



EDITED BY
Adrienne E. Gavin &
Carolyn W. de la L. Oulton

**BRITISH
WOMEN'S
WRITING FROM
BRONTË TO
BLOOMSBURY,**

VOLUME 2
1860s and 1870s



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

Series Editors

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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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‘Mary Elizabeth Braddon with Horse.’ (Image courtesy of the Mary Braddon Archive, International Centre for Victorian Women Writers (ICVWW), Canterbury Christ Church University)

To the conversation (and to making it new in the time of COVID-19)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is the second 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 nineteenth century 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, and Michelle Crowther and Ian Simpson for curating and advising on the Mary Braddon Archive. Crucially we would like to thank Susanna Avery for allowing the ICVWW to house this important archive. 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 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. 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. Second, the ongoing rediscovery of neglected women writers and texts (for example, through publication of scholarly editions) has created a demand for a supporting body of critical work. Third, 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 fourth, 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 tourists. 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 and 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 each new decade brings. 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 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 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 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, different as their agendas, styles, and subgenres may be. 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 themselves to 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 in to 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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Alyson Hunt has recently completed a PhD at Canterbury Christ Church University, researching the role of dress in Victorian short crime stories. A former Assistant Reviews Editor for *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies*, she has guest-edited a special edition of *Victorians Journal* on Women of the Press in the 1890s (December 2017). She is also the Research Associate for the International Centre for Victorian Women Writers for which she has co-convened five international conferences, produced exhibitions, devised a digital adventure, and staged a mock trial. Her chapter ‘Fashioning Modernity in *Fin-de-Siècle* Serialised Crime Fiction’ is published in *Fashion and Material Culture in Victorian Fiction and Periodicals* (2019) ed. by Nickianne Moody and Janine Hatter (Edward Everett Root).

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Catherine Pope was awarded her PhD in 2014 by University of Sussex for her thesis on feminism in the novels of Florence Marryat. She is now a publisher and freelance workshop facilitator. Her publications include an entry on Rhoda Broughton for Oxford Bibliographies, a critical edition, with Troy Bassett, of Helen C. Black’s *Notable Women Authors of the Day* (2011), and a chapter on marital violence in *For Better, For Worse: Marriage in Victorian Novels by Women* (2018). She has recently finished writing a monograph on Florence Marryat for Edward Everett Root’s Key Popular Women Writers series. She is the founder and managing director of Victorian Secrets, an independent publishing house dedicated to producing high-quality books from and about the nineteenth century.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

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

This volume is the second in 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 1860s and the 1870s, 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 exploring women's fiction within the social and cultural contexts of the 1860s and 1870s, the collection distils in terms of women's writing how these decades discretely build on earlier

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work that is identifiably Victorian. In doing so, it reveals both points of departure and thematic and stylistic continuities.

The achievements and influence of the Brontës in the 1840s and 1850s, and of George Eliot from the 1850s, had already placed women's writing in the spotlight. That these writers published pseudonymously in itself drew attention to the ambiguous status of women authors, whose proliferation had been the subject of much agitated commentary in the 1850s. From the 1860s the stage was set for an intense, even obsessive, examination of gendered authorship—the question of who could write what, for whom, and in what context, is played out across both literary criticism and fiction from this point in the nineteenth century.

Defined historically by decade, with chapters ordered chronologically to suggest shifting emphases in fiction as each decade progresses, the volume considers a broad range of developments in female writing. It reveals that women's writing of the 1860s was able to incorporate melodramatic events into a realist mode, challenging readers to re-examine the type of novel they thought they were reading. In turn, female-authored fiction of the 1870s began to turn away from sensation to the serious, made women's relationship to money central, and voiced the unvoiced including in relation to physical sensation and female desire.

From the emotive articles in the popular press one might be forgiven for thinking that by the 1860s 'a book without a murder, a divorce, a seduction, or a bigamy, is not apparently considered worth either writing or reading; and a mystery and a secret are the chief qualifications of the modern novel' ('The Popular Novels' 262). As the chapters in this volume show, sensation fiction does not have a monopoly on provoking or depicting physical sensation and affect, nor on representations of empathetic grief and difficult emotion. Following the death of Prince Albert in 1861 Queen Victoria entered a period of public mourning that persisted until her death 40 years later. The need to balance private feeling with public restraint emerges as a serious concern in a number of female-authored novels from this time.

Time itself is examined in new ways, as it becomes increasingly unstable or at least multivalent in the context of scientific discovery and technological advance. Time was at one and the same time hugely expanded by evolutionary theory, most notably propounded in Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, and—at the other end of the spectrum—collapsed through the sense of ever-increasing speed associated with the continued expansion of railway and transport networks throughout the 1860s and 1870s. As Elizabeth Ludlow argues in her chapter on Gaskell in this volume, that

‘the secret of Dunster’s murder (in *A Dark Night’s Work* [1863]) is uncovered through the process of railway expansion is indicative of how, in a decade that saw a boom in train lines, technological progress transformed the spatial and temporal landscape of individual lives.’ Indeed both Ludlow and Andrew F. Humphries here point to railway expansion as central to the discovery or solving of crimes, while ‘Gaskell responds to the pressures of time with an emphasis on the urgent need for reconciliation’ (Ludlow).

Greater mobility is also linked to the theme of disguise and the infiltration of the middle-class home by dissident adventurers in a number of sensation novels. The increasing difficulty of sustaining and policing social networks is set against the assurance that the criminal or interloper will finally be detected, as the rail network pits antagonists against each other in a race to discover or efface the past. The difficulty of recognizing figures from the past is also depicted in more nuanced ways across genres during these decades. Both Gaskell’s *Sylvia’s Lovers* (1860) and Ellen Wood’s *East Lynne* (1861) feature disfigured parents returning in disguise to see their children; while in Anna Sewell’s *Black Beauty* (1877) Black Beauty does not initially recognize ‘an old worn-out chestnut, with an ill-kept coat and bones that showed plainly through it’ as his once glorious friend Ginger (*Black Beauty* 131).

The volume is structured in two parts, each devoted to one decade so that specific trends can be identified. As Lucy Hartley observes, ‘the possibilities for a writerly life for nineteenth-century women were various and the gendered division of literary work from home work was surmountable, though not, as ever, without struggles or steadfastness’ (16). Both struggles and steadfastness are evidenced in women’s lives and fiction of the 1860s and 1870s, with female authors not only driving and adhering to new trends but also reacting against and varying them.

The 1860s were acutely conscious of the sensational possibilities offered by a new generation of writers. Exploring, complicating, or simply contesting this new genre provided one means by which a woman writer could define her own position in the literary marketplace. In the 1870s women writers continued to draw on the creative opportunities that 1860s sensation writing had made available. Developing an increasingly serious focus, some novelists such as Eliot and Sewell produced works that were at once powerfully affective and concerned with moral questions on a level deeper than the ‘moral’ or ‘improving’ literature that had so often been the assumed literary lot of the Victorian woman author. Women’s relationship to money also became a key 1870s concern.

WOMEN'S WRITING OF THE 1860s

The 1860s saw new developments in technology as well as the early stages of what has been termed the 'Victorian crisis of faith' in the context of the Higher Criticism and Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859). At the same time, the press provided a new critical focus on women's writing and intense debate over the limits within which it should confine itself, as well as a renewed attention to its impact on female readers in particular, who supposedly needed to be policed for their own safety. While for the increasingly public female author literature in these years might be 'simply treated as an accessible profession' (Peterson 47), the visceral nature of reading is nowhere better exemplified than in the supposed dangers of sensation fiction, in which the bodies of heroines on the page assume a dangerous physiological function in channelling not only affective responses but also physical arousal in their unsuspecting female readers.

The desire to redefine social identities as well as to establish connections and form new and extended social groups manifested itself in other ways during this decade as cartomania, the collection of small photographs and *cartes de visite*, reached a peak alongside the explosion of female-authored railway reading associated with W. H. Smith and the ever increasing dominance of Mudie's circulating library. The debate over whether railway travel encourages the reading of more exciting, fast-paced fiction has never been wholly resolved. That it was widely believed to do so in the 1860s suggests that the publication of *Lady Audley's Secret* in 1862, the same year that London Victoria railway station first opened a direct line to a public keen to find quicker and more convenient routes to the seaside resorts in Kent, is coincidental but could hardly have been better planned.

The modern women's movement began in the 1860s, exemplified by the setting up of the feminist Victoria Press by Emily Faithfull in 1860, a parliamentary petition for female suffrage in 1866, John Stuart Mill's drafting of an amendment (which failed to pass) to the Second Reform Act in 1867 that would have given voting rights to female property owners, and both the inauguration (as the College for Women) of Girton College, Cambridge, and the publication of Mill's *On the Subjection of Women* in 1869. In 1869, too, the 'Edinburgh Seven,' led by [Sophia Jex-Blake](#), became the first women to matriculate at a British university. Having won the right to study medicine at the University of Edinburgh, they were not allowed to take degrees or practise medicine (unless qualifying in Paris or elsewhere), but the opening of higher education to women had begun. In

1865 Elizabeth Garrett Anderson had become the first woman to be granted a licence to practise in medicine (through a loophole that was soon closed). The publication of Isabella Beeton's *Book of Household Management* in 1861 and Eliza Warren's bestseller *How I Managed My Household on £200 a Year* (1864) and *How I Managed My Children from Infancy to Marriage* (1865) stood as reminders of the ways in which female authors could become commercially successful without overtly breaking gender codes. A more extreme stance was adopted by the novelist Eliza Lynn Linton, whose own domestic irregularities did not prevent her from publishing a notorious series of antifeminist articles in *The Saturday Review*, beginning with 'The Girl of the Period' in 1868, in which she fulminated against the 'vitiating taste' of this immodest but characteristically modern young woman (340). These trends developed alongside and sometimes in opposition to less positive events, such as the death of Prince Albert in 1861, the major cholera outbreak that was particularly serious for large cities such as London in 1866, and the series of Contagious Diseases Acts (1864, 1866, and 1869) designed to regulate and compulsorily treat sexually diseased prostitutes (although not their clients) in English key ports such as Chatham. Class and gender debates also intersected in this decade, with the International Working Men's Association being founded in 1864 with Karl Marx giving the opening address.

By the 1860s women authors may have been under close scrutiny, but they were also able to position themselves in a new tradition by responding to recent literary models that were identifiably Victorian, as they successfully built on the achievements of 1850s genre fiction to shape and sometimes contest the emerging sensation fiction for which the 1860s remain famous. In the 1840s, at the start of the period covered by this series, the provincial fiction of the Brontës and others strongly suggests that gender roles were still in flux. This may have been especially true for communities that retained some degree of isolation across the country, as they started to construct new models of femininity under the first female monarch in more than 200 years. Coventry Patmore's 'The Angel in the House,' published in parts between 1854 and 1862, offered what is still perhaps the century's most famous model of conservative gender politics.

In the 1860s women authors continued to respond to the work of Charlotte Brontë, who had died in 1855, but who remained a much-contested prototype for the 'reclusive spinster novelist.' Julia Kavanagh also highlighted the importance of 'long dead' women writers of pre-Victorian generations 'to the formation of the modern novel' in her

two-volume *English Women of Letters: Biographical Sketches* (1863) (Kavanagh, 'To the Reader' n.p.). Brontë's biographer Elizabeth Gaskell died in 1865, and at around the same time a new generation of women authors was starting to attract attention, as they variously responded to earlier traditions and found new modes of expression. Mary Braddon published *Three Times Dead (The Trail of the Serpent)* in 1860; Ellen Wood won a temperance competition with *Danesbury House* in the same year, and Rhoda Broughton challenged the boundaries of the sensation genre in a series of novels beginning with *Not Wisely, But Too Well* in 1867.

Women were, and could be seen to be, articulating a very public response to the demands and opportunities of modernity by the 1860s as symbolized on the one hand by the growing railway network and the increased leisure time of the middle and upwardly mobile classes, and on the other by the continuing debate over female employment. These responses included philanthropic and religious novels as well as aesthetically beautiful drawing-room volumes (a number of which were printed by Faithfull's Victoria Press) and a growing network of women writing journalism and serial fiction in the press. At the same time the 'newly combined and (to women) newly available role of author-editor was a position that could influence the ways in which fiction was shaped, produced, and consumed' (Palmer 3). Women's contributions to newspapers and periodicals meant, in effect, that they joined the debate about their own fitness to participate in public life, and gained a level of control over the terms on which women authors should be read. Drawing attention to Florence Wilford's novel *Nigel Bartram's Ideal* (1869), Elaine Showalter shows how women writers overtly engage in these debates. The eponymous character has written brutally about a pseudonymous female author, whom he unknowingly goes on to marry. Only his own illness makes him realize that 'just as it is no shame for a man to be weak, it is no disgrace for a woman to be strong,' enabling the couple to become 'literary partners' (Showalter 124).

The construction of a body of literature that could comment on and explain—perhaps if necessary even contain—this new sense of modernity necessarily came to include a high degree of self-consciousness about the positioning of the female author in particular, a critique that became increasingly polarized as the sensation craze took hold. The chapters in the current volume offer a reminder that not all women writers were tempted to climb onto this particular bandwagon. However, some of those who did so seem unlikely contenders, given the immoral associations of the