



# The INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR Victorian Women Writers Newsletter

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## Welcome ... to the sixth issue of *The ICVWW Newsletter*!

"You're very protective of him."  
Even by email the tone is insinuating.  
"We're old friends," I snap defensively.

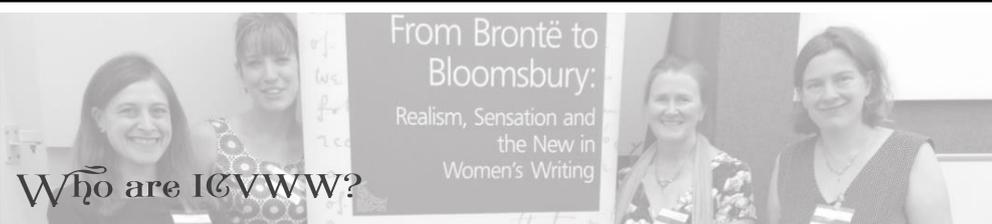
Is it normal to discuss long-dead writers in quite this way? Absurd question. Which is how this issue is able to celebrate two years of the ICVWW newsletter and the five years of our Brontë to Bloomsbury project!



Carolyn Oulton (Director of ICVWW)

Alyson Hunt reports on the final conference with our modernist colleagues and a pair of Charleston dancers. CCCU PhD graduate Pat Argar reflects on her ongoing relationship with 20C author Sheila Kaye-Smith, as (not at all confusingly) we publish the first volume of essays on women's writing of the 1840s-50s. In "books we come back to" Ian Higgins talks forgotten voices and why there's never a dull moment being bored. For more on this theme, keep an eye on the Being Human [website](#) for "Canterbury Tales: from the City to the Sea," coming up in November.

Meanwhile, in our latest guest interview, Talia Schaffer fills us in on her current research on the ethics of care, and why she doesn't care if Emily Brontë won't talk to her. Nonetheless to avoid an awkward silence we invite Mary Cholmondeley—please note, all featured crushes are in fact on women authors—out of the archive to talk about writing, gender and politics. Some of her responses may make us wince, but as another young woman said to me recently, "we don't necessarily have to like everything about our friends. If we love them sometimes we can live with the rest."



## 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 ...

### ICVWW Brontë to Bloomsbury Fifth International Conference

#### Reassessing Women's Writing of the 1920s-1930s

16-17 July 2018, Canterbury Christ Church University

The final conference in the Brontë to Bloomsbury project saw ICVWW enter the mildly disconcerting realm of the Modernists (or, as our first keynote speaker Faye Hammill pointed out, the domain of the Edwardianists, early twentieth centuryists, or long nineteenth centuryists, depending on one's nominal preference). The confusion demonstrated the sense in which Victorianism and "what came after" are so often segregated in scholarly discussion, a division which the conference set out to overcome in order to consider the role of Victorian women writers in a much broader context.

Delegates explored a huge variety of writers, some of whom were born Victorians and exhibited those conventional tendencies, and some who embraced the spirit of change and fought against those earlier literary ancestors. Poetry, novels, journalism, children's fiction, short stories, crime fiction, comedy, supernatural stories, memoirs of war, biography and autobiography; almost every conceivable genre and sub-genre appeared in the 1920s and 30s, and delegates flew in from far and wide to share their knowledge and enthusiasm.

The evening of the first day saw the customary wine reception complete with surprise entertainment, provided this year by twin Charleston dancers resplendent in glitzy costumes. The girls showed off their moves and explained how ground-breaking the dance had been in the way that it allowed women to freely move their bodies. It also signified the influence of cross-Atlantic entertainment and the crossover between theatrical performance and early films, creating a cultural sensation which swept across the masses, despite the rather risqué movements.

Of course, the 20s and 30s were not all swivelling hips and changes for the better, with great social rifts generated by the Great War, women's fight for suffrage, political struggles and financial crashes. Writers like Mary Borden and Shelia Kaye-Smith offered very different experiences of war, while Stella Gibbons and Agatha Christie ignored these pivotal events almost entirely, generating much debate amongst conference-goers about the role women writers played in simultaneously stimulating and entertaining the reading public. Though the historical backdrop may have been more tumultuous than ever before, the final conference featured women writers as heroic, talented, innovative and enjoyable as those of the previous decades, as well as a wonderfully generous scholarly community willing and eager to share their wisdom.



## Out of the Archive

### Date with a Diarist: Interviewing Mary Cholmondeley

Mary Cholmondeley (1859-1925) was the author of *Red Pottage*, one of the best-selling novels of 1899. While she was notoriously reticent in person, her diaries give a candid account of what it was like to be a woman author at the fin de siècle.

Interview by her biographer and shameless groupie, Prof Carolyn Oulton.



Cholmondeley as a young woman

#### **Authorship is a notoriously precarious career choice. Worth it or not?**

"If God set before me two lives, one gifted with perfect health, and a slow conventional mind, and the other—the life I have now, a failure in nearly all directions owing to ill health and long periods of pain, disappointment, renunciation, but having this one decided talent permeating it—if God set these two lives before me, health and a conventional mind. Ill health and pain and a talent. Which should I choose? I am only just up after illness. Nevertheless I should not hesitate one second. I should answer instantly the only possible answer. Ill health and talent."

(7 November 1897)

#### **If you hadn't become a writer, what might you have done instead?**

'I think it must be a bad thing to dream and build castles in the air as I have been doing lately, dreaming that I am a great painter, that beautiful forms rise on the parchment at my will, and fame smiles on me and beckons me on. ... I still cling to my bright castle in the air, which always fades when I look straight at it.' (5 September 1875)

#### **You grew up in an isolated Shropshire village before moving to London in 1896. Town or country?**

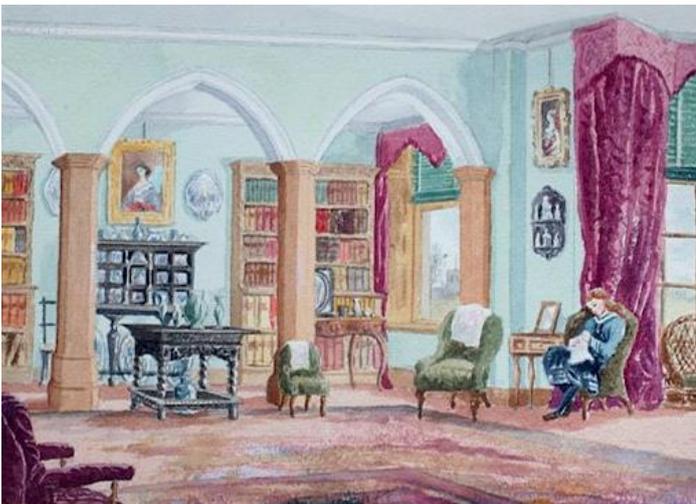
"I came home feeling myself quite a distinguished personage, so much had I been complimented on "Diana" [*Tempest*], but at Hodnet I soon forgot it. I always find my own county where no one attaches the least value to what I write, has a very wholesome effect on me if I am inclined to be vain, as I always am after living in London." (19 July 1896)

#### **Which Victorian authors most inspire you?**

"... no one except Ralph Waldo Emerson has influenced me as much as George Eliot. In spite of her height above me, her power over me draws me near to her." (2 April 1899)

#### **Do you feel a natural bond with all women authors?**

"I went to tea with Mrs Humphry Ward who gave me the impression of great intellectual power, but little humour. She was kind, but I did not feel quite at ease with her." (19 July 1896)



Drawing room of Hodnet Rectory by Cholmondeley

"Why should literary women be so unattractive, and surely if one can be nothing else one can look clean ... I think it is rather petty of me to notice these things. Perhaps it is because I rebel against the obvious connection between dowdiness and literature."

(21 June 1898)

#### **Any political predictions you'd like to reconsider?**

"Mr Winston Churchill took me in to dinner and I found him brilliant, almost too brilliant. He expressed himself with such ease and such power over language that one felt his very facility would be against him later on. In appearance he is a little underbred looking clear complexioned youth ... He appeared to me a very able man, but not a first class one." (1 March 1901)



# Research and Researchers

## Work in Progress

*Dr Pat Argar reflects on the adventure of completing a thesis on Sussex-born novelist Sheila Kaye-Smith and the on-going journey of keeping her work alive for future readers ...*

The topic of my PhD was in no doubt for me—I had always wanted to know more about the novelist Sheila Kaye-Smith.

Her novels, including *The Tramping Methodist* (1908), *Sussex Gorse* (1916) and *The End of the House of Alard* (1923), fall into the category of middlebrow writing, and are almost all based around the exploration of rural life in Sussex and Kent in the first half of the twentieth century. For me they are truly special; I have lived in Kaye-Smith country all my life and recognise her characters in those who were and are near and dear to me.

The adventure that was my PhD study was harder work than I had ever envisaged it might be. It was only my passion for Kaye-Smith's work and the constant encouragement from those around me that saw me through. I can still only just believe I wrote nearly a hundred thousand words on the fiction of Kaye-Smith. Once the study was finished, the award ceremony was over, and I was able to call myself Dr, I turned to the next stage of my journey.

I tried, to be honest not too diligently, to see if anyone was interested in publishing material on Kaye-Smith. I got over excited when a publisher showed some interest and was hugely deflated when she changed her mind.

Undeterred, I didn't want Kaye-Smith's fiction to disappear again into the past.

I therefore decided to write a blog, in which I would publish a series of articles on her novels. I am about half way through I think, including articles on topics such as, "Like a picnic on the edge of an abyss"—Sheila Kaye-Smith's First World War novels," and a recent paper that I gave on Kaye-Smith's 1923 novel *The End of the House of Alard*. I have had some great responses from my readers so far.

The blog has also expanded to include other areas of interest for me. I discovered Kaye-Smith's poetry again and set myself the task of writing one poem for each month of 2018. Like my thesis, this has been something of a challenge!

Please feel free to have a look at my blog, The Rural Writer, at:

<https://theruralwriterblog.wordpress.com/>



*Kaye-Smith in her thirties (1922)*

Please also get in touch with me, either by posting any comments on the blog, on social media through my twitter handle @theruralwriter, or via email to theruralwriter@outlook.com—a writer always needs readers!

## Interview with a Guest

Name: Talia Schaffer

Title: Professor of English, Queens  
College, CUNY and Graduate Center, CUNY



### What is your current research project?

I'm interested in communities of care in Victorian fiction. We tend to outsource caregiving to institutions today—but Victorian subjects experienced care at home. Meanwhile, the philosophers who theorize care don't necessarily register this huge group of test cases in the Victorian novel, in which various forms of caregiving get tried out, tested, and assessed. So I'm trying to make these two fields speak to each other.

### What would be your dream research project?

The one I'm doing! Whichever one I'm doing is always the one I most want to do! I actually started this project mainly because I felt that people were really hungry for new disability-studies theories. The book I *meant* to write next, however, is a study of feminist criticism in Victorian studies from the 1970s on. I'm interested in how a feminist campaign predicated on recovering lost writers can work in an era of digitisation.

### Critical sources you can't live without?

This is hard because my work has ranged quite widely and for each project, there are different works I can't live without. My first two monographs were on material culture, and Elaine Freedgood's *The Ideas in Things* is just stunning. My marriage-plot book relied a lot on Ruth Perry's incisive *Novel Relations*. But one through-line has always been Nancy Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, a book that says so much that is so vital. I have been arguing with it for 30 years, and for 30 years I have been going back to it and finding new riches in it. It manages to be both perennially infuriating and fathomlessly important. I joke that I should have entitled my most recent book "Nondisire and domestic fiction," although I went with *Romance's Rival* in the end. Other books I can't stop myself from going back to are Sedgwick's *Between Men* and *The Epistemology of the Closet* and Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*, which just proves that you should be careful what you read in graduate school, because it will stay with you for life.

### What is your favourite work by a Victorian female writer?

I can't name just one. *Jane Eyre*, obviously; I reread and teach it every year, and it just gets more moving, more important, more powerful. It is in many ways the central novel of the nineteenth century for me. But there's something immensely comforting about Charlotte Yonge's family chronicles, including *The Daisy Chain*, *The Pillars of the House*, *The Magnum Bonum*, and others. And because I was one of the first modern critics to encounter Lucas Malet's (Mary St Leger Kingsley Harrison's) *The History of Sir Richard Calmady*, I feel a certain pride that sets it apart. It really is a masterpiece, an extraordinary psychological study and a crucial disability-studies text, up there with *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* or *Frankenstein*. Does Jane Austen count? She's not precisely Victorian, but I adore every one of her works, including the *Juvenilia*. One of the great pleasures of my life is teaching a Jane Austen course, where I get to reread all of them every year.

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

Well, my immediate thought was: "I'd invite Lucas Malet and ask her all the things I'm dying to know!" But it might not be a fun dinner party for her to have this intense stranger interrogating her about exactly why her marriage broke up. So maybe I'd invite Malet, but also Oscar Wilde and Henry James, so that the dinner conversation would be witty and sparkly—and then I'd ask her to help me clean up, corner her in the kitchen, and demand that she tell me about her love life. I could invite the three Brontë sisters, but I don't think they'd talk much, and they probably wouldn't like my food, though no doubt that situation would be salutary for me. I'd rather be ignored by Emily Brontë than talked to by almost anyone else.

# Books We Come Back To ...

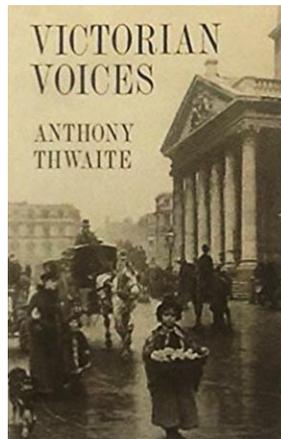
## Book Recommendations

*In this issue, Dr Ian Higgins of CCCU gives his critical and fictional book recommendations ...*

### **Victorian Voices (1980)**

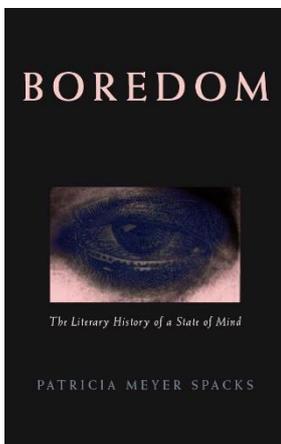
Anthony Thwaite

Thwaite's collection is a fantastic literary experiment in which he takes a typically Victorian poetic form (the dramatic monologue, pioneered by Tennyson and Browning) and uses it to explore marginal and forgotten voices of the nineteenth century. Among the fourteen voices are some fascinating women's lives: the children's writer Margaret Gatty, the novelist Ouida, the travel the travel writer Isabella Bird, and the firebrand anti-feminist Eliza Lynn Linton. However, one of the stand-out sections is 'A Message from Her', comprising five sonnets written from the perspective of Mary Ellen Meredith addressed to her estranged husband, the novelist George Meredith, in response to his own sonnet sequence on their failed marriage, *Modern Love*. The quality of Thwaite's verse and his ability to resurrect forgotten lives make this a rewarding book.



### **Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind (1995)**

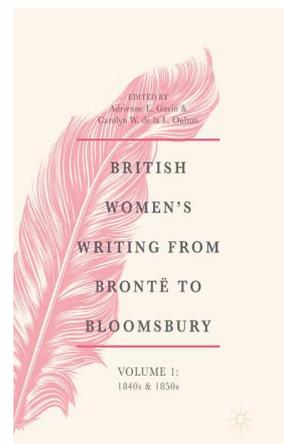
Patricia Meyer Spacks



I admit, this may not sound like the most exciting book to keep coming back to! Spacks' considerable wit and razor-sharp skills as a literary critic, however, make this an enjoyable and insightful read for scholars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. She presents a broad analysis of boredom in literature, covering a range of writers from Jane Austen to D.H. Lawrence. The book also deals at length with the often fraught subject of boredom and women's lives, including a chapter on "The Normalisation of Boredom: Nineteenth-Century Women and Their Fictions," which explores the complex ways in which boredom was gendered (and moralised over) in the Victorian period. It is anything but a dull read.



## New and Upcoming Publications



### **British Women's Writing From Brontë to Bloomsbury Volume 1: 1840s & 1850s (Aug 2018)**

Prof Adrienne E. Gavin and  
Prof Carolyn W. de la L.  
Oulton (eds)

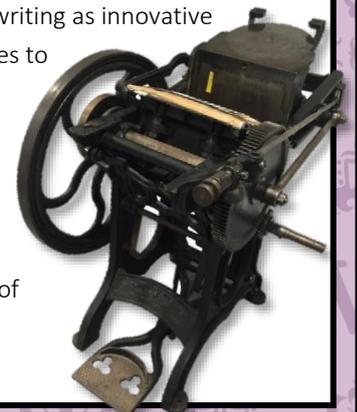
What better way to mark the  
end of ICVWW's conference  
series than the publication of  
Volume 1?

This book of sixteen original essays inaugurates the series by historically and culturally contextualizing Victorian women's writing distinctly within the 1840s and 1850s. A huge thank you to all our wonderful contributors and to all those who made the very first conference the success that buoyed the series!

### **"Women's Life Writing and Reputation: A Case Study of Mary Darby Robinson" (Jul 2018)**

Dr Susan Civale

By examining nineteenth-century responses to the *Memoirs of the Late Mrs. Robinson* (1801), this essay argues for Robinson's life writing as innovative and influential, and gestures to the benefits of extending the traditional "edges" of Romanticism in terms of both genre and period.



Available in Vol 24 Issue 2 of  
*Romanticism* [here](#):

# Upcoming Events Calendar

## September 2018

Sat 1 Sept-Sun 23 Dec	<a href="#">"This Girl Did:" Dorothy Wordsworth &amp; Women Mountaineers Exhibition</a>	Wordsworth Museum - Grasmere, Cumbria
Thurs 13-Fri 14 Sept	<a href="#">Substance Use and Abuse in the Long Nineteenth Century</a>	Edge Hill University - Ormskirk, Lancashire
Thurs 13-Fri 14 Sept	<a href="#">Women in Print: Production, Distribution and Consumption Conference</a>	University of Birmingham - Arts Building, Edgbaston Campus, Birmingham
Thurs 20 Sept	<a href="#">Regionalism Across the World in the Long Nineteenth Century</a>	University of Southampton - Avenue Campus, Southampton
Thurs 20 Sept	<a href="#">London and Southeast Romanticism Seminar: Romantic Novels 1818. Anna Maria Porter, <i>The Fast of St. Magdalen</i></a>	University of Greenwich - London, 18:00 (Room TBC)

## October 2018

Sat 20 Oct	<a href="#">Dickens Day 2018: Dickens, Families and Communities</a>	Woburn Suite, Senate House, London
Fri 26 Oct	<a href="#">Women and the Book Symposium</a>	University of London - Institute of English Studies, Senate House, London

## November 2018

Tues 6 Nov	<a href="#">Elizabeth Ludlow, "Prayer, Transfiguration, and the Body in Victorian Women's Poetry"</a>	Canterbury Christ Church University - Canterbury, 17:15 (Room TBC)
Thurs 15 Nov	<a href="#">London and Southeast Romanticism Seminar: Romantic Novels 1818. Charles Maturin, <i>Women</i></a>	University of Greenwich - London, 18:00 (Room TBC)
Fri 16 Nov	<a href="#">History: the beginning of the end?" Roundtable</a>	Canterbury Cathedral Archives and Library – Canterbury, 16:30

## December 2018

Mon 17-Tues 18 Dec	<a href="#">"Who Shall Deliver Me?" Christina Rossetti and the Illustrated Poetry Book Symposium</a>	Watts Gallery - Artists' Village, Compton, Surrey / Birkbeck University of London - School of Arts, London
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## February 2019

Mon 4 Feb	<a href="#">Emelyne Godfrey, "Henrietta Lesley"</a>	Canterbury Christ Church University - Canterbury, 17:15 (Room TBC)
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## Call for Papers

Publication/Conference	Theme	Deadline	Information/Contact
Birkbeck Centre for Nineteenth-Century Studies/Watts Gallery	'Who Shall Deliver Me?' Christina Rossetti and the Illustrated Poetry Book ( <a href="#">more details</a> )	<b>01/10/2018</b>	350-word abstract & 100-word bio to <a href="mailto:assistantcurator@wattsgallery.org.uk">assistantcurator@wattsgallery.org.uk</a>
Leeds Centre for Victorian Studies Conference	Science and Spiritualism, 1750-1930 ( <a href="#">more details</a> )	<b>15/11/2018</b>	250-word abstract and contact info to <a href="mailto:e.sera-shriar@leedstrinity.ac.uk">e.sera-shriar@leedstrinity.ac.uk</a>

## The ICVWW Newsletter Team

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