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

Series Editors
Adrienne E. Gavin
Department of English and Language Studies
Canterbury Christ Church University
Canterbury, UK

Carolyn W. de la L. Oulton
Department of English and Language Studies
Canterbury Christ Church University
Canterbury, UK
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.

More information about this series at http://www.palgrave.com/gp/series/15858
‘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)
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.

ICVWW Research Associate Alyson Hunt has worked tirelessly and imaginatively, bringing verve and new ideas to the centre from its inception; thanks are also due to Susan Civale for her enthusiastic organization.
of and contribution to research events, and to Lizzie Sheppard for her innovative work launching and editing the ICVWW’s newsletter.

Thank you to Palgrave Macmillan, especially editor Ben Doyle and Camille Davies for their enthusiasm for the project and support for making its publication a co-imprint with the ICVWW.

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.
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 *Rroomscape: 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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Danielle Charette is a PhD candidate with the University of Chicago’s Committee on Social Thought, USA, where she focuses primarily on modern political theory and the rise of commercial society. She holds a BA in English Literature from Swarthmore College and in her work draws on literary examples whenever possible.


Fionnuala Dillane is Associate Professor in Nineteenth-century British Literature at University College Dublin (UCD). Published works include essays on George Eliot, periodical print cultures, and memory studies; *Before George Eliot: Marian Evans and the Periodical Press*, joint winner of the Robert and Vineta Colby Prize for 2014; *The Body in Pain in Irish Literature and Culture*, co-edited with Naomi McAreavey and Emilie Pine (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); and *Ireland, Slavery, Anti-Slavery, Empire*, co-edited with Maria Stuart and Fionnghuala Sweeney (2018). She is Associate Dean for Arts and Humanities at UCD.
Adrienne E. Gavin is Emeritus Professor of English Literature and Co-founder and Honorary Director of the International Centre for Victorian Women Writers (ICVWW), Canterbury Christ Church University, UK. She is also an Honorary Academic at The University of Auckland, New Zealand. Author of Dark Horse: A Life of Anna Sewell (2004), the proposal for which won the Biographer’s Club Prize, she has produced critical editions of Caroline Clive’s Paul Ferroll (2008), Henry de Vere Stacpoole’s The Blue Lagoon (2010), C. L. Pirkis’s The Experiences of Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective (2010), and Anna Sewell’s Black Beauty (2012). She is editor of The Child in British Literature (2012) and Robert Cormier (2012) and co-editor with Christopher Routledge of Mystery in Children’s Literature (2001), with Carolyn W. de la L. Oulton of Writing Women of the Fin de Siècle (2011), and with Andrew F. Humphries of both Childhood in Edwardian Fiction (2009; winner of the Children’s Literature Association Edited Book Award), and Transport in British Fiction: Technologies of Movement, 1840–1940 (2015).

Margaret Harris is Challis Professor of English Literature Emerita at The University of Sydney. Her publications on Victorian literature include George Eliot in Context (2013), The Journals of George Eliot (1998), with Judith Johnston, and an edition of Middlemarch, also with Judith Johnston, together with The Notebooks of George Meredith (1983), with Gillian Beer, and editions of several of Meredith’s novels. She also publishes on Australian fiction of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Janine Hatter’s research interests centre on nineteenth-century literature, art, and culture, with particular emphasis on popular fiction. She has published on Mary Braddon, Bram Stoker, the theatre and identity, Victorian women’s life writing, short stories as a genre, and nineteenth- to twenty-first-century Gothic. She is co-editor of New Paths in Victorian Fiction and Culture and Key Popular Women Writers for Edward Everett Root Publishers. She has co-edited a collection on Fashion and Material Culture in Victorian Fiction and Periodicals, as well as special issues for the Wilkie Collins Journal, Revenant, Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies, Supernatural Studies, and Femspec. She is conference co-organizer for the Victorian Popular Fiction Association and has co-founded the Mary Elizabeth Braddon Association.

Tamar Heller Associate Professor of English and Comparative Literature at University of Cincinnati, Heller is the author of Dead Secrets: Wilkie
Collins and the Female Gothic (1992) and has co-edited Scenes of the Apple: Food and the Female Body in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Women’s Writing (2003) and Approaches to Teaching Gothic Fiction: The British and American Traditions (2003). She has worked extensively on Rhoda Broughton and has edited both of Broughton’s earliest novels, Cometh Up as a Flower (2004) and Not Wisely, but Too Well (2013). She is writing a study of Broughton’s work entitled A Plot of Her Own: Rhoda Broughton and English Fiction and will also be co-authoring, with Graziella Stringos, a monograph on Broughton for the series Key Popular Women Writers (Edward Everett Root Publishers).

Clare Horrocks is Senior Lecturer in Media, Culture, and Communication at Liverpool John Moores University, UK, and is the Project Lead on a major collaborative project with Gale Cengage publishers working on transcribing and digitizing the Punch Contributor Ledgers 1843 to 1919. She is the author of Reassessing the Social and Cultural Dynamics of Punch: A Methodological Approach for a Digital Age (2017) and is working on an anthology of contributions from many of the unknown women contributors of the magazine for publisher Victorian Secrets.

Andrew F. Humphries holds a PhD in English from University of Kent and an MA from Cambridge University and is Senior Lecturer in English Education at Canterbury Christ Church University, UK, where he also lectures and supervises undergraduate and postgraduate students in English literature, specializing in twentieth-century literature and modernism. He has published a monograph D. H. Lawrence, Transport and Cultural Transition: ‘A Great Sense of Journeying’ (Palgrave 2017) and is co-editor with Adrienne E. Gavin of both the international award-winning Childhood in Edwardian Fiction: Worlds Enough and Time (Palgrave 2009) and Transport in British Fiction: Technologies of Movement 1840–1940 (Palgrave 2015). His main research focus is modernist writers and themes and particularly the relationship between technology (transport especially) and literature. He is also interested in representations of the child and childhood in literature. He has taught and presented papers on British drama, Victorian literature, and children’s literature. His doctoral study was on D. H. Lawrence and modernism, but he has also published on H. G. Wells, E. M. Forster, Katherine Mansfield, and Robert Cormier and has forthcoming chapters on Elizabeth Braddon and Dorothy Richardson.
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).

Elizabeth Ludlow is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, UK. She is the author of Christina Rossetti and the Bible: Waiting with the Saints (2014) and has published articles in peer-reviewed journals including the Gaskell Journal, Literature Compass, Victorian Review, and English Literature in Transition, 1880–1920. Her research project considers prayer and the female body in Victorian women’s writing.

Tara MacDonald is an assistant professor at University of Idaho, USA. She is the author of The New Man, Masculinity, and Marriage in the Victorian Novel (2015) and co-editor, with Anne-Marie Beller, of Rediscovering Victorian Women Sensation Writers (2014). She is reviews editor for the Wilkie Collins Journal and has published articles and book chapters on Victorian masculinity, sensation fiction, and neo-Victorian fiction.

Nickianne Moody was Principal Lecturer in Media and Cultural Studies at Liverpool John Moores University, UK, until her death in 2019. Her interests included early science fiction and fantasy writing, particularly by women writers, gothic and late twentieth-century feminist and cyberpunk utopias and dystopias. Her work tends to address the representation of animals and the environment, especially with regard to visual culture. Her latest research was based on the Liddell Hart Collection of Costume held at Liverpool John Moores University and co-ordinating public engagement with the Femorabilia Collection. Her publications include work on most popular genres, nineteenth- and twentieth-century fiction, popular culture, and more specifically cultures of reading. She was a vibrant presence and a respected scholar, as well as a good friend to many of the contributors to this series.

Carolyn W. de la L. Oulton is Professor of Victorian Literature and Director of the International Centre for Victorian Women Writers at Canterbury Christ Church University, UK. She is the author of *Literature and Religion in Mid-Victorian England: From Dickens to Eliot* (Palgrave Macmillan 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 (with SueAnn Schatz) of *Mary Cholmondeley Reconsidered* (2009), and (with Adrienne E. Gavin) of *Writing Women of the Fin de Siècle* (Palgrave 2011). Her most recent poetry collection is *Accidental Fruit* (2016). She is researching the reading culture and literary representation of seaside resorts 1840s–1930s.

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.

Melissa Purdue is Associate Professor of English at Minnesota State University, Mankato, USA. She has published *New Woman Writers, Authority and the Body* with Stacey Floyd (2009) and a critical edition of
Rosa Praed’s *Fugitive Anne: A Romance of the Unexplored Bush* (2011). Her most recent publications have been in *Domestic Fiction in Colonial Australia and New Zealand* (Ed. by Tamara Wagner, 2014) and *The Latchkey: Journal of New Woman Studies*. She is also a founding editor/co-editor-in-chief of *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies*. 
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

A. E. Gavin (✉)
Department of English and Language Studies, Canterbury Christ Church University, Canterbury, UK
e-mail: adrienne.gavin@cantab.net

C. W. de la L. Oulton
School of Humanities, Canterbury Christ Church University, Canterbury, UK
e-mail: carolyn.oulton@canterbury.ac.uk

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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 prolif-
eration had been the subject of much agitated commentary in the 1850s.
From the 1860s the stage was set for an intense, even obsessive, examina-
tion 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 vol-
ume 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 wom-
en’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 depict-
ning 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 technologi-
cal advance. Time was at one and the same time hugely expanded by evo-
lutionary 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
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 ‘vitiated 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