EDITED BY
Adrienne E. Gavin &
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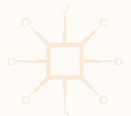
BRITISH WOMEN'S WRITING FROM BRONTË TO BLOOMSBURY

VOLUME 1: 1840s & 1850s



British Women's Writing from Brontë to Bloomsbury, 1840–1940

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This series, published in association with the International Centre for Victorian Women Writers (ICVWW), consists of five volumes of critical essays written by international experts in women's writing. Structured chronologically, with each volume examining a twenty year timespan, it explores the dynamic contiguities of literary realism, sensation, and the new as a frame for reassessing, decade by decade, how women's writing changed and developed in Britain from the 1840s to the 1930s. A transformative period in women's private, public, and literary lives, the century from 1840 to 1940 saw the rise and fall of the circulating library as an effectual censor of literary expression, the growth and achievements of the female suffrage movement, and a series of legislation that re-envisioned relations within marriage. Female higher education opened and expanded, employment opportunities for women substantially increased, and women's roles as single women, wives, mothers, and authors were recurrently debated.

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1840s and 1850s

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Charlotte Brontë (1816–1855). Mezzotint, 1857, by John Sartain after George Richmond. (Reprinted with the permission of Granger Historical Picture Archive/Alamy Stock Photo)

To getting there.

Acknowledgements

This book is the inaugural volume in the five-volume series *British Women's Writing from Brontë to Bloomsbury, 1840–1940*, which is itself a central part of the wider *From Brontë to Bloomsbury: Realism, Sensation and the New in Women's Writing from the 1840s to the 1930s* project directed by the International Centre for Victorian Women Writers (ICVWW), the aim of which is to recover, reassess, and reinterpret women's writing of the Victorian period and beyond.

We wish here to acknowledge the support, assistance, and inspiring exchange of ideas we have had from an ever-growing international community of academics, independent researchers, and research students whose interest in and enthusiasm for the wider *From Brontë to Bloomsbury* project have stimulated our planning and thinking on this volume.

In particular, we would like to thank Canterbury Christ Church University for supporting our establishment of the ICVWW in 2012. We also wish to thank the ICVWW advisory board: Professor Christine Alexander, Professor Hilary Fraser, Professor Susan Hamilton, Professor Andrew King, Professor Graham Law, Professor Kate Newey, Professor Lyn Pykett, Professor Valerie Sanders, Professor Joanne Wilkes, and the late Professor Linda Peterson, for their support of our ventures.

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The *Brontë to Bloomsbury* project would not have been possible without the enthusiasm and generosity of the many scholars and students who have attended the ICVWW's series of international conferences, shared new perspectives on canonical women's writing, and introduced us to forgotten authors. May the conversation be ongoing!

We also wish to thank our volume contributors, whose dedication to and enthusiasm for the project have been tested and have survived.

Finally, we wish to thank our families, Dewayne, Laura, Demia, and Riley, and Paul, Melissa, and Tom, for always supporting us in our project and for welcoming decades of women writers into their homes.

Series Introduction

British Women's Writing from Brontë to Bloomsbury, 1840–1940 is a five-volume series comprising 80 original critical essays written by international experts on women's writing. A project of the International Centre for Victorian Women Writers (ICVWW), which the editors co-founded at Canterbury Christ Church University, UK, in 2012, it explores the dynamic contiguities of literary realism, sensation, and the new as a frame for reassessing, decade by decade, how women's writing changed and developed in Britain from 1840 to 1940. The series title acknowledges canonical authors and literary movements in its key terms 'Brontë' and 'Bloomsbury,' while significantly indicating the movement 'from' one to the other. This transition over a vital century of female authorship encompasses, but as the essay contributors show is not always neatly defined by, Victorian, *fin-de-siècle*, Edwardian, and modernist writing, and is shaped by numerous writers, reviewers, and literary consumers. Centrally re-examining the cultural and social contexts in which both canonical and lesser-known or 'forgotten' works by women were produced, the series is designed to be a substantial, consciously expansive, and inclusive project, which allows many critical voices and viewpoints to be heard. Accordingly, it includes discussions of proto-feminist authorship, but avoids an exclusive focus on the 'advanced' woman author, whether she is depicted as representative of her time or, conversely, as sublimely indifferent to the opinions of a wider readership. Equally, in order to identify emerging trends and the impact of key debates on writers governed by the same laws and who had access to or cognizance of the same print culture, the series

is confined to women authors who were British, living in Britain, or in other ways integrally part of a British tradition of writing. The series necessarily cannot survey all British women writers across the century, nor is it designed to do so; rather, the essays have been commissioned to focus on topics and writers that illustrate the aspects of women's writing that most reflect a decade-based periodicity. In this way the series constitutes a new intervention in the ongoing recovery and reinterpretation of British women writers.

The series is predicated on four central beliefs. The first is that the continuing interest in Victorian and early twentieth-century women's writing needs to be contextualized through further attention both to social and cultural change and to the material context of publishing conditions and readerships. The second is that the ongoing rediscovery of neglected women writers and texts (for example, through the publication of scholarly editions) has created a demand for a supporting body of critical work. The third is that the consideration of lesser-known alongside more familiar texts will be of benefit to scholars in establishing a wider frame of reference for further study. And the fourth is that a chronological, decade-based re-exploration of women's writing offers new critical insights and interpretations.

A transformative period in women's private, public, and literary lives, the century from 1840 to 1940 saw the rise and fall of the circulating library as an effectual censor of literary expression, the growth and achievements of the female suffrage movement, and a series of legislation that re-envisioned relations within marriage. Female higher education opened and expanded, employment opportunities for women substantially increased, and women's roles as spinsters, wives, mothers, and authors were recurrently debated.

As leisure increased across the century (at least for the middle class) as a result of new technologies and wealth, and as printing costs declined, a heightened demand for reading material was met by an array of literature adapted for perusal in a variety of contexts: expensively bound books for private houses, volumes for circulating libraries, serials for periodical publications, and cheap railway editions for commuters and travellers. Women both produced and encountered a vast range of literature during this period. Central to their reading and writing experience was fiction: the most dynamic, daring, and dominant genre across these ten decades. The popularity and length of the novel, in particular, enabled women writers' voices to be expressed and heard in both overt and covert ways. For such

reasons, this series primarily focuses on fiction in tracing the allusive works of writers who, in serial or volume form, responded to each other and to their predecessors as they engaged with and adapted different forms: negotiating the various demands of the three-decker in its early to mid-Victorian heyday, the new challenges posed by the one-volume and short story format of the late nineteenth century, and the experiments of Modernism (and counter-Modernism) that self-consciously destabilized the achievements of the previous century.

Central to the series' reassessment of women writers is close attention to the literary, cultural, and social contexts of the decades within which women wrote particular texts. Chronologically examining the ways in which women's writing changed and developed, adapted and innovated, each of the five volumes considers two decades of women's writing. In doing so, these volumes examine each decade discretely, offering an encapsulatory sense of its significance to female authorship, while also exploring the confluences and divergences that each new decade wrought. Considering women's writing chronologically is not of course new, but the specific attention to decades in this series aims to offer an enhanced precision to periodized discussion of writing. Compartmentalizing literature by decade is in some senses an artificial division as literary influences and interests naturally endure across decade (and century) demarcations. Nevertheless, decades, as they still do, had strong psychological resonance for readers, writers, and critics. The essays in these volumes certainly show clear identificatory characteristics evident in women's writing within each of the ten decades considered, providing an illuminating trajectory that allows new readings of female authorship.

The series builds on previous studies of women's writing across these periods by offering new connections and uncovering particular tensions. Recent work has questioned the preoccupation with a few canonical women writers that was a feature of critical discourse for much of the twentieth century, and which perpetuated a distorted view of the female-authored texts actually being written and read widely by an increasingly literate population. In addition to re-examining fiction by canonical authors such as Charlotte Brontë and Virginia Woolf, the series is significantly concerned with rediscovering and repositioning the work of neglected female authors in order to explore the conflicted (and often conflicting) literary productions of women writers in their social and cultural context.

Critical attention to women's writing since the pioneering recovery projects of the 1970s and 1980s—such as Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1978; 1999) and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Women Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979; 2000)—has largely, and valuably, focused on charting a feminist tradition of subversive or politically engaged women's writing, but inevitably this has privileged the openly radical messages of Emily Brontë over the ambivalence of Mary Braddon, or has foregrounded the shock tactics of Sarah Grand over the class-inflected satire of Ellen Thorneycroft Fowler. Similarly, it has under-examined morally didactic works by writers such as Anna Sewell and Emma Worboise, as well as 'forgotten' bestsellers by authors including Caroline Clive and Mary Cholmondeley that clearly spoke to the period in which they were published. Bringing these authors together allows patterns to emerge across genres, revealing, for instance, the religious aesthetic of Thorneycroft Fowler's fiction and the sensational elements of Worboise's religious writing.

Developing on this earlier critical work, new interpretations of the cultural contexts of female authorship include Lyn Pykett's *The Improper Feminine: The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing* (1992), Joanne Shattock's edited collection *Women and Literature in Britain 1800–1900* (2001), Talia Schaffer's *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late-Victorian England* (2009), and Jennie Batchelor and Cora Kaplan's more chronologically expansive ten-volume edited series of critical essays *The History of British Women's Writing* (2010–). Works such as *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Women's Writing* (2015, ed. Linda H. Peterson) and *The Cambridge Companion to Modernist Women Writers* (2010, ed. Maren Tova Linett) have further consolidated scholarship on women authors. Interest in female writers' networking is also increasingly frequent in studies such as Susan David Bernstein's *Roomscape: Women Writers in the British Museum from George Eliot to Virginia Woolf* (2013). Studies such as Linda Peterson's *Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market* (2009) have begun to address the complexity of apparently conservative nineteenth-century women's writing such as religious biography and children's fiction, while others, including Valerie Sanders's *Eve's Renegades: Victorian Anti-feminist Women Novelists* (1996) and Tamara Wagner's collection *Anti-feminism in the Victorian Novel: Rereading Nineteenth-Century Women Writers* (2009) stress the need to allow space to the many

voices raised in objection to women's emancipation. Focusing on the last decades of the nineteenth century, the nine-volume Pickering & Chatto series *New Woman Fiction 1881–1899* (2010–11) holds these opposing positions in tension while suggesting the difficulty of defining texts in the binary terms of 'pro' or 'anti' women's rights, however defined. Its contextualizing of a range of texts, for instance, positioning Ouida's antifeminist *The Massarenes* (1897) next to New Woman writing such as George Egerton's *The Wheel of God* (1898) and Mary Cholmondeley's *Red Pottage* (1899), alters the way each text is read by allowing the debate over women's 'value' and identity to ripple across very different novels which were written in isolation, but were likely to have been borrowed or purchased by the same readers. By placing such different texts in juxtaposition, it is possible to review the field of women's writing in new ways.

In a parallel strategy, this series on women's writing from 1840 to 1940 proposes interdependencies between the numerous texts discussed, despite their sometimes divergent agendas, styles, and subgenres. Notably, while some apparently conservative female-authored texts may reveal a level of resistance to the social order by which the authors were bound—as recent critics of Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* (1853) have increasingly argued—others clearly do not. Not all women writers were in rebellion against the political and social systems of their time, and crucially those who were in a state of more or less open revolt did not themselves write in a literary vacuum. Women writers were aware of, and in some cases subscribed to, the constraints imposed on female authorship. This in itself creates a productive tension, in the Victorian novel especially, between the exigencies of the plot and the moralizing role of the female narrator.

Where it is significant across this series, female authors are considered in relation to their male counterparts, but given the tensions inherent in women's entry into, and existence within, literary culture, its volumes are crucially preoccupied with the ways in which women writers defined themselves, whether as professional or amateur, politically engaged or emotionally intuitive. In placing diverse voices next to and sometimes against each other, the series affirms the importance of women's writing regardless of its terms of self-definition, and in doing so it seeks to create a more nuanced understanding of how Victorian and early twentieth-century female authors negotiated economic, social, and imaginative positions for themselves in and through their writing.

In its chronological coverage of a century of writing, and allowing for the potentially problematic convergence of the Victorian years and the

first decades of the twentieth century, the series further seeks to question the emergence of Modernism as the defining feature of 1920s and 1930s literature and literary culture. While many women authors consciously presented themselves as belonging to, or as distanced from, particular cultural and political standpoints, writers portraying the times in which they lived to their target readership did not necessarily expect to themselves be positioned through a clearly defined sense of 'period.' Towards the end of the nineteenth century, for example, writers such as Mona Caird stressed their sense of themselves as inhabiting a transitional zone, 'striding between two centuries' ('The Yellow Drawing Room' [1892] 30). As if to make just this point, the death of Queen Victoria one year into a new century disrupts any completely tidy identification of 'Victorian' with 'mid to late nineteenth century.' In the same way, many writers in the first decades of the twentieth century were not modernist in style. Some of them, like Netta Syrett and Mary Braddon, had first made a name for themselves in the previous century and often continued writing in the manner to which they and their readers had become accustomed.

In order to understand the important changes in women's writing between the start of the Victorian period and the beginning of the Second World War, then, an examination is needed with a scope that is broad enough to acknowledge a range of standpoints. Any such reassessment (incomplete and partial as it will inevitably be) must encompass both canonical and non-canonical texts, conservative ideology and radical protest, the forgotten late-career works of Victorian-born authors as well as the rise of the modernist aesthetic. Exploring connections and divergent approaches from 1840 to 1940, a period of vibrant literary and cultural change, this series therefore juxtaposes very different types of fiction by a range of authors. In the process, it reminds us that the development of women's writing through these decades was often highly self-conscious, both in what it apparently rejected and in the sense of tradition it chose to reference.

Adrienne E. Gavin
Carolyn W. de la L. Oulton

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Erin D. Chamberlain has been an assistant professor of English at Washburn University in Topeka, Kansas, USA since 2008. Her teaching and research activities examine the influence of public culture upon the private home in Victorian literature, in particular the literature written for and about women. Her research includes the study of servant characters in terms of class, gender, and space as represented through the middle-class

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Sharon Connor was awarded her PhD by the University of Liverpool, UK, in 2014. Her thesis, 'Retrieving the Husbandless Woman: Single Women in Victorian Fiction,' explores the Victorian novel as a powerful tool of resistance to the dominant ideology surrounding women and marriage. Having published a number of articles on Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and Margaret Oliphant, she is currently working on a collection of essays on the novelist and social reformer Harriet Martineau, which is to be published by Palgrave Macmillan. She has also recently been appointed Scientific Secretary of the Martineau Society.

Katie Garner is a lecturer in nineteenth-century literature at the University of St Andrews, UK. She completed her PhD at Cardiff University and was a Government of Ireland Irish Research Council Postdoctoral Fellow at University College Cork in 2013–14. Her research interests span Romantic and Victorian women's writing, medievalism, the Gothic, and book history. Her work to date has focused on women's engagements with Arthurian romance, and she is the author of *Romantic Women Writers and Arthurian Legend: The Quest for Knowledge* (2017). She is currently working on an edition of *Jane Eyre*.

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Kristin A. Le Veness is an associate professor in the Department of English at SUNY-Nassau in New York, USA. Anne Brontë has been a major focus of her scholarship, beginning with her DPhil dissertation 'Giving Good Advice: Anne Brontë's Rational Feminism.' In November 2011, *Brontë Studies* published her article 'Lessons from *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*: Recasting the Mother.' She has also presented a number of conference papers on Brontë, including 'Spiritual Optimism and Social Change: Moravianism's Influence on Anne Brontë.'

Anne Longmuir is Associate Professor of English at Kansas State University, USA. In addition to publishing articles and book chapters on Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell, Wilkie Collins, Don DeLillo, and J. M. Coetzee, she co-edited *Victorian Literature: Criticism and Debates* (2016) with Lee Behlman. She is currently working on a book on the gender politics of John Ruskin's economic theory.

Gail Marshall is Head of the School of Literature and Languages at the University of Reading, UK. She is the author of *Actresses on the Victorian Stage* (1998, 2006), *Victorian Fiction* (2002), and *Shakespeare and Victorian Women* (2009), and has edited books on Shakespeare and the Victorians, George Eliot, and the *fin de siècle*. She is currently researching the literature and culture of 1859, and recently completed a scholarly edition of Margaret Oliphant's *Kirsteen* (2015). She is general co-editor of a new Cambridge University Press series on 'Re-reading the Nineteenth Century.'

Carolyn W. de la L. Oulton is Professor of Victorian Literature and co-founder and Director of the International Centre for Victorian Women Writers (ICVWW), Canterbury Christ Church University, UK. She is the author of *Literature and Religion in Mid-Victorian England: From Dickens to Eliot* (2003), *Romantic Friendship in Victorian Literature* (2007), *Let the Flowers Go: A Life of Mary Cholmondeley* (2009), *Below the Fairy City: A Life of Jerome K. Jerome* (2012), and *Dickens and the Myth of the Reader* (2016). She is the co-editor of *Mary Cholmondeley Reconsidered* (2009) and *Writing Women of the Fin de Siècle* (2011), and the general editor of *New Woman Fiction 1881–1899* (2010–11). Her poetry collections include most recently *Accidental Fruit* (2016).

Valerie Sanders is Professor of English at the University of Hull, UK. She first became interested in Harriet Martineau as a PhD student and has written widely about her since. She recently co-edited the essay collection (with Gaby Weiner) *Harriet Martineau and the Birth of Disciplines: Nineteenth-Century Intellectual Powerhouse* (2016), and has edited four volumes of Pickering & Chatto's *Selected Works of Margaret Oliphant* (two with Joanne Shattock and Joanne Wilkes). Her other recent publications include *The Tragi-comedy of Victorian Fatherhood* (2009) and two edited volumes of nineteenth-century childhood autobiography, *Records of Girlhood* (2000 and 2012).

Tamara S. Wagner obtained her PhD from Cambridge University and is Associate Professor at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. Her books include *Victorian Narratives of Failed Emigration: Settlers, Returnees, and Nineteenth-Century Literature in English* (2016), *Financial Speculation in Victorian Fiction: Plotting Money and the Novel Genre, 1815–1901* (2010), and *Longing: Narratives of Nostalgia in the British Novel, 1740–1890* (2004). She has also edited collections on

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Clare Walker Gore holds a Junior Research Fellowship at Trinity College, Cambridge University, UK. She completed her PhD in English at Selwyn College, Cambridge University in 2015. Her thesis explored representations of disability in the nineteenth-century novel, with a particular focus on the work of Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, Dinah Mulock Craik, and Charlotte M. Yonge. Her published work includes articles in *Victorian Literature and Culture*, *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, and *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies*, and a critical edition of Dinah Mulock Craik's novel *A Noble Life* (2016). She is currently working on her first book, *Plotting Disability in the Nineteenth-Century Novel*.

Joanne Wilkes was educated at Sydney and Oxford Universities, and is currently Professor of English at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. Her main research interests are in nineteenth-century fiction and literary criticism (especially the practice of women), literary relations between Britain and France, and the poetry of Keats and Byron. She has edited Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848; 2005) and Geraldine Jewsbury's *The Half Sisters* (1848; 1994). More recently, she has contributed two edited and two co-edited volumes to Pickering & Chatto's *Selected Works of Margaret Oliphant*, covering Oliphant's literary criticism and her novel *At His Gates* (1872). Her critical monographs are *Lord Byron and Madame de Staël: Born for Opposition* (1999) and *Women Reviewing Women in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Critical Reception of Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot* (2010). Her latest publications include a chapter on women reviewers for the *Cambridge Companion to Victorian Women Writers* (ed. Linda Peterson, 2015) and an article on Anthony Trollope in *Essays in Criticism* (April 2017).

PART I

Women's Writing of the 1840s

Two Women and a Girl. (Reprinted courtesy of the British Library, © British Library Board, http://www.bl.uk/learning/timeline/external/victorians110-tl.jpg)

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Adrienne E. Gavin and Carolyn W. de la L. Oulton

This volume inaugurates the five-volume series *British Women's Writing from Brontë to Bloomsbury, 1840–1940*, which decade by decade critically reassesses women's fiction, examining the ways in which it propels and challenges discourses of realism, sensation, and the new across a century of dynamic social, cultural, and technological change. Analysing confluences and developments in women's writing across the 1840s and the 1850s, the 16 original chapters that follow critically reconsider fiction by canonical and lesser-known women writers, redefining the landscape of female authorship during these decades. By analysing women's fiction within the social and cultural contexts of the 1840s and 1850s, the collection distils in terms of women's writing both how those decades are discrete and how they contain thematic and stylistic continuities. Given the nineteenth-cen-

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tury preoccupation with writing as intrinsically gendered, the volume also takes seriously the claim of particular authors to be writing in a feminine mode, offering insights into what a woman's topic might look like under a female monarch.

Sharply defined historically by decade, and with chapters chronologically ordered to suggest emphases in fiction as each decade progresses, the volume is broad in terms of the range of developments in female writing it considers. It canvasses, for example, the construction of a post-Romantic tradition, the politicization of the domestic sphere, women's involvement in publishing, the opportunities available to women as both writers and producers of literary texts, and the claim to a feminine sensational mode. It reveals that women's writing of the 1840s was concerned with both individual mobility and social exclusion, and was enabled by anonymous periodical practices that conversely obscured its achievements. In turn, female-authored fiction of the 1850s paid nuanced attention to the lives of single women, to masculinity, and to the impediments of marriage.

Attempts to locate or define a female voice abound in discussions of literature during the 1840s and 1850s, although not necessarily in mainstream journal articles written by women themselves. As Susan Hamilton has suggested, 'Victorian feminists did not find it a simple matter to speak out about women's place in Victorian culture in the commercial periodicals, journals, reviews and newspapers that proliferated from the late 1850s on. And they worried about it' (xi). However, as Linda H. Peterson argues in her introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Women's Writing* (2015): 'If we can illumine the careers of women writers by locating them within literary, social and political networks, we can also place them within larger literary movements and recognize their contributions to established and emerging genres' (6). Joanne Shattock similarly notes that while only a few female authors broke into major periodicals, they did seek to establish a sense of relationship with each other's work, even before the feminist press initiatives of the 1850s and 1860s: '[w]omen writers had fewer opportunities than their male colleagues to participate in the interlocking networks of writers, publishers, editors and proprietors that operated in London … Networks that included women writers existed, however, from the 1830s onwards' (31).

This volume is concerned with some of the ways in which female writers envisaged, established, and operated within this framework, in a publishing context that defined them and their activities against powerful and exclusive male networks, while at the same time finding new ways to shape

a tradition of women's relations within literary texts. As Elizabeth Barrett Browning expressed it in 1856:

> The man had baffled, chafed me, till I flung
> For refuge to the woman—as, sometimes,
> Impatient of some crowded room's close smell,
> You throw a window open and lean out
> To breathe a long breath in the dewy night. (*Aurora Leigh* [1856] IV. 347–51)

The volume is structured in two parts, each devoted to one decade so that specific trends can be identified. As the new Victorian culture started to establish itself, so writers were able to respond to a very recent past and also to anticipate the shifts in technology as well as economic and religious thought and practice that a new period might promise. Some of these explorations by early Victorian women writers would remain influential for decades to come. Yet this two-part structure also draws attention to the apparent arbitrariness of the influences here identified. Chapters in the first section on the 1840s, for example, consider women writers who pre-date or are contemporaneous with the iconic Brontë sisters, but who failed to attain the same standing; these lesser-known figures include the youngest Brontë sister, Anne, a fact that ironically is often overlooked.

Women's Writing of the 1840s

The first half of this volume is concerned with the reassessment and repositioning of women's writing from the 1840s, including periodical reviewing practices, the servant novel, children's literature, and fictional treatments of political economy, as well as reworkings of Gothic and Byronic motifs in realist settings. In recovering neglected work by writers such as Mary Howitt and Christian Johnstone and placing it alongside canonical texts including the novels of Charlotte and Emily Brontë, Part I of the volume explores a range of significant issues, including considering the ways in which mid-nineteenth-century women writers contest or adapt Romantic ideas, as they seek out literary traditions or initiate new and gendered modes of their own.

The 1840s can be seen as a watershed in women's writing, including innovations of style such as the reworking of Romantic motifs in realist settings, which both redefined literary fiction and offered new ways for

women to identify themselves as writers. Female authors of the 1840s were also acutely aware of the practical and the ideological problems attending this enterprise. Several of the writers discussed in this section draw attention to the logistical and cultural difficulties faced by women who wished to travel from one location to another, while also charting the progression of female characters from states of emotional deprivation to the realization of narrative agency.

Contributors consider these issues in the context of the 'hungry forties,' the first entire decade of Victoria's reign, and a period of rapid economic and social change following the Industrial Revolution of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries which had instigated the mass movement of workers and their families to factory towns like Manchester and Birmingham and to the increasingly overcrowded housing in London, much of which was not by the 1840s 'fit for purpose.' Major events during this decade, as discussed below, suggest that it was a time of both instability and commitment to the ideal of human relations, a paradox most potently embodied in the new railways that both facilitated contact between distant family members and cut up existing domiciles, as old slums were demolished in the metropolis to make way for rapidly expanding lines.

The 1840s are associated with widespread social discontent and hardship, and literature increasingly moved away from silver-fork fiction and its preoccupation with the doings of 'high life' towards portraying 'low life.' The last years of the decade also created an appetite for new popular forms such as the railway novels and 'yellow-backs' produced by successful imprints such as Routledge's *Railway Library*, which began publishing in 1848. While some of the most influential novels of this decade, such as *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Wuthering Heights* (1847), return to an imagined rural past, they seem to do so more to challenge their readers than to reinstate a lost idyll.

Queen Victoria married Prince Albert in 1840 and, marking the rise of a newly literate class, the Penny Post was established in the same year, while Fox Talbot produced the first photographic collection to be published for profit in 1844. The novel was becoming the dominant literary genre and displayed, as Kathleen Tillotson notes in *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties* (1954), 'a surging variety of material and method, new fashions jostling old, new ground broken in time, place, purpose, and social class,' with the decade also seeing 'the beginnings of serious [literary] criticism of novels' (15, 16). The three-decker novel emerged as the standard format for the novel (as it would remain until the 1890s) with the opening of

Mudie's library to subscribers in 1842, and the demand for female higher education was acknowledged in the founding of Bedford College for Women in 1849. Legal landmarks included the Factory Acts of 1844 and 1847 (Ten Hours Act) which increased legal protections for women and young persons, as well as the repeal of the controversial Corn Laws in 1846. These marks of progress were received in the context of developing Chartist protest, which led to fears of a working-class revolution in 1848, and a major cholera epidemic in the same year, but at the same time some of the poorest children were able to obtain a rudimentary education with the opening of the first Ragged Schools in 1840, started in the most deprived parts of London by evangelizing Christians.

The 1840s also followed the end of the second-generation Romantic period, associated with the first three decades of the nineteenth century. Celebrated writers Laetitia Landon and Felicia Hemans had only recently died, while Fanny Burney lived until 1840. Caroline Norton had begun her literary career in the 1830s (against the backdrop of the First Reform Act of 1832—which extended male suffrage to include an increased number of householders, tenant farmers, and shopkeepers, but pointedly made no provision for women—and the New Poor Law passed in 1834). Highly productive women writers such as Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, silver-fork novelist Catherine Gore, Mary Howitt, and the widely popular Sarah Stickney Ellis were still publishing regularly in the 1840s, as was journalist and author Christian Johnstone, while writers including Elizabeth Gaskell, the Brontës, Harriet Martineau, Catherine Crowe, Charlotte Yonge, Geraldine Jewsbury, Elizabeth Sewell, Eliza Lynn (later Linton), Margaret Oliphant, and Harriet Maria Gordon (later Smythies) were beginning or developing their literary careers.

Mere years after poet laureate Robert Southey's now infamous 1837 advice to Charlotte Brontë that 'Literature is not the business of a woman's life, and it cannot be' (Robert Southey to Charlotte Brontë, 12 March 1837), women writers of the 1840s were demonstrably, and in a multiplicity of ways, proving him wrong. By the late 1840s, the dominance of male writers such as Charles Dickens and William Thackeray was being challenged by the success of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, and Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848). These controversial—even confrontational—accounts of women's socially disadvantaged state, and the extreme measures to which the heroines are driven in combating the limitations of their lives, form a determined opposition to the dictates of more traditional