

The INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR Victorian Women Writers Newsletter



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Director's Cut

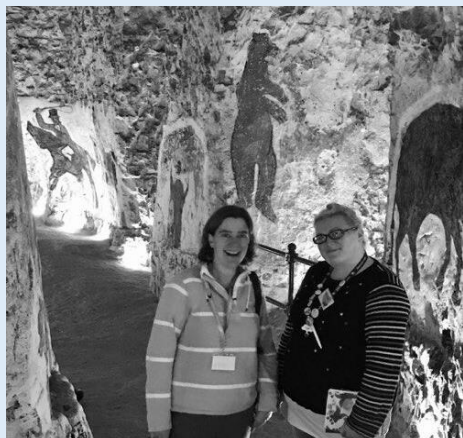
Issue 9 Autumn 2019

by Carolyn Oulton

Deadlines. Some days you can't get out of bed without tripping over one. For some they're sheer adrenaline, the galvanic force that gets the job done with a minute in hand. For others, worrying about the deadline becomes a job in itself (and no, we are really not going to talk about Brexit).

But some things are worth the wait. Let's say it's a few weeks into the new academic year. You have programme monitoring, validation planning, meetings have seemingly got together and agreed to start arranging themselves. And then your favourite newsletter from a Victorian Women's research centre turns up in your inbox with a brand-new look.

In this issue we welcome Gemma Aldridge as our new web editor, jointly with Alyson Hunt. Gemma fills us in on the Brontë Parsonage Museum in A Victorian Grand Day Out. In our guest interview we catch up with Lizzie Sheppard – who knows all about deadline dramas, but we get to edit *her* now, so she's saying nothing. Ann-Marie Richardson brings Amy So-that's-where-you've-been-all-this-time Levy 'Out of the Archives' (in kinky boots, no less). The books we want our students to fall in love with almost certainly involved some fraught negotiations and sleepless nights. So we're all pitching in to thank a few authors – it's the least we can do. Not least among them, Janine Hatter and the much-missed Nickianne Moody, for their edited volume on fashion and material culture.



Anyone who's been following our Being Human activities, you'll be relieved to learn that this year we are not making Chris Price sing in the rain. Instead he'll be singing Victorian music hall in a cave. Be careful what you wish for, everyone!

Catch up with all our Being Human Antics online at beinghumanfestival.org or on Twitter at [#BeingHuman19](https://twitter.com/BeingHuman19).

Date for the Diary

ICVWW welcome Lucasta Miller as guest speaker on 2nd December 2019. Lucasta's biography of Letitia Elizabeth Landon, *L.E.L. The Lost Life and Scandalous Death of Letitia Landon*, the celebrated "female Byron" was published by Jonathan Cape in 2019. The event is free and open to all so please do come along to room **Jg22** on our Canterbury campus from 17:15.



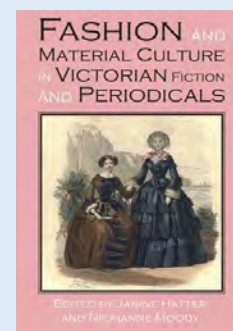
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Plus lots more!

Out of the Archive

Amy Levy's Early Desire for a Feminist Network

by Ann-Marie Richardson, University of Liverpool

After years of only reading about the life and works of Amy Levy (1861-1889) in print, it was thrilling to finally visit the [Camellia PLC Archive](#) in Linton Park, Kent, and see her handwritten manuscripts and juvenilia. The vibrancy of her childhood artwork particularly emphasised the ambition that would make Amy Levy a feminist icon, especially close drawn in collaboration with Levy's beloved sister, Katie.¹ One shared scrapbook (Camellia PLC Archive: Box 7, M3000) contains multiple pen and pencil depictions of women dominating all fields, from the domestic (nuns, cooks, maids and waited-upon ladies) to the public (Crimean nurses, medical students and philosophers). Through their juvenile art, both Amy and Katie channel the autonomous role-models they wished to see in the world, and eventually become.



@RichardsonA_M

One of the most suffragist sketches Amy and Katie collaborated on, 'The Woman's Club' Sketch (Box 7:5P, p.20), depicts a "new" enlightened woman lecturing on the importance of women's rights and inspiring her female audience to use their voices. The tableau is similar to a scene from a newspaper or liberal woman's magazine as the feminist speaker stands on the apron of a stage, with a poster behind her reading: "Lecture on Woman by Dorothy Bay." We see the titular Miss Bay motioning to the crowd, with a blend of fashionableness and empowerment. She too stands on the apron of a stage, having invaded the space of the older women in the front row, who stare up in shock and judgement at her speech. Unlike these gloved and bonneted elders, Miss Bay wears an androgynous style, reminiscent of a horse-riding outfit, including a riding jacket, puffed-out breeches and knee-high boots. Nevertheless, there are lady-like touches in her pinned-back hair, small earrings and stylish handbag hanging from her belt. With her tailoring, Miss Bay could easily be a visiting professor or archeologist, lecturing on her recent innovation to the stunned crowd – only her discovery is the "new" liberated woman. We can almost hear Dorothy Bay reciting a juvenile precursor to Levy's essay 'Women and Club Life (1888)': 'woman is waking up to a sense of the hundred and one possibilities of social intercourse'.¹ The front row of the theatre may not be converted, yet as we look further to the back of the audience, the detail decreases, but the passion intensifies as the exclamations 'woman's suffrage!' and 'man is a cruel oppressor!' are sketched above the crowd. The progressive woman is listening to the Levy sisters' heroine, but she must battle through the traditional woman in order to join her sisterhood. It was Amy Levy's own determination to do so that resulted in a successful collaboration with her sister, and eventually allowed her to thrive as a "New Woman" writer.



¹ All of the Levy siblings were often encouraged to participate in performing Amy's juvenile plays, as well as contributing to an "in-house" magazine titled *The Poplar Club* (or, *The Poplar Club Excelsior!*), for further information please see Naomi Hetherington's essay 'Chapter Fifteen: New Woman, "New Boots": Amy Levy as child journalist' in *The Child Writer from Austen to Woolf*, Eds.. Christine Alexander and Juliet McMaster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 254-268.

¹ Amy Levy, 'Women and Club Life (1888) (532-538) in *The Complete Novels and Selected Writings of Amy Levy 1861-1889*, Ed. Melvyn New (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993), 532-533.

An introduction to Amy Levy can be found in the ICVWW [database](#) of women writers on our website. Do let us know if you would like to add your favourite writer and reveal more about the women behind the texts.

Interview with a Guest

Name: Lizzie Sheppard (or more “Oi, Miss!” these days ...)

Current position: Trainee Secondary English Teacher



Do you think young people are already interested in the Victorian period, or is it a hard sell?

Compared to my own piteous experience at school with a text I fondly call “Blithering Wights”, the 19th Century diet that secondary school students receive these days makes me want to go back and do school all over again.

You can definitely see the refurbished National Curriculum’s emphasis on appreciating our wide, cultural literary heritage taking hold in the classroom. I recently observed a Year 8 class, who are doing a unit on 19th century literature, discussing the subtle nuances between “beauty” and the “sublime” in Romantic poetry. I felt a little twinge of envy (I only encountered the sublime in my undergrad years – how unfair). Moving up to Year 10, who are doing Dicken’s *A Christmas Carol* students find the language itself very fiddly (who doesn’t?) but what intrigues them most is the context. Give them a few weeks and they’re spouting information about the inequalities of the industrial revolution and the living conditions of workers. Make them pretend they’re workers in a workhouse with only measly gruel to live on and they appreciate it even more. Of course, the overall winner is the gothic and grotesque. All they need is a picture of a spooky castle, an extract from *Dracula*, and they’re in. Funnily enough, whenever our Year 7s are asked to write their own creative stories these days, gothic, spooky houses with creepy dolls are on trend. I’ll keep an eye on them as they grow older ... perhaps a cohort of sensationalists are coming your way, CCCU ...

Books you can’t live without?

I think anyone of the 90s generation would be met with raised eyebrows (and wands) if they didn’t say J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series. Being a trainee teacher now, and actually an adult-ish influence in charge of creating engaging lessons (the power!), I will make sure to include as many extracts from the canon as possible. Always.

What is your favourite work by a Victorian female writer?

Hate to be cliché, but *Jane Eyre* always wins hands down. I recently went on holiday to the Peak District and visited Haddon Hall (where they filmed the BBC TV series-the best adaptation in my opinion, with the best snogs), and was very aware of the tour guide nervously eyeing me up for an asylum as I ecstatically pointed out every inch where Jane and Mr Rochester had touched or stood. As I stood in the chapel, I couldn’t help but imagine a little voice saying, I do ...

A valiant runner-up would be Gaskell’s *North and South*. Why? Again, like in *Jane Eyre*, what more can a reader want than a rugged, grumpy, just out of reach, dreamy-eyed ... I mean, the dichotomy between industry and pastoral are really quite intriguing ... cough cough.

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

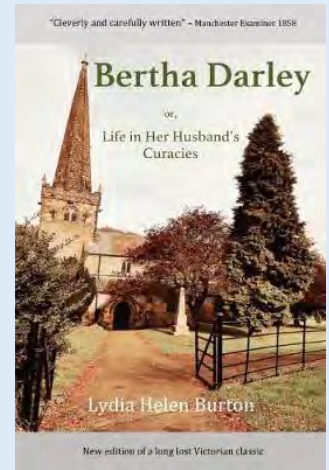
Maybe Typhoid Mary as the cook ... no, no, sorry. Erm, definitely Charles Dickens, but with the sole aim of introducing him to a thing called a full stop. If my year 7s can resist the comma splice so can you, sir. Out of curiosity I would also invite Prince Albert, but mainly to see with what Queen Victoria was so obsessed (can’t be the hairline). Finally, as a music lover myself, I’d hire Liszt and Paganini as entertainment and watch them have a virtuoso showdown (they were genius rivals on the piano and violin always trying to outdo one another). While the coffee is being passed around, I’d also make a quick phone call to Lewis Carroll and explain to him why cameras are a very, very bad idea for a hobby.



Hot On Our Reading List....

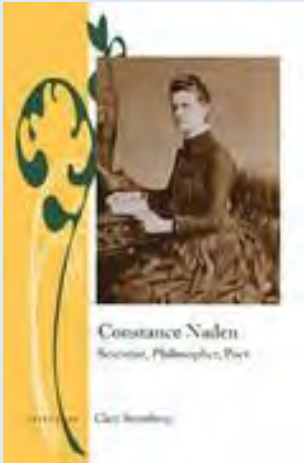
Bertha Darley, or, Life in Her Husband's Curacies

Unpublished since its original airing in 1858, Lydia Helen Burton's account of a young curate's wife in the industrialised North has the unmistakable whiff of Gaskell amongst all that smog. Thanks to the research of Matthew Wells, this obscure text is once again available for public consumption. Read an extract and [buy online](#) via Feed A Read.com



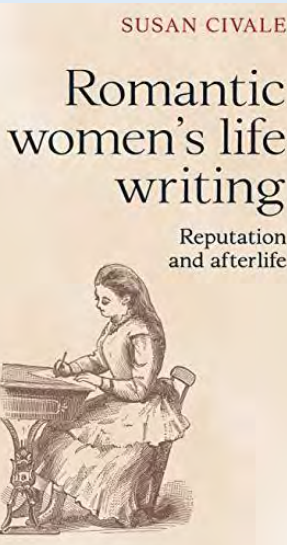
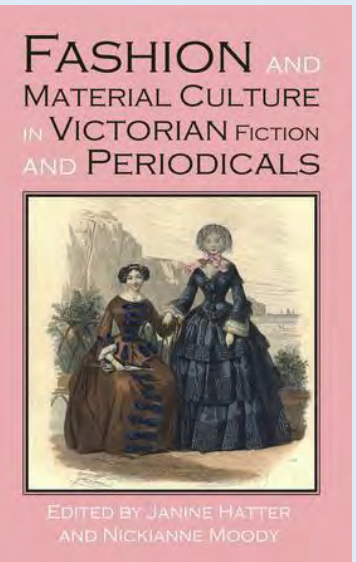
Constance Naden: Science, Philosopher, Poet

Clare Stainthorp's eagerly anticipated account of the life and work of Constance Naden is hot off the press from [Peter Lang publishers](#). Attendees of ICVWW conferences will remember Clare's spirited accounts of Naden's fights to improve women's rights and give a voice to the vulnerable. Clare has almost single-handedly fought to revive interest in Naden and even secured the funds to restore her headstone in March 2019. She has now turned her PhD thesis into a monograph which showcases Naden's indomitable spirit and considerable talents.



Fashion and Material Culture in Victorian Fiction and Periodicals

Edward Everett Root Publishers recently released this eye-catching collection of essays edited by ICVWW friends and colleagues Janine Hatter and the late Nickianne Moody. Also featuring a chapter by ICVWW RA Alyson Hunt, the book examines the intersections between fashion and sartorial matters in nineteenth century literature and culture. A diverse selection of essays containing a number of women writers including Charlotte Brontë and Mary Elizabeth Braddon. Available online at all your favourite booksellers and via the [publishers direct](#).

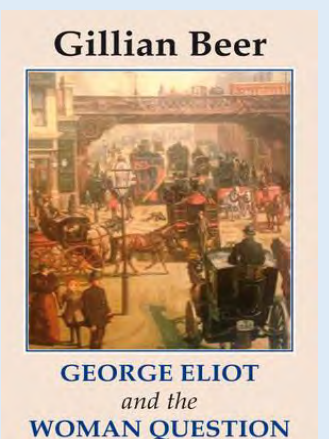


Romantic Women's Life Writing

Susan Civale's monograph introduces the stalwarts of eighteenth-century women's writing, many of whom inspired the later Victorian writers. The book considers how the publication of women's 'private' lives, through diaries, auto/biographies, letters, and memoirs, influenced their literary afterlives. The project focuses on Frances Burney, Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Robinson, and Mary Hays, each of whom authored and/or inspired works of 'life writing'. Available now through [Manchester University Press](#).

George Eliot and the Woman Question

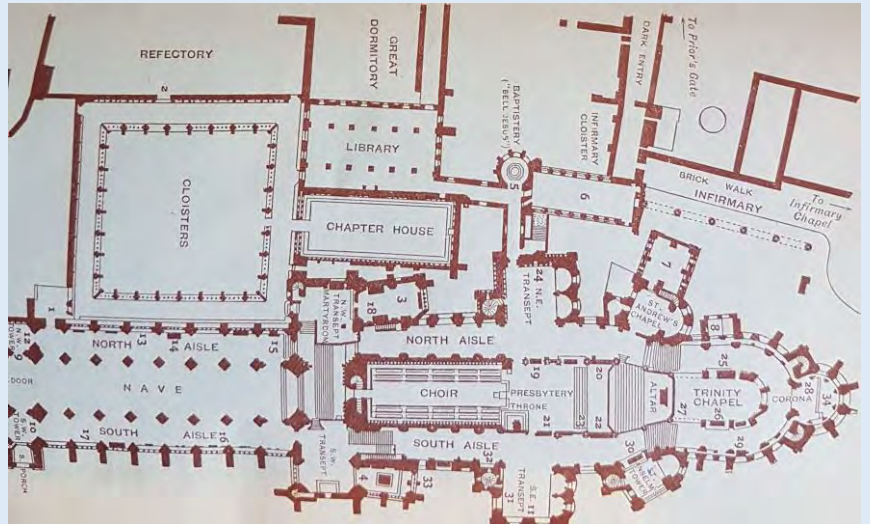
A reprint of Gillian Beer's stalwart of any Eliot researchers' library, this new edition features a new introduction alongside chapters covering Eliot's entire writing career. A useful companion for teaching released this summer by Edward Everett Root and available on their [website](#).



ICVWW Antics and Events

Digital Map

ICVWW and interdisciplinary colleagues are currently working with JSTOR on the development of a Digital Map of Kent. Hot on the heels of wonderful resources such as the COVE map, which maps global events of significance in the nineteenth century, and the University of Calgary map of Victorian Literary Sociability which maps literary relationships by geographical and temporal locations, ICVWW are creating a literary map of our own familiar corner of the world. Working from the middle ages to the present day, this ambitious project features research by more than 35 participants and is intended to be an ever-evolving resource. Watch this space for updates!



Being Human

ICVWW and friends are participating in the [Being Human Festival](#) for the fourth time this year. If you've not heard of it (where have you been?), Being Human is the UK's national festival of the humanities, bringing together scholars and community groups across the UK to explore what the humanities mean to them. Events are mostly free and open to the public but do book early to guarantee your places. This year we're hosting a [Murder Mystery Trail](#), a [film screening and book discussion](#) in deepest, darkest Margate; a [convivial singalong](#) in Margate's newly re-opened eighteenth century caves and a [Secret Writing](#) workshop but we can't tell you where - that would be telling!



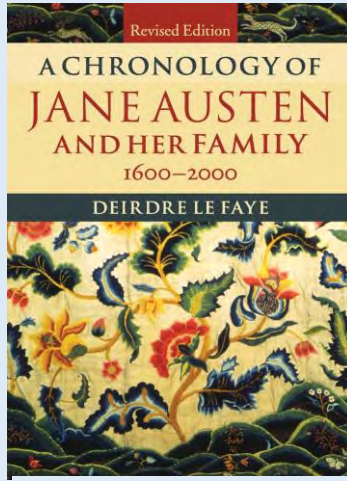
Do check out what's going on in your local area and support this brilliant festival. A few of our Victorian themed favourites include: [Fern Crazy](#) which uncovers the Victorian predilection for greenery at Liverpool John Moores University; [We Are Not Amused](#), an exploration of Victorian humour at Edge Hill University; [Sails, Whales and Tails](#) showcasing magic lanterns at Dundee University and [Our Mutual Friend the Machine](#) considering Victorian storytelling through a modern day perspective at the University of London.

And Finally....

Reader, she married him! ICVWW had a very special get-together in August when Research Associate Alyson Hunt married her very own Mr Rochester at St Martin's Priory.



What We've Been Reading by Susan Civale



As part of my research on Jane Austen, I finally got around to reading Deirdre Le Faye's *A Chronology of Jane Austen and Her Family, 1700-2000* (2006). This epic reference work offers a bird's-eye view of the living situation, travels, daily routines, financial transactions, social networks, and leisure pursuits of Jane Austen and her family (including her ancestors and descendants) over a period of three centuries. Containing over 10,000 entries, Le Faye's *Chronology* collates—and presents in readable fashion—data collected from letters, pocket-books, journals, banking and taxation records, civic and legal documents, published literary and historical works, and private archives. Though the seemingly mundane details of bank transactions, pub lodgings and meal times may seem far from the stuff of literary analysis, they in fact provide a rich and textured context for understanding Austen's life and work.

Just after her father died in 1805, for example, the entries paint a picture of a family of women (Jane, her sister Cassandra, and their mother) left in straitened conditions, and forced to economise despite the wealth and financial stability of some of their extended family. Jane Austen never experienced poverty, of course, but she may have been as familiar as the Dashwoods with the challenges of dependency. In documenting the genesis, drafting, and family reception of both her published and unpublished material (including poetry as well as prose), the *Chronology* also evidences Austen's lifelong passion for writing, as well as the ways in which her writing was embedded in her family life. Austen wrote poems to mark notable occasions (such as the marriage of one of her brothers) and to be read by specific relatives (such as her nieces), and she read her work aloud for the amusement of her siblings and parents. Even more interestingly, perhaps, the *Chronology* speaks to the support she had from her family—especially her brother Henry Thomas Austen—when it came to the publication of her fiction, but also to the excitement and encouragement of her extended circle in anticipating the release of each novel in turn. And it corroborates what several scholars have already noted: that Austen had literary and financial aspirations for her published work. As such Le Faye's *Chronology* helps to clarify our understanding of Jane Austen's authorial practice(s) and, more broadly, to dispel myths about nineteenth-century female authorship as necessarily shameful, forbidden, or unambitious.

Meanwhile, Across the Pond.... Celebrating *Little Women's* 150th Anniversary by Stefania Ciocia

"Never liked girls or knew many, except my sisters, but our queer plays and experiences may prove interesting, though I doubt it", recorded Louisa May Alcott in April 1868, having been asked to write a "girls' book". She accepted the commission for that most pragmatic of motives for any jobbing writer: she needed the money. In September 1868, the first 2,000 copies of *Little Women* were flying off the shelves. Four months later, she had completed Part 2. The staggered publication of the two volumes means that, rather handily, fans of the March girls all over the worlds – and there are a lot of us – are still celebrating the 150th anniversary of *Little Women*.

Last year's sesquicentennial was marked by Anne Boyd Rioux's *Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy. The Story of Little Women and Why It Still Matters*, a thought-provoking assessment of the enduring relevance of this classic story of sisterhood. Rounding off this extra-long anniversary this December is Greta Gerwig's film adaption, featuring Saoirse Ronan as Jo, Laura Dern as Marmee and Meryl Streep as Aunt March. I await its release with impatience mixed with trepidation because – much as I love Gerwig's work – no adaptation of *Little Women* can live up to how Alcott's words translate into images on the cinema screen in my own mind.

The trailer highlights the girls' ability to shape their own destiny, the validity of their different choices, and the fact that some of them are strikingly at odds with the rules of patriarchal society. Even the film's marketing strapline strikes a powerful chord. "This Christmas, own your story" reminds me that, with its four protagonists, *Little Women* has always lent itself to a "pick-your-own-heroine", or even a "mix-and-match-to-create-your-perfect-fit" attitude. With what promises to be a *Little Women* for the 21st-century, this Christmas cannot come too soon.



A Victorian Grand Day Out

By Gemma Aldridge

The Brontë Parsonage Museum

When on holiday in Yorkshire back in 2015, there was one place I knew without a doubt that we had to visit. While the endless waterfalls were beautiful, and the views from the top of the Dales even more so, it was the Brontë Parsonage Museum that I was most interested in. With the graveyard directly in front of it and a stunning backdrop of the Yorkshire dales, my heart was fluttering with excitement like Cathy's in *Wuthering Heights* as we walked up to the parsonage. Its indescribable atmosphere transports you back in time into a world where each of the Brontës' novels exists as more than fiction.



Inside, there are several rooms fitted out as they would have been when the Brontës lived there, with the Museum undergoing the Herculean effort of finding and returning original furniture to its rightful home. Walking around, it feels as though the previous occupants have only stepped out for a minute, and will return at any moment, settling down to read by the fire, or writing letters (and perhaps their literary works as well) in the dining room. These rooms include Mr Brontë's study, the dining room and the children's study, while rooms such as Charlotte's bedroom and Branwell's studio are kitted out not with original furniture but with priceless Brontë relics.

The museum boasts the largest Brontë collection anywhere, including original manuscripts, clothes and everyday belongings through which to connect with each of the Brontës in turn. Among the most memorable were the manuscripts for the juvenilia written by the Brontës as children: they're tiny books that fit in the palm of your hand, with the handwriting so miniscule they require a magnifying glass to read them.

It was while viewing this particular artefact that the fateful event took place. My mother, having finished looking around before the rest of us, leant against the wall while she waited. The next thing we knew, the fire alarm was screeching in our ears.

"I'm so sorry," she shouted, making us cringe inwardly, "that was me!" Unwittingly, she had leant against the fire alarm and triggered it. We were evacuated from the building, with the fire engine on its way. It was mortifying.

When you're finished looking around the parsonage (and if your trip hasn't been cut short by the fire alarm), then the village itself is a short walk away and continues with the olde-worlde feel. There's an old apothecary that looks like nothing has changed in the last hundred years, a sweet shop in a similar condition, and plenty of tea rooms, souvenir shops and pubs, including the one Branwell Brontë allegedly used to frequent.



Of course, behind the parsonage is the impressive backdrop of the Pennines, so if you're not afraid of a little cold and rain (which seems to be the default setting in Yorkshire, from what I remember), you could take a bracing walk and imagine yourself as a delirious Jane or a brooding Heathcliff.

And if you time it right, there is a 1940s weekend which occurs every year in May, which includes live wartime music, a parade with wartime vehicles, and an evening dance. What's not to love?

Fire evacuations aside, it was a brilliant day out and well worth the visit. Just be aware of the fire alarms when finding a place to rest.

For more information on the Brontë Parsonage Museum, visit The Brontë Society at www.bronte.org.uk or follow their Twitter account @BronteParsonage. The Brontë Society are also [crowd-funding](#) to bring home a tiny manuscript written by fourteen year old Charlotte Brontë due to be sold at auction in Paris on November 9th.