carolyn Oulton (ICVWW Director)



Who are ICVWW?

Co-founded by Professors Carolyn Oulton and Adrienne Gavin, The International Centre for Victorian Women Writers aims to spearhead new and innovative research in the area of Victorian women's writing, providing an international focus for scholars. We are involved in research projects, and regularly organise conferences, exhibitions, and public lectures in conjunction with our research.



Pedal on to discover more!



What ICVWW Has Been Up To ...

Fearless Writing with Lucy Durneen and Antonella Gambotto-Burke

28 March 2019, Canterbury Christ Church University

What does fearless writing look like? One evening in March ICVWW joined writers Lucy Durneen, Antonella Gambotto-Burke, Sonia Overall and Danny Rhodes to disagree about just that. For the protagonist of Danny's *Fan* the hardest thing is not telling his girlfriend he loves her, but persuading her to say it first. Lucy talked about how hard is to call yourself a poet when you're "meant to be" a fiction writer. Antonella focused on female sexuality, while Sonia talked us through the risks she takes as an experimental poet. ICVWW awards itself one point for Carolyn's 'I may be inappropriate in social situations', written specially for the event and including a line about women in bloomers. It seems we had all been told at some point what it meant to be male, to be female. And somewhere at the back of the room, near the door listening quietly, we might have seen a woman in a corset looking back at us—as if she had seen it all before.



The "Fearless Writing" panel. Photo credit Antonella Gambotto-Burke

Not Your Average Josephine—The Results!

"I'm going to write you a regular volume, for I've got heaps to tell, though I'm not a fine young lady travelling on the continent," writes budding writer Jo March in *Little Women* (1868). Jo's assumption that only "fine young ladies" wrote books got us thinking here at ICVWW. What assumptions do we make about Victorian women writers and if there were an "average" writer, what would she be like? The "Not Your Average Josephine" project was born. We asked one hundred members of the public, with no prior knowledge of Victorian women writers, to answer some very simple questions to find out what sort of images sprung to mind. We had some fabulous answers including "big dresses" and "tea-cosy hair"! We collated these answers to work out what our respondents thought the average Victorian woman writer was like.

To test their responses, we gathered some data from real women writers. With generous assistance from Victorianist scholars around the world, we collected information on around 75 women writers who had featured at the first four ICVWW conferences. A comparison of these two datasets revealed that the public were surprisingly accurate with their assumptions, correctly predicting that most writers were aged in their thirties, unmarried, childless, comfortably-off and middle-class at the time that they wrote their most successful works. Jo's image of a "fine young lady" is more accurate than we'd imagined! You can find the full project report on our [website](http://www.icvww.org.uk).

The data we collected has been gathered into a database on our website, which offers something different to the usual encyclopaedia entries. This is a database that thinks about these writers as real women and considers the lives they led while writing their most famous works. The database gives colour to women only seen (at best) in black and white photographs to show a little of their individual personalities. If you would like to add another writer to our database, or wish to add to any of our entries, then please do drop us an email at icvww@canterbury.ac.uk. We'd love to hear from you!

Out of the Archive

Elizabeth Fry: Reform by Reading

Michelle Crowther, Learning and Research Librarian at Canterbury Christ Church University, discusses the ambitions of Elizabeth Fry—known Victorian philanthropist and reformer—revealed in an exciting donated item ...



In July 1839 the Quaker, Elizabeth Fry, known for her tireless work to improve conditions for female prisoners in Great Britain, visited the military hospital at Barèges in the Haute Pyrenees, obtaining “leave to introduce the New Testament and I hope a library also” (Fry 360). Two hundred religious tracts were distributed, and Fry noted in her journal that the men “appeared much pleased with our visit” (Fry 360).

A letter written after this visit, glued inside a memoir of her life published in 1846 and donated to Canterbury Christ Church University Library by the Maidstone Quakers in 2018, reveals more about how Fry planned to fund the library. In the letter, addressed to François Delessert (1780-1868), Mrs Fry asked her dear friend to send a library to Barèges, as “I know thee to be so excellent a judge of what suits the population of France as in respects books of a religious nature and others.” Elizabeth had met the Parisian banker a year earlier when he arranged “comfortable and commodious apartments” (Fry 277) for her at the Hotel de Castille and his wife Sophie had accompanied Fry on a visit to a school in the city.

The Delessert family were wealthy Protestants who mixed in fashionable and literary circles; in the late eighteenth century, Rousseau had written *Letters on Botany* for François’s sister and in 1802, they were visited by Maria Edgeworth, whose work *Practical Education* was influenced by Rousseau. Maria’s sister Charlotte wrote this account:

Here come tea and cakes, sweetmeats, grapes, cream, and all the goods of life. The lady who was playing at cards now came and sat beside me, amusing me for a long time with a conversation ... M. François repeats some good lines very well. Laughter and merriment (Hill 38).

On a return visit to France eighteen years later, Maria wrote: “François the same ... only with the additional crow’s feet of eighteen years, sobered into a husband and father, the happiest I ever saw in France” (231). No doubt he had a few more wrinkles by the time Fry met him.

Elizabeth Fry, whom Maria Edgeworth described as “that angel woman” (Hill 218) drew on the support of rich patrons both in Britain and abroad. Whether the library at Barèges was established is another question, but the letter provides an interesting insight into her social networks.

Michelle Crowther will be giving a paper entitled “Each doing a little much would be accomplished” Elizabeth Fry and her benefactors: crowd-funding libraries nineteenth-century-style at the John Rylands Library, Manchester on the 22nd June 2019.

Works Cited

Fry, Elizabeth Gurney. *Memoir of the life of Elizabeth Fry, with extracts from her journal and letters*. London: Charles Gilpin, 1847.

Hill, Constance. *Maria Edgeworth and her circle in the days of Buonaparte and Bourbon*. London: John Lane, 1909.

Research and Researchers

Work in Progress

Lois Burke, recent PhD graduate, shares with us the details of her thesis and her future projects ...

Now that I've completed my PhD, I can reflect on what it was actually about. My thesis straddled so many of my research interests, only now am I able to unravel them and observe them from a distance!

My thesis examined the appropriative writing culture of girls during the last four decades of the nineteenth century. This research involved visiting several archives from around the UK. I looked at the manuscript magazine *The Barnacle*, edited by Charlotte Yonge and held at Lady Margaret Hall College, Oxford; the *Evergreen Chain*, held at the Museum of Childhood in Edinburgh; and the juvenile archive of Eglantyne Jebb (co-founder of Save the Children) and her siblings, held at the Women's Library in London. Working closely with collections was the highlight of the PhD research—I also co-curated three exhibitions with the Museum of Childhood during this time. I was fascinated by the ways in which these girl writers were aware of literary tradition and adaptation, and invented their own rules about appropriative authorship. Moreover, in their collaborations the girls maintained a mutual understanding of these guidelines, but had to adapt their approach as girlhood melded into womanhood. This observation marries with sociological insights into collaborative peer culture noted by William Corsaro and Pierre Bourdieu. A journal article on my methodology and some examples of the manuscript magazines I analysed is forthcoming in *Victorian Periodicals Review*.

I re-assessed several New Woman novels featuring the girl writer's plight using a Girls Studies theoretical framework. I compared works including Charlotte Riddell's *A Struggle for Fame* (1883) and George Paston's *A Writer of Books* (1898) with representations of girls' manuscript writing culture by Juliana Ewing in *Six to Sixteen* (1876) and in Charlotte Yonge's *The Disturbing Element, Or, Chronicles of the Bluebell Society* (1878). During my time as a Residential Research Library Fellow in early 2019 at Durham University, I was also able to explore the wonderful collections of nineteenth-century intergenerational parent/child life writing held in Durham's Palace Green and Ushaw College libraries.



I am relishing the different paths that my research has directed me to. I am now looking forward to pursuing a larger post-doctoral project related to Victorian women writers, cultures of life writing, curation, and children's cultures. This summer I will travel to I-CYS (The Institute for Child and Youth Studies) at the University of Lethbridge in Alberta, Canada, for a short writing fellowship. I have two book chapters forthcoming, one on sexuality in the manuscripts of Philip Pullman's Sally Lockhart book series, and one on children's collections and digital humanities methods, co-authored with Dr Kate Simpson. For those who are interested in children's literature and culture in relation to Victorian women writers, do look out for the future work of the [Scottish Early Literature for Children Initiative \(SELICIE\)](#) and the Children's Literature and Science project!

Interview with a Guest

Name: Prof. Alexis Easley

**Title: Professor of English,
University of St Thomas, Minnesota**



What is your current research project?

I am currently at work on a new book, *New Media and the Rise of the Popular Woman Writer, 1820–60*. This study links the rise of the Victorian woman author to the revolution in print that occurred in the early nineteenth century. The invention of steam printing, the elimination of the taxes on print, the extension of rail networks, and the rise in literacy rates produced a robust media ecology that opened up new opportunities for women writers. The emergence of new media formats—the cheap newspaper, the family magazine and the illustrated periodical—provided openings for women to publish short poems, sketches, paragraphs and columns, the kind of brief content that suited the busy modern reader. The practice of reprinting associated with new media formats enabled women to see their work go “viral”—both at home and abroad—as never before. The rise of new media of course also presented new barriers to women’s expression. Various forms of gender-trolling imposed narrow definitions of proper femininity and sidelined mass-media women authors in the emerging canon of British literature. Writers who feature prominently in the study are Felicia Hemans, George Eliot, Charlotte Brontë, Eliza Cook and Frances Browne. Throughout my investigation of their careers I plan to draw connections between Victorian and twenty-first-century new media.

What would be your dream research project?

I would like to write a biography of Eliza Cook. She was a foundational figure in the history of Victorian women’s writing who worked as a poet, journalist, and editor. She cross-dressed, had a much-publicized romantic friendship with an American actress, and founded her own journal. She was a free spirit who loved American slang and had a wonderful sense of humor. It would be a joy to research her life, and publishing a biography would also enable me to reach a broader audience than is possible with scholarly writing. I would also enjoy the challenge of writing an engaging, chronological narrative that does justice to the many cliff-hangers and mysteries in Cook’s life.

Critical sources you can’t live without?

There are four books that I turn to again and again: Margaret Beetham’s *A Magazine of Her Own?*, Kathryn Ledbetter’s *British Victorian Women’s Periodicals*, Richard Altick’s *The English Common Reader*, and Gerry Beegan’s *The Mass Image*. I recently had to replace the Beetham and Altick books because they fell apart from constant use! My current obsessions are Meredith L. McGill’s *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting*, Ellen Gruber Garvey’s *Writing with Scissors*, and Victoria Alfano and Andrew Stauffer’s edited collection *Virtual Victorians*. I admire work that operates at the intersection of gender studies, media history and Victorian literature.

What is your favourite work by a Victorian female writer?

When I read George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* for the first time, it was a revelation. Here was a novel that redefined heroism in radical terms: an idealistic, ambitious heroine, Dorothea Brooke, battles against a cynical, mediocre society. In the end, her kindness and empathy transform the lives of those around her. The novel’s brilliant final line drives its message home: “The effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.” This line led me to reconsider what it means to lead an exemplary life.

If you could have three Victorians round for dinner, who would you have, and why?

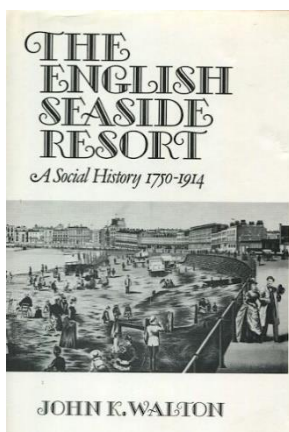
I would have to choose Eliza Cook, George Eliot and Harriet Martineau. These writers have stimulated my writing and imagination for years; I can’t stop writing about them! The more research I do, the more intriguing detail I discover. I would love to ask them about their experiences working in a society that denied them political representation, higher education, and subjected them to constant gender discrimination.

Books We Come Back To ...

Book Recommendations

In this issue, our own Prof Carolyn Oulton gives her critical and fictional book recommendations ...

My research into seaside reading over the last few years has seen me shuttling between public library newspaper databases (you get cut off after an hour, and find all your print jobs have been deleted) and uncatalogued archives (increasingly kept under lock and key after someone in a mackintosh walked out looking bulky).



***The English Seaside Resort: A Social History 1750-1914* (1983)**

John K. Walton

John K. Walton's *The English Seaside Resort: A Social History 1750-1914*, is probably unmatched in its painstaking research and analysis of these archives.

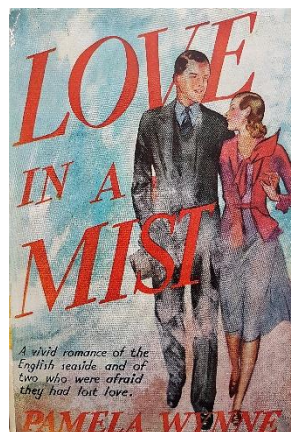
Highlighting a range of practices from nude bathing to cross-class encounters, Walton's pioneering work still has much

to tell us about the power of the seaside to challenge "carefully adopted code[s] of public behaviour, reinforced by the fear of sanctions from neighbours."

***Love in a Mist* (1932)**

Pamela Wynne

Sticking a toe in the twentieth century water (see what I did there?) one of my new favourite novels is Pamela Wynne's *Love in a Mist*, published in 1932 and later reissued by Barbara Cartland's *Library of Love* series.



Set in Margate, the novel focuses on the love triangle between a frustrated female author, her shell-shocked husband and their dishy new lodger. Forget I mentioned Barbara Cartland. This novel is an exciting example of what the "middlebrow" can really do when it tries.



New and Upcoming Publications

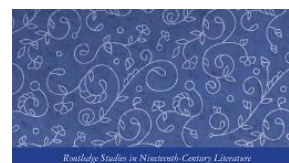
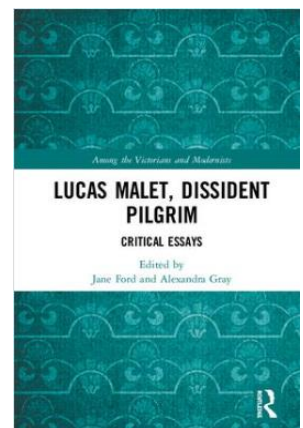
"Lucas Malet, Dissident Pilgrim: Critical Essays"

Jane Ford, Alexandra Gray (Eds)

Popular novelist, female aesthete, Victorian radical and proto-modernist, Lucas Malet (Mary St. Leger Harrison) was one of the most successful writers of her day, yet few of her novels remain in print.

This collection of ten essays asks "who was Lucas Malet?" and how did her "courageous, unique and fascinating" writing vanish from view for so long?

[\(Available from Routledge\)](#)



**GEORGE ELIOT'S MORAL
AESTHETIC
COMPELLING CONTRADICTIONS**

Constance M. Fulmer



**George Eliot's Moral
Aesthetic: Compelling
Contradictions**

Constance M. Fulmer

This volume investigates Eliot's ethical and artistic principles by defining her moral aesthetic as it relates to her self-concept, and by

exploring Eliot's narrative decisions and the various circumstances which prompt those choices.

[\(Available from Routledge\)](#)



Upcoming Events Calendar

May 2019

Fri 17 May	Escaping the Doll's House: Women, the Arts, War and Work 1910-1920	Women's Library, London
Mon 20-Fri 24 May	IES Nineteenth Century Study Week	Institute of English Studies, London
Thurs 30- Fri 31 May	Vernon Lee 2019: An Anniversary Conference	British Institute of Florence, Italy

June 2019

Thurs 6-Sun 9 Jun	Virginia Woolf and Social Injustice International Conference	Mount St. Joseph University, OH, USA
Fri 7 Jun	Industrial Labour & Literary Culture in the Long Nineteenth Century	The Finnish Labour Museum Werstas, Tampere, Finland
Fri 7 Jun	Women & the Family in Ireland, 1550-1950	University of Hertfordshire
Thurs 20 Jun	Navigating the Nineteenth-Century Institution	University of Leicester
Sat 22 Jun	Women in Library and Information History	The John Rylands Library, Manchester
Weds 26 Jun	A Space of their Own: Women, Writing and Place, 1850-1950	University Centre Shrewsbury

July 2019

Tues 2-Weds 3 July	Elizabeth von Arnim - Identities	Université de Toulon, France
Mon 8-Weds 10 July	Mind, Matter(s), Spirit: Forms of Knowledge in Victorian Popular Fiction and Culture	University of Greenwich
Weds 17 July	Victorian Villains and Victims	Centre for Nineteenth Century Studies, University of Hull
Tues 23 July	Narratives of Ageing in the Nineteenth Century	University of Lincoln

September 2019

Fri 6 Sept	Goodness, Truth and Beauty in the Work of John Ruskin and his Contemporaries	Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge
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Call for Papers

Publication/Conference	Theme	Deadline	Information/Contact
Victorians Journal (Winter 2019)	Celebrating significant figures in the long-nineteenth century, 1819-1919	01/07/2019	7500-9000 words. Queries to: deborah.logan@wku.edu
Victorians Journal (2020 Special)	Ann Brontë Bicentenary	01/03/2020	7500-9000 words. Queries/subs to: deborah.logan@wku.edu
Romance, Revolution & Reform Journal	Call for reviewers (enthusiastic academics and postgraduates working on long-nineteenth century)	n/a	Contact Katie Holdway at: rrr@soton.ac.uk

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