

WHAT IS INTERDISCIPLINARY ABOUT VICTORIAN HISTORY TODAY?

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In the 1990s, scholars rediscovered melodrama.¹ The theatre of hysteria, spectacular stage effects, contrived coincidences, dashing brigands, heroic jack tars, screaming maidens and scheming stewards had formerly been viewed as an embarrassing feature of nineteenth-century life. Theatre historians such as Michael Booth and Louis James had certainly extolled its virtues and recreated its hold on popular culture but otherwise its trite sentimentality rendered it too trivial to be taken seriously by social historians or critics. It was the literary scholar Peter Brooks who put melodrama on the scholarly map in a new way. Following his lead, a variety of nineteenth-century specialists came to insist that the ‘melodramatic imagination’ was a vital constituent of the Victorian frame of mind.² If the world view of men and women of the nineteenth century was shaped partly by theatre and performance, then melodrama provided a means to study politics, gender, reportage and, more generally, structures of feeling. Judith Walkowitz, for example, reconstructed the role of melodrama in late Victorian moral panics about sexuality and child prostitution.³ Stalwarts of the mid-century Sensation Novel such as Mary Elizabeth Braddon were taken seriously once more.⁴ Melodramatic language and styles of performance were held to have shaped forms of self presentation. Popular radicalism and even the culture of elections allegedly followed a melodramatic script. This ‘melodramatic turn’ was experienced in History, Literature and Art History. What concerns us here is that melodrama’s impact on nineteenth-century culture excited a lively conversation between academic disciplines which was symptomatic of a wider shift in the way that the Victorians were being discussed in the academy. New understandings of the Victorians (and much else) required that formal disciplinary boundaries could no longer be policed in a dogmatic way. New kinds of academic conversation were apparently becoming possible.

We hear a lot about interdisciplinarity these days.⁵ In a variety of locations and sites – in the British Association of Victorian Studies, the North American Victorian Studies Association, in periodicals such as *The Journal of Victorian Culture* or *Victorian Studies*, in numerous Victorian Studies MA programmes – the insistent demand is that we need to dissolve formal academic boundaries.⁶ The New Historicism in Literature has had a huge

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impact although it was only one of a range of influences promoting interdisciplinary connections. The ‘Law and Literature’ school, for example, has enabled a thriving cross-fertilization of disciplines which has held that the Law is too important to be left to lawyers. Not settling for a treatment of lawyers in fiction, it has unraveled the narratives and forms of emplotment on which the law is based, comparing the evidentiary strategies employed both in the courtroom and the novel. After reading this work, neither the Victorian legal system nor the Victorian novel looks quite the same.⁷ Scholars enjoy the slightly transgressive feel of this kind of work; drawing on methodologies in which they have not technically been trained involves intellectual risk taking and the prospect of the condescension of academics from within the borrowed disciplines. There is nothing peculiar about the Victorian period in this respect. Scholars devoted to other periods would no doubt be able to make similar claims. Nevertheless, the experience of being a ‘Victorianist’ in recent years has been shaped by the need to pay attention to neighbouring disciplines. When scholars in Literature can write important articles about Victorian finance (normally the preserve of economic historians), then clearly we are working in a new and more challenging environment.⁸

But where does this leave History (my own discipline)? Have historians absorbed this new interdisciplinary ethos? Have historians abandoned their methodological conservatism and resistance to ideas from outside? It is hard not to miss the fact that many people giving interdisciplinary papers or writing similar articles in journals are not in History departments. My purpose here, however, is to argue that interdisciplinarity has shaped Victorian history in important respects and to reflect on this. The newer forms of cultural history in particular have provided an invigorating and challenging space for cross-disciplinary conversations (indeed, a lot of recent work in Literature has been essentially a form of cultural history). Historians have raised a series of important questions about the nineteenth century and about the category of the ‘Victorian’ that scholars in all disciplines need to attend to. We should historicise this new wave of interdisciplinary cultural history. I aim to intertwine an argument about interdisciplinarity with an overview of the trajectory of Victorian history and (to a lesser extent) Victorian Studies over the past one hundred years. As we move further into a new age (where the Victorians can no longer be described as being ‘in the last century’), there is a need to ask whether this new wave of interdisciplinarity in History is really making us look at the Victorians in new ways.

If we are going to interrogate the interdisciplinary nature of current scholarship, it is important to be clear what ‘interdisciplinarity’ itself means. Historians have long drawn on ideas derived from political and social science which they have considered cognate disciplines. Most would acknowledge that interdisciplinarity means more than a historian sticking in the odd reference to Thackeray or a literary critic citing Asa Briggs’ *The Age of Improvement*. As Martin Hewitt has trenchantly observed, much of what passes for interdisciplinary work is really a form of ‘multi-disciplinarity’, juxtaposing historical and literary approaches (he cites the Dyos and Woolf collection on *The Victorian City* as an example of this approach).⁹ But, as Joe Moran argues (drawing on Roland Barthes), interdisciplinarity has to be transformative in some way.¹⁰ It needs to produce conclusions that cannot be obtained through the normal academic channels; otherwise, it would have little to recommend it.

At the risk of placing the interdisciplinary bar too high (so that most scholars fail to make it), a genuinely interdisciplinary approach needs to do more than just demonstrate an awareness of what other disciplines are doing and must be more daring than the older approach based on juxtaposition. This is not a call to ditch the various protocols and forms of knowledge that are peculiar to the different disciplines or to create an indifferent form of analytical porridge that will please no one. The distinctive quality of interdisciplinary work is its readiness to ask questions of the different kinds of academic explanations available. This generates a certain self-consciousness of technique (evident in recent cultural history) but also an awareness of the varieties of explanation that can generate new insights. For example, it is no surprise that much interdisciplinary work has been based around performance of various kinds (the ‘melodramatic turn’ is an example of this). Issues around performativity and theatricality have required scholars to think about language, style, ideology, space, gender, class, emotions, the body, the body politic and the specific contexts within which events or speech acts take place. The critic W.J.T. Mitchell describes this approach as ‘top-down interdisciplinarity’: ‘a comparative, structural formation that aims to know the overarching system or conceptual totality within which all disciplines are related’.¹¹

I am concerned here with all attempts to create conversations between different disciplines whether by multi-disciplinary juxtaposition of approaches or by an awareness that no single discipline has a monopoly on the meanings of cultures and behaviour in the past.

However, the present article has been inspired by the ambition of certain historians who have wanted to think more broadly about their subjects and who have been drawn by the promise of cultural history into thinking seriously about issues that had previously been left to scholars in other disciplines. For example, a recent historian of race has produced provocative interpretations of *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* whilst a historian of credit has pursued her search not just through legal cases and account books but through fiction and they are not alone.¹² Perhaps the most striking example of interdisciplinarity can be found in the field of Victorian science where there has been a quite remarkable dialogue between historians and literature scholars.¹³

This article is made up of three sections. First, I intend to examine the shape of Victorian historiography to establish the peculiarities of where we are now. In doing this I demonstrate that interdisciplinarity is nothing new and that therefore we should view the current wave of cultural history as a reworking of existing trends of scholarship. This will be a far from exhaustive survey in which important books and tendencies will have to be ignored for reasons of space. In the second section, I review some of the post-1980 wave of interdisciplinary cultural history. The third section argues that one characteristic of current Victorian historiography is that it appears to resist the construction of revised syntheses that would provide new directions or make us think about the period as a whole in fundamentally new ways. Although the older themes that historians have employed to guide them (such as class and separate spheres) have been questioned, there have been fewer attempts to think anew about how Victorian Britain functioned as a social or cultural system. A lot of new scholarship essentially underwrites the older models that we have employed to understand the Victorians. Where might new syntheses or models come from? I will discuss the role of interdisciplinarity in pointing to this terrain which must surely preoccupy us over the next few years. I will end by reviewing the situation today and asking about the political pay-off of writing about the Victorians in the twenty first century.

I.

Interdisciplinarity came naturally to the Victorians themselves; middle and working-class readers often followed discussions in art, literature, science and technology without much attempt to police disciplinary boundaries (which were then in the process of formation). When

the history of the Victorian age came to be written, there was always an interdisciplinary element to it. In seeking to trace the interdisciplinary ethos of the post-1980 generation we should commence by noting the considerable continuity with earlier historians.

For example, G.M. Young's landmark evocation of the Victorian spirit, 'Portrait of an Age', first surfaced in his larger edited collection, *Early Victorian England*, in 1934.¹⁴ Although now remembered solely for Young's long essay which was subsequently reprinted separately, the two volumes were made up of a series of articles by leading authorities on many different aspects of Victorian life, including the army, the press, the theatre, the economy, town life and sport. In other words, they did not try to contain the Victorians within the then dominant narrative of constitutional or diplomatic history. The volumes were distinctive in their determination to provide a broader social history and to be interdisciplinary (although perhaps not in the sense that we might use the term today). There was a strong feeling in the books that art and literature were important. The collection was commissioned as a companion to similar volumes on *Shakespeare's England* and *Johnson's England* (its original title was *Dickens's England*). There were ninety three references to Dickens in the book and a strong sense that Victorian literature offered a form of social history (a view that has often provided a meeting point for scholars in Literature and History).

Indeed, Literature was one impulse (although certainly not the only one) for writing Victorian history. There was a need to research the background of the Victorians in order to explain the Victorian novel. E.P. Thompson's background was as much in Literature as in History; hence his first book was on William Morris (and his last was on William Blake). Asa Briggs wrote his pioneering article about the medical history behind *Middlemarch* as early as 1948, part of the rediscovery of George Eliot that characterized the immediate post-war period. Even at this early stage, Briggs was able to commence his article by saying that 'Victorian novels have long been accepted as useful source-books for the social historian'.¹⁵ Moreover, literary intentions were behind one of the most important publishing initiatives in the 1950s: Peter Quennell's editions of Mayhew.¹⁶ These provided a historical context for literature, giving readers the feeling they were getting Dickens' London for real (although a later generation of Mayhew scholars would make us see him rather differently) and restored Mayhew both as a central Victorian writer and an early social scientist.¹⁷ The BBC's 'Third Programme' also played an important part in developing an interdisciplinary assessment of

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the Victorians, broadcasting a series of fifty seven talks in 1948 on all aspects of nineteenth-century life and culture, although the producers found that ‘Genuine specialists in the period are surprisingly few’.¹⁸ That was about to change.

The 1950s witnessed an enormous growth in ‘Victorian Studies’ which we need to dwell on if we are to understand the peculiarities of recent work. Conceived very much as an interdisciplinary enterprise, studies of the nineteenth century gathered steam as higher education expanded. The journal *Victorian Studies* was founded at the University of Indiana in 1957. In its early days it would not accept articles unless they clearly drew on at least two disciplines (although this boldness was later modified to a belief that interdisciplinarity should be an ‘aspiration’).¹⁹ In Britain, interdisciplinarity was embedded in the curricula of some of the new universities of the 1960s, such as the University of Sussex, which (under Asa Briggs’ tutelage) took the lead in Victorian explorations. There had already been an interdisciplinary flavour to some of the work done in Victorian political history in the 1950s where there was an important cross-fertilisation between historians and political scientists who established what has been called the ‘electoral sociology’ school.²⁰ Whilst the 1960s produced important work in political history by Robert Blake, John Vincent and others, a huge wave of research emerged under the disciplinary label of ‘social history’.²¹ Asa Briggs, E.P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, Brian Harrison, Harold Perkin, J.F.C. Harrison and many others pioneered nineteenth-century social history, challenging the dominance and legitimacy of older forms of political history. Their use of social science also contrasted with the impressionistic approach of earlier historians such as G.M. Young. They aimed to uncover the laws of historical development and explain the distinctive civilization constructed by industrial capitalism. However, despite their concerns with society as a whole, their focus tended to be on the male working class (‘history from below’) rather than on the middle or upper classes, although Perkin and Briggs wrote about the ‘entrepreneurial ideal’ in government and middle-class reformers.²² Notoriously, there was relatively little attention devoted to Victorian women of any class. A number of these social historians (such as Thompson, Hobsbawm and John Saville) had been in the Communist Party Historians Group (and regarded the working class as the main agent of historical change). If it were not for the fact that they often described themselves as ‘Marxists’, it might be better to describe them as historians engaged in a critical dialogue with Marx (which better captures the non-reductive

and complex flavour of a lot of their work). These studies had obvious political implications (perhaps the only significant conservative social historian of Victorian Britain was the author of *The Age of Equipoise*, W.L. Burn).²³

Marxism as a system of thought always stressed the inter-connectedness of knowledge. Thus there were strong links between the above historians and figures such as Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams in Literature, Stuart Hall in Sociology and a range of figures in the growing discipline of Cultural Studies which many of the above helped to create. But interdisciplinarity did not stop there. The History Workshop movement aimed to foster interdisciplinary approaches (many of the papers at its early conferences were devoted to the nineteenth century). This was a time when historians such as Keith Thomas were urging a greater attentiveness to work in Anthropology.²⁴ Until well into the 1980s, it was usual for social historians to have some acquaintance with the methodology of Anthropology, particularly the work of Clifford Geertz, although this was more evident amongst early modern historians.²⁵ E.P. Thompson was a distinctive advocate of an anthropological approach which can be detected in *The Making of the English Working Class*. This explains his concern with popular rituals, traditions and indeed with the whole concept of ‘culture’.²⁶ Economic history also boomed; counting was the order of the day which meant that historians often had to learn statistical or quantitative methods. In the 1970s, the use of other disciplines was defined not so much by the word ‘interdisciplinarity’ but by whether historians should employ Critical Theory, an urge resisted by defenders of more empirical approaches. Nevertheless, the call to interdisciplinarity was an established feature of intellectual discussion well before the current generation.

Historians of the 1950s generation were drawn to the nineteenth century because it offered, as Harold Perkin put it, ‘the origins of modern English society’. Britain, in the post-1945 period, for all the talk of ‘embourgeoisement’, remained a society where class was extremely evident and this wave of social history spoke to that. To study the Victorians was to make sense of modern economics, social structure and class relations. It explained why Britain in the post-war world was at it was. Understanding nineteenth-century Britain might make a difference in the world of contemporary politics; there was nothing antiquarian about it. Post-war labour historians were inspired by earlier figures such as G.D.H. Cole who had managed to combine his path-breaking studies of Victorian radicalism with his role as public

intellectual and activist within the Labour Party (the Webbs provided another example). To recreate the Victorians as well as the broader outlines of British social and economic development represented in effect a contribution to public policy.

This was very much a generation. Eric Hobsbawm was born in 1917, Briggs in 1921, Thompson in 1924 and Perkin in 1926. They were the children of Victorians.²⁷ Generations of course do not always understand one another but there was a certain familiarity with the Victorian mindset if only because it remained so pervasive in the world into which they were born. It should also be said that this was a generation that grew up in the 1930s and was formed by the experience both of economic depression and then of total war (in which they participated in various ways).²⁸ Another feature of this period was the strong Anglo-American dimension, partly sparked by engagement with Victorian literature and embodied by the journal, *Victorian Studies*. Figures such as Richard Altick and R.K Webb in the United States produced pioneering studies on working-class consumption of fiction that paralleled comparable work that was being done in Britain by Louis James.²⁹ *The Other Victorians*, an examination of pornography and sexual culture by the American critic Steven Marcus, expressed this new Anglo-American interdisciplinary tide. It was a literary work that doubled as a form of social history and was discussed as such by historians.³⁰ Marcus acknowledged that the Victorians had not only created the modern economy but also established the basis of modern sexual culture with its reticence and codes of silence. Marcus turned William Acton, the surgeon who claimed that women lacked sexual feelings, and ‘Walter’, author of the pornographic *My Secret Life*, into eminent (or, at least, iconic) Victorians. His reading of Victorian sexuality was subsequently absorbed by Michel Foucault in his history of sexuality. Americans in the aftermath of the Kinsey Report (Marcus undertook a lot of his research at the Kinsey Institute) considered themselves heirs to Victorianism as it had flourished in the United States although they were divided over whether this was a good or a bad thing.³¹ Marcus’ book was very much part of the taboo-busting rejection of Victorian hypocrisies that became the 1960s cultural revolution. We might even view *Victorian Studies* as a minor building block of Anglo-American culture. No one could deny that Victorian history mattered.

In retrospect, much of the burgeoning work on the nineteenth century reflected the economic growth of the 1950s and early 1960s. David Cannadine has marvelously pinpointed

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Asa Briggs as the great historian of the ‘white heat of technology’ era.³² The nineteenth century was a story of working-class misery but also of enormous growth, optimism and challenge. Victorian capitalism refashioned both Britain and the world. One of the key works was by the American economist, W.W. Rostow. His *British Economy of the Nineteenth Century*, coming as it did more than sixty years after Arnold Toynbee and a hundred years after Engels, was certainly not the first work on industrial development in Britain.³³ It did, however, provide the notion of ‘industrial take off’. Nineteenth-century Britain became a guide to how societies industrialise and modernise which imbued modern British history with an importance in the Third World (where it was often already being taught for imperial reasons). Britain provided a model of what to do and what to avoid. Thus Thompson’s *Making of the English Working Class* acknowledged that social and political struggles, lost in capitalist Britain, might still be won elsewhere in the world. Rostow’s work was not uncritically received. Indeed it fed into the violent debate about standards of living during the industrial revolution which mirrored many of the arguments of the Cold War as it was being fought amongst the British intelligentsia.³⁴ Scholars did not simply draw on economic history. The cultural counterpart to Rostow’s economic approach, Klingender’s *Art and the Industrial Revolution*, had been published a year earlier. Its Marxist approach prefigured comparable work such as Raymond Williams’ *Culture and Society*.³⁵ Klingender’s pioneering focus on art, literature, technology and commerce was an inspiration to the construction of interdisciplinary approaches (he commenced his book with figures such as Arthur Young and ended with Jules Verne). Both Rostow and Klingender provided a growth-driven account of the nineteenth century. This kind of interpretation had built-in obsolescence to some extent. Once the post-1945 years of growth came to an end, different kinds of nineteenth-century histories would need to be constructed which did not deny economic growth but explored the complexities of Britain’s economic performance. All history, as the saying goes, is contemporary history.

Readers will have noticed that I have tended so far to use the terms ‘nineteenth century’ and ‘Victorian’ as though they are interchangeable whereas, of course, they are not. The 1950s generation established modern Victorian Studies and wrote many works about the Victorians; yet, it is difficult to ignore the fact that many of the key works were actually about the immediate pre-Victorian era. After the late 1950s, E.P. Thompson ceased to write about

the Victorians.³⁶ Even Asa Briggs' influential textbook, *The Age of Improvement*, with its remarkable chapter on the rise of 'Victorianism', was devoted for half its length to the years before Victoria came to the throne and ended in 1867.³⁷ Many of these historians (even the non-Marxists) also had more of a commitment to the category of the 'nineteenth century', embodying a new stage in human history based on industrial-capitalist production, rather than the 'Victorian'. Their focus was particularly on working-class life (the word 'Victorian' has, rightly or wrongly, always seemed to fit more comfortably with the middle classes). Significantly, the autobiographies of Eric Hobsbawm and John Saville do not speak of any particular affinity with the idea of 'the Victorian'.³⁸ These historians were concerned with the larger processes of historical change. The Victorians were simply a chapter in a bigger story.

II.

Since the early 1980s, the term 'Victorian' has made something of a comeback. Some of this had to do with Margaret Thatcher. Her invocation of 'Victorian Values' in 1983 gave a purpose to Victorian history. The 'History Workshop' movement used a special 'Victorian Values' issue of the *New Statesman* to contest Mrs. Thatcher's interpretation.³⁹ On the Right, Gertrude Himmelfarb offered a reinterpretation of the Victorians and poverty, seeking to reclaim notions of virtue, morality and character that had allegedly been erased by the growth of welfare state ideology.⁴⁰ Discussing reformers such as Chadwick but also literary figures like Dickens, she embodied a particular kind of interdisciplinarity that has been encouraged by intellectual history. The Victorian era was never more relevant than it was during the high tide of Thatcherism. Significantly, more work was devoted to the mid-Victorian period whereas earlier research had tended to cluster around the early and late Victorian periods (the times of social crisis). This reflected a greater interest in the sources of social and political consensus, which built on the Labour Aristocracy debate of the 1970s and emphasized themes such as respectability.⁴¹ The Age of Equipoise was the period when, to use Perkin's phrase, the entrepreneurial ideal was at its height. It was the moment that was really evoked by the New Right when it spoke of Victorian values. Keith Joseph wrote an introduction to a new edition of Samuel Smiles' *Self Help* (1859) and proclaimed it 'a book for *our* times'.⁴² If Victorian economic liberalism could be shown to have delivered the goods (without recourse to an elaborate welfare state) at least for a time, then that might be held to vindicate the New

Right project. Moreover, Himmelfarb, as an American with close ties to the Republican party, had her eye on what the Victorians could teach the contemporary United States in the age of Reagan and Gingrich. In fairness, many of the leading Conservative historians did not write in such a polemical way but tended to focus on the history of High Politics.

But there were other reasons why historians came to engage with the category of 'the Victorian' in the post-1980 period. Issues concerning race, gender, post-modernism, sexuality and empire were obvious matters of interest to Victorianists. Many of the key works of the new Women's History were devoted to the nineteenth century, not least because the arguments around the construction of the ideologies of domesticity remained important in contemporary politics.

Above all, 'the Victorian' made a comeback because it proved hospitable to a new kind of cultural history which has pushed other forms of history aside and provided a space for dialogue with other disciplines. Before 1980, interpretations were shaped by Marx (for or against). Since then, the tendency has often been to offer a mixture of Foucault plus Habermas. Moreover, during the linguistic turn of the 1980s, literary forms of analysis, such as post-structuralism, swept across the Humanities raising issues about the interpretation and the deconstruction of texts. Significantly, literary scholars have always been slightly more comfortable with the label 'Victorian' than historians have been. Where historians formerly discussed class at great length, now they were as likely to talk about the social and political imaginary.⁴³ The big themes have been about the way in which, as the nineteenth century went on, language and institutions came to reshape human behaviour, emotions, manners and the public and private spheres. Moreover, historians have discussed how different kinds of space helped constitute new views of the social and to legitimate liberal notions of governmentality. These notions are compatible in some respects with older arguments about the rise of Victorianism and the enforcement of respectability and other disciplinary codes. A lot of recent work has also tended to focus on the middle classes and particularly on new forms of consumerism (perhaps reflecting the questions generated by the rise of Thatcherism). Again the label of 'Victorian' has fitted more comfortably with this kind of work.⁴⁴

Another shift in Victorian history has been caused by the rise of the idea of the 'long eighteenth century' that lasted, depending on who one reads, from 1688 to 1832.⁴⁵ For this newer generation the key economic historian was not Rostow but N.F.R. Crafts. Crafts argued

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that there was no great economic transformation before 1830. Industrial expansion was limited to a few core industries. Similarly, Raphael Samuel argued that most production in the mid-nineteenth century still took place in workshops rather than factories.⁴⁶ There was no great industrial takeoff in the early nineteenth century. Indeed this period had far more in common with the century that preceded it than with the world of mass production that would eventually succeed it. The emphasis was now on continuity rather than dramatic change. If there was no great social or economic transformation before 1830 (or, more properly, if the transformation that did take place was more complex than we realized), that at least made the period after 1830 slightly more distinctive and hence gave the word 'Victorian' a greater salience.⁴⁷

The work published on Victorian history since about 1980 has often been distinguished by a consciousness of the need to engage with other disciplines. Certainly, there have been many works that make no claim to employ anything other than the normal protocols of empirical historical research (there are good reasons for this to which I will return). Theoretical issues still remain a minority concern amongst historians. However, cultural history came to establish itself as the cutting edge of historical research, the area that promised new insights. There have been fewer demands that historians count or quantify and far more emphasis on textual analysis, the interpretation of visual sources and the need to interpret the wider cultural bricolage of the Victorian age.

This is the interdisciplinary atmosphere in which we find ourselves today. Few can ignore both the 'cultural turn' and the need to pay attention to other disciplines (except possibly in the area of foreign policy and diplomatic history but even here this is changing). However, it is not insignificant that many key recent works of Victorian cultural history have been produced by North Americans. This may reflect the way in which the American undergraduate system has resisted over-specialisation producing historians with a greater openness to ideas coming from elsewhere. It should also be noted that cultural history has tended to flourish more in the United States and in Europe than it has in Britain.⁴⁸

Although interdisciplinarity, as we have seen, is nothing new, there are some peculiar characteristics of the recent wave of literature. Whilst it may have been fostered by Marxism, the new wave is perhaps also the product of the decline of Marxism. There is less sense of the primacy of the economic that was a characteristic of the 1950s generation. Recent

cultural history does, however, build on the Thompsonian belief that culture can shape everything else (and to that extent represents a continuation of some elements of the work undertaken in the 1950s and 1960s). As the Cold War came to an end and the world became an even more complex place in the wake of September 11, the notion that it is culture that counts gave interdisciplinary-minded cultural historians a real purchase on the world.

Let us think about some of the agenda-setting works that make up modern Victorian history in its self-consciously interdisciplinary mode. These works are examples in my view of an interdisciplinarity that has a transformative dimension. Economic history, for example, has been reworked by the cultural turn. This is surprising because recent years have witnessed a reduction in attention to conventional economic history with its focus on production. Consumerism rather than production has become the main source of interest, offering to some extent a reinvention of economic history itself. The history of shopping and of material culture has proved extremely vibrant, not least because it raises issues about gender and the shifting demarcations between the public and the private spheres.⁴⁹ Victorian economic history since 1980 has had most impact in the form of the ‘gentlemanly capitalism’ debate and, in particular, its application to the British empire by Cain and Hopkins.⁵⁰ This debate was marked by the recent concern about the divided nature of British capitalism and the complex role of the financial sector in British economic development.⁵¹ However, Martin Wiener’s controversial interpretation of British economic history in 1981, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit*, was distinctive for placing culture centre stage and reflected a notion that culture was not (to put it in Marxist terms) merely part of the superstructure.⁵² In Wiener’s view, the anti-urban and even (to some extent) anti-capitalist values of the elite helped contain the entrepreneurial ethos of the middle class and led to economic decline. Politicians of Right and Left seized on it as an important state-of-the-nation book that explained why Britain was at it was. Much of the criticism by historians dealt with issues such as the legitimacy of using literary sources to illustrate the capitalist (or, in this case, the anti-capitalist) mindset and contested his account of economic change.⁵³ The importance of this book in the long term may rest not so much on whether it was wrong or right as in the fact that it marked a coming of age for cultural history, daring to intrude into questions of economic development.

Histories of sexuality and the body have witnessed a considerable interdisciplinary encounter. Judith Walkowitz's work on narratives of sexual danger set out to undermine all policing of disciplinary boundaries. She incorporated the linguistic turn as well as arguments derived from gender studies, sociology, urban geography and, as we saw at the commencement of this article, ideas about melodrama.⁵⁴ The purpose was to deliver a rich cultural history that uncovered layers of meaning and shifted from the microanalysis of discrete events in the 1880s (such as the moral panics over child prostitution and Jack the Ripper) to a broader discussion of ideology, space, gender and power. Her postscript on the Yorkshire Ripper murders of the early 1980s refused readers the consolation of assuming that the subject was part of a distant and depoliticised past (in contrast to the modern Jack the Ripper industry which trivializes the murder of a series of unfortunate women struggling to survive amidst bitter poverty by turning them into a gothic mystery). The payoff of this deployment of Foucauldian as well as feminist approaches was to reveal that narratives about sexual violence and women's ability to move in the public sphere retain their potency today. Victorian Britain remains terrifyingly contemporary. *City of Dreadful Delight* can profitably be read as a dialogue with a number of scholars in other disciplines such as Mary Poovey and Elaine Showalter in Literature and Lynda Nead in Art History (these authors demonstrate how limiting these disciplinary labels can be) who have deconstructed narratives about the body and Victorian sexuality with the implication that these narratives still continue to flourish and need unraveling.⁵⁵ These scholars also elaborated a landscape of sexual encounters that we can detect in, for example, the pastiche Victorian fiction of Sarah Waters (whose novels such as *Fingersmith* represent another kind of interdisciplinarity).

Increasingly, it is the politics of the personal that has come to exercise younger scholars which is why issues around identity, sexuality, gender and race bulk larger in the literature.⁵⁶ For example, Kali Israel's work on Emilia Dilke focused on the stories and texts that came to make up her subject.⁵⁷ Drawing on a variety of post-modernist ideas about theatricality and selfhood, Israel destabilised that most old fashioned of genres - biography. Lady Dilke, often considered an inspiration for Dorothea Brooke in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, was an effective subject for this kind of treatment given that she appeared to live several lives under different names (first as Francis Pattison the art historian and then, after her second marriage, as Emilia Dilke, pioneer trade unionist and participant in sexual

scandal). By refusing to provide a conventional biography, Israel was able to interrogate the assumptions about narrative that are deployed in the writing of a life. Literary theory and art history were used in the attempt to understand Dilke's identities and the stories that have circulated about her. Patrick Joyce and Miles Taylor have each done something not dissimilar (although with very different approaches and methodologies) by deconstructing the narratives that provided the reformer John Bright and the Chartist Ernest Jones with their powerful images.⁵⁸ These works raise questions about the construction of identity that are very different from the 1950s generation which was mainly interested in class as a form of identity rather than the narratives of romanticism, tragedy and patriotism that went into the making of Victorian public figures.

It is significant that one of the most fertile areas in the history of radicalism in recent years has been the exploration of the relationship between politics, fiction and poetry in the first half of the nineteenth century leading to an extensive interdisciplinary conversation.⁵⁹ Although many of the earlier generation were interested in Literature as we have seen, few took seriously the fact that some leading radicals wrote fiction even though this provides us with important clues about their sense of self, their politics and their moral purpose. John Saville's biography of Ernest Jones had virtually nothing to say about his fiction (although he did include a number of his poems), preferring to focus on his political life.⁶⁰ The modern interdisciplinary dialogue made possible new approaches in which figures such as G.W.M. Reynolds, the Chartist, melodramatic novelist and journalist, could be reclaimed as an important political commentator whilst the extensive columns in the *Northern Star* devoted to literature (it even ran a 'Beauties of Byron' column at one point) could be viewed both as an instrument of the political struggle and as an attempt to restore the dignity of working-class lives by showing them to be capable of feeling and sensitivity.⁶¹ The melodramatic turn was part of a wider concern with issues around performance and social life. Theatricality now turned up as an analytical category in some apparently unlikely locations. James Jaffe, for example, has taken the traditional Labour History subject of the development of collective bargaining by unions and employed performance theory to understand the dramaturgical nature of negotiations between unions and management.⁶² We are now a long way from the world of G.D.H. Cole or the Webbs' history of trade unions. It is possible to envision in future a productive dialogue between historians and practitioners of Theatre Studies (who are

the people who have been thinking very productively about the meanings and uses of performance although, as the melodramatic turn demonstrates, there are other disciplines which have been taking performance seriously as well).

The British empire has also provided a meeting place for discussions between disciplines. Catherine Hall (who in the best interdisciplinary fashion has been associated with both Sociology and History departments as well as the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies) has drawn extensively on post-colonial theory, including the work of Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and others, to explore the way in which the empire shaped British society.⁶³ The colonial encounter between Baptist missionaries and people in Jamaica marked both sides. The empire shaped Birmingham nonconformity in a profound way not least through the development of new, allegedly scientific ideas about race. However, one limitation of recent work has been the lack of concern with foreign policy or the way in which Europe shaped Britain (although there are signs that this is changing).⁶⁴

Peter Bailey's work on popular culture since the 1980s has been characterised by a concern to play around with a series of ideas from Critical Theory, Cultural Studies and Sociology. These provided him with vehicles to deconstruct the meaning of figures such as George Leybourne's music hall character 'Champagne Charlie' or the parasexual appeal of the barmaid. Tracing the meaning of erotic encounters in railway carriages led him to draw on the sociological literature on the uses of space.⁶⁵ Bailey's explorations have been distinguished by a theoretical adventurousness which he has combined with a concern to understand not only representations but also the strategies that the Victorian working classes employed to deal with the commodities and pleasures of metropolitan life. Mass culture was not something that was simply imposed on the workers to keep them quiet (essentially the Frankfurt School view) but it was also a 'laboratory of style' in which workers could try on and play around with new identities offered by fashion, advertising, the stage and the pub.⁶⁶ Class remained an issue but Bailey discerned a wider range of identities offered by the modern city. Identity was complex and ambiguous, something that could be performed, enjoyed and abandoned according to context (precisely the point that much critical and gender theory was making).

All these works are examples of good-natured interdisciplinary theft on the part of historians. They have broadened the scope of 1950s social history (which, as we have seen,

always took culture seriously) but have transformed it by taking seriously different kinds of representations which they have equipped with agency. Images and symbols in this view do not passively reflect the social order but also, in various senses, create it. There has been more focus on literary approaches and rather less on sociological insights. That is why cultural history has become more fashionable than social history in recent years.

The use of other disciplines or the participation in a hybrid world of interdisciplinarity by historians has been partial (something that is probably true of all disciplines). Interdisciplinarity often remains an aspiration rather than an achievement. It is usually characterised by a spirit of omnivorous borrowing rather than a fully theorised or thought-through approach to the past. Moreover, Victorian history still has some way to go in absorbing the 'pictorial turn' that has been evident elsewhere and which is a counterpart to the linguistic turn which has so occupied social historians.⁶⁷ Historians of the nineteenth century need to think more deeply about the use of visual sources and learn from art historians; they still essentially deal in the written word and need to reflect further on the meaning of images although historians of other periods have proved more adept at this.⁶⁸ We need to think far more about how the Victorians negotiated between the written word (in which many had so much faith) and a visual culture that was being remade with the spread of spectacular images whether in the form of advertising or painting. This no doubt reflects the concern of our age where the power of images (particularly images delivered electronically) have become so central to our sense of self. It does remind us that Victorians looked as well as read.

However, the relentless pressure to publish more and more frequently forces scholars to concentrate on less and less, to produce smaller scale projects rather than the more considered work that draws on various disciplines. To put it crudely, interdisciplinarity means twice the work. We should not therefore be surprised or judgemental to find scholars sticking to the research procedures of their own disciplines.

III.

The interdisciplinary tide of the post-1980 generation has certainly been invigorating. It has refreshed Victorian Studies in important ways and History has been an important part of that transformation. Issues around democracy and Britain's unwritten constitution have been projected back into the Victorian past to raise complex questions about the development of the electoral system which differ from approaches based on class consciousness.⁶⁹ The

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Victorian middle classes are now studied more intensively than the workers. These initiatives no doubt reflect the priorities of the post-socialist world, based around the Thatcherite settlement, in which scholars now live. This generation (it is of course really several generations) is very much of the post-war period, the products of the affluent society and social liberalism. Thus social class has come to be less of an issue despite the constant calls for 'race-class-gender' analyses.

However, the time has come to ask some difficult questions. Victorian history lacks synthesis in the present time. The broader forms of periodisation (such as the distinction between the early, mid and late Victorian eras) remain unquestioned for the most part. There is relatively little evidence of new thinking about how society functioned as a totality or at least a sense of the kind of science of society that historians are employing (something that was evident when Marxist approaches dominated the writing of social history). There have of course been synthetic works and textbooks, often of very high quality, published over the last few years. However, their portrait of the nineteenth century is a familiar one. To a large extent Victorian history is still living off the syntheses of the previous generation such as Briggs' *Age of Improvement* which was published in 1959. None of the more recent overviews have offered substantially new ways of thinking or have the authority of Briggs' treatment. We lack attempts to bring this new wave of interdisciplinary work together in any kind of systematic fashion.

Moreover, it is less clear what wider purpose Victorian history serves any more (beyond its intrinsic interest). The social and political context in which the 1950s generation conceived their nineteenth-century histories has disappeared. We are no longer in the age of Harold Macmillan or Harold Wilson. To put it crudely, what is the political pay-off of writing about the Victorians in the age of Tony Blair? As new accounts of the Victorians emerge, how might they be marked by this recent wave of interdisciplinarity that I have identified?

The lack of new syntheses is perhaps not surprising. We live in a post-modernist age where grand narratives are an object of suspicion. Moreover, the complexity and range of research now defies the generalist. The volume of material and the proliferation of journals has led to a fragmentation of the academic conversation. It also looks as if there is less work being devoted to Victorian history. Historians have been increasingly moved to work on either the eighteenth or the twentieth centuries. The absence of any new synthesis has perhaps

provoked the feeling that the Victorians have been covered and there are other worlds for historians to conquer. Symptomatic of this lack of intellectual adventure in Victorian history has been the relatively muted scholarly response to Richard Price's *British Society*, an important book of real stature that is a definite exception to this trend away from synthesis.⁷⁰ Price has produced a substantial challenge to Victorian history, arguing that most of the period that we associated with political, social and economic transformation, was instead characterised by a continuation of the post-1688 political settlement and social order. The real moment of transition to something approximating a modern polity and economy came in the 1880s - not the 1830s (a view, incidentally, that is not incompatible with Eric Hobsbawm's view of nineteenth-century social relations).⁷¹ Price's book was certainly widely reviewed and was often contested. However, the debate which it ought to have launched does not seem to have happened. The possibility of redefining where we stand in relation to the Victorians or to the periodisation of modern Britain seems to have been missed.

The tragedy is that recent interdisciplinary work suggests a range of possibilities out of which a new synthesis for the early twenty first century might be made. A new interpretation could be formulated around the construction and reconstruction of identities, spaces and emotions in the nineteenth century. This would include the new kinds of consciousness generated by the application of technology to many aspects of life as well as issues around race, nation, gender, class, status and religion amidst much else. The literature on the public and private spheres needs to be more fully integrated so that we can get a real measure of how they made a difference to Victorian life (including the impact of mass media).⁷² We need to think far more about how liberalism became a form of identity and governance.⁷³ Clearly we need to continue to scrutinise imperialism, both to understand how it changed the British but also to identify more clearly which aspects of life were untouched by empire.⁷⁴ Some of the most enduring forms of modern popular culture were created in the nineteenth century, an insight that can still be explored fruitfully and a reason why the Victorians still speak to the present day (a lot of recent work is in effect reconstructing the 'Victorian Society of the Spectacle'). This includes the press, something that many historians still do not think about.⁷⁵ Did the alleged transition from Romanticism to Victorianism bring about a change in consciousness and a different emotional economy? Here is an opportunity for dialogue between historians and literary scholars. Given the renewed attention to the

politics of the local and the locality, where does this leave arguments about the construction of the state and of a national and international market economy?⁷⁶ Are there ways of writing Victorian religious history that go beyond the Secularisation debate that has so often shaped the way faith has been discussed?⁷⁷ Following Richard Price, does the category of ‘the Victorian’ make sense? Finally, we need to continue asking the key question: does the nineteenth century really offer us the origins of modern British society? This last will provide the basis of any new synthesis that will make us think about Victorian Britain as a whole.

But there is another broader question that will determine the shape of the new nineteenth-century history. We will have to ask what cultural and political work should nineteenth-century history perform in the twenty first century.

In the twentieth century the Victorian experience was never far away from the minds of policy makers.⁷⁸ For some, the Victorian experience was important because it taught lessons about citizenship, the struggle for democracy and the benefits or wickedness of empire. For the Left, the Victorians were about the world we needed to get away from: the ‘other’ of modern social security is the workhouse; the ‘other’ of modern feminism is separate spheres. For Margaret Thatcher, the Victorian experience was clearly an inspiring moment (although her commitment to Victorian values, as many of her supporters would admit, was doubtful as she ushered in a credit boom that would have alarmed anyone who cared about the values of thrift).⁷⁹ The Victorians were also a powerful influence on the rethinking of the Left as it moved into a post-socialist phase in the 1990s. There was a renewed interest in liberalism of various kinds and a concern to revive those Victorian values that Margaret Thatcher had not revived such as public spiritedness, civic pride and localism.⁸⁰ However, class as a category appears to have been downgraded. It has been rethought as only one of many identities, subject to remaking (which is both a positive and a negative development). There is now a real danger that we are constructing a history of the nineteenth century in which the poor or the working class have been marginalized once more.

Sadly, the modern Left lacks the clarity and confidence of the post-war generation. On many of the leading issues of our time, the Left does not quite know what to say. No thought out alternative to New Labour or replacement for Socialism has been forthcoming in Britain (although the anti-globalisation movement might be seen as dealing with the legacy of the Victorians). It is therefore no surprise that historians on the Left have trouble generating a

position about the Victorian period. At the same time, there is a real clarity on the Right about the Victorians. Gertrude Himmelfarb and Niall Ferguson, to take the two most obvious figures, champion the values of classical liberalism and the ways in which the market economy triumphed. The forms of globalisation pioneered by the British empire changed the world (for the better in Ferguson's view).⁸¹ Moreover, the Right seems to take economic issues seriously in a way that historians of the Left have recently failed to do.

Will interdisciplinarity help us with any of this? It may be that interdisciplinarity is on the decline (given the way some British universities are abandoning interdisciplinary aspects of their programmes). Furthermore, too much might be expected of interdisciplinarity. It will not have all the answers; indeed its effectiveness will depend on how we formulate our questions. However, the business of the historian is to discern the patterns of the past and to develop ideas about historical change. It is difficult to imagine interdisciplinarity not being part of that project. The kind of synthesis I am calling for is one that can be inspired by Art and Theatre history but is also concerned to maintain a dialogue with other disciplines over the shifting uses of power (whether state power or personal power). In the examples of interdisciplinary work I cited above, we see something of that new kind of Victorian history beginning to form.

'The modern' or 'modernity' (which are in themselves extremely complex terms) meant something slightly different to scholars writing in the 1950s from what it means today. For them 'the modern' signified a world of industry and mass production much of which was still based in Britain. We have now allegedly entered an age of post-industrialism (at least in the West). This could of course make the steam-driven world of the Victorians appear less relevant in an age when modernity is often defined by electronic forms of communication. On the other hand, as Tom Standage's study of the early years of the telegraph, with its eye-catching title, *The Victorian Internet*, makes clear, we can discover in the Victorians the basis not only of modern technology but also of ways of thinking and communicating that are not entirely foreign to ourselves.⁸² The 2001 'Locating the Victorians' conference at Imperial College, London was distinguished amongst other things for its cross-disciplinary discussions about the role of technology in reshaping culture and ways of seeing. Scholars working on the emergence of cinema and its predecessors in the nineteenth century have already made us think about the sensations and structures of feeling that new technologies could produce.⁸³ It

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has become increasingly common to argue that cinema was essentially an outgrowth of Victorian culture with its demand for ever increasing verisimilitude in spectacle, rather than simply a scientific breakthrough.⁸⁴ Moreover, various aspects of Victorian life have come to the fore that continue to address the world in which we live. With so much production of goods based elsewhere in the world we need to continue thinking more about the creation of the globalised market place (which certainly did not originate in the nineteenth century but which became far more integrated in our period).⁸⁵ It is perhaps no surprise that in the 1980s there was a renewed focus on non-industrial sources of wealth, on the Victorian fortunes made in banking and insurance which reflected an era in which British manufacturing went to the wall and the City of London boomed. A recent editorial in *Victorian Studies* noted the remarkable similarities between the collapse of the 1990s dot.com bubble and the 1840s railway mania, as well as the Enron corruption scandal and the notorious collapse of the firm of Overend and Gurney in 1866.⁸⁶ Significantly, *Victorian Studies* is an American publication. It may well be that the world's leading superpower still has a lot to learn from the first superpower of the modern age. Whether we get the Victorians at their public-spirited best or at their hypocritical worst will be one of the questions of our times.

¹ See my article, 'Melodrama and the Historians', *Radical History Review*, 78 (2000), 57-84. Versions of this article have been delivered to audiences at Trinity and All Saints College, Leeds, and at the Institute of English Studies, University of London. I have profited greatly from the discussions on both occasions. My thanks also go to Kelly Boyd, Holly Furneaux and Robert Maidens for their helpful comments. Some of the discussion of cultural history is informed by conversations with the Historiography Reading Group which met at the Institute of Historical Research. Thanks to all participants over the years. Teaching on the Victorian Studies MA at Anglia Polytechnic University has also allowed me to think about interdisciplinarity and I have benefited from discussing these themes with students on the course.

² Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976); for further references to 'the melodramatic turn', see my 'Melodrama and the Historians'.

³ Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London: Virago, 1992).

⁴ eg. Marlene Tromp, Pamela K. Gilbert and Aeron Haynie (eds.), *Beyond Sensation: Mary Elizabeth Braddon in Context* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).

⁵ This article is based on *The Victorian Studies Reader* that Kelly Boyd and I are editing for Routledge (to be published in 2006). The Reader will feature a series of extracts that illustrate the key debates and tendencies within Victorian history during the last quarter century. It will feature a long article by us to be titled 'Rethinking the Victorians' that will explore the current state of Victorian Studies and its past.

⁶ For reflections about interdisciplinarity and Victorian Studies, see Michael Wolff, 'Victorian Study: An Interdisciplinary Essay', *Victorian Studies*, 8 (1964-5), 59-70; Martin J. Wiener, 'Treating "Historical" Sources as Literary Texts: Literary Historicism and Modern British History', *Journal of Modern History*, 70 (1998), 619-38; John Kucich and Dianne F. Sadoff (eds.), *Victorian Afterlife: Postmodern Culture Rewrites the Nineteenth Century* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Martin Hewitt, 'Victorian Studies: Problems and Prospects', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 6 (2001), 137-161; Christine L. Krueger (ed.), *Functions of Victorian Culture at the Present Time* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2002); Helen Rogers, 'Victorian Studies in the UK' in *The Victorians since 1901*, ed. by Miles Taylor and Michael Wolff (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 244-259.

⁷ see, for example, Alexander Welsh, *Strong Representations: Narrative and Circumstantial Evidence in England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); Jan-Melissa Schramm, *Testimony and Advocacy in Victorian Law, Literature, and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Jonathan Grossman, *The Art of Alibi: English Law Courts and the Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); Margot Finn, Michael Lobban and Jenny Bourne Taylor (eds.), *Spurious Issues: Law, Literature and History, 1680-1900* (forthcoming); for a discussion of recent approaches to Victorian law, see Margot Finn, 'Victorian Law, Literature and History: Three Ships Passing in the Night', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 7 (2002), 134-46. It should be acknowledged that Finn's focus in this article is primarily on the failure of these disciplines to engage with one another, hence her title.

⁸ Mary Poovey, 'Writing about Finance in Victorian England: Disclosure and Secrecy in the Culture of Investment', *Victorian Studies*, 45 (2002), 17-41; *The Financial System in Nineteenth-Century Britain* ed. by idem (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁹ Martin Hewitt, 'Victorian Studies'; H.J. Dyos and Michael Wolff (eds.), *The Victorian City: Images and Realities* (London: Routledge, 1976).

¹⁰ Joe Moran, *Interdisciplinarity*, p. 16.

¹¹ W.J.T. Mitchell, 'Interdisciplinarity and Visual Culture', *Art Bulletin*, 77 (1995), p. 541.

¹² Howard Malchow, *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Margot Finn, *The Character of Credit: Personal Debt in English Culture, 1740-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹³ see, for example, Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983); James A. Secord, *Victorian Sensation: The Extraordinary Publication, Reception and Secret Authorship of Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Rebecca Stott, *Darwin and the Barnacle* (London: Faber, 2003).

¹⁴ G.M. Young (ed.), *Early Victorian England, 1830-1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934). On Young, see Asa Briggs, 'G.M. Young: The Age of a Portrait' in *The Collected*

Essays of Asa Briggs ed. by Asa Briggs (Brighton: Harvester, 1982) ii, pp. 253-271; Miles Taylor, 'G.M. Young and the early Victorian revival' in *The Victorians since 1901*, pp. 77-89.

¹⁵ Asa Briggs, 'Middlemarch and the Doctors', *The Cambridge Journal*, 1948, 749-762 (quotation from p. 749); this essay was reprinted in a revised form in *The Collected Essays of Asa Briggs*, ii, pp. 49-67.

¹⁶ Peter Quennell (ed.), *London's Underworld* (London: W. Kimber, 1950); *Mayhew's Characters* (London: Spring Books, n.d.). Biographer, poet and litterateur, Quennell had written an important early book about the Victorians: *Victorian Panorama: A Survey of Life and Fashion from Contemporary Photographs* (London: Batsford, 1937).

¹⁷ *The Unknown Mayhew: Selections from The Morning Chronicle, 1849-50*, ed. by E.P. Thompson and Eileen Yeo (London: Penguin, 1973); Anne Humpherys, *Travels into the Poor Man's Country: The Work of Henry Mayhew* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1977); Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age* (London: Faber, 1984); Bertrand Taithe (ed.), *The Essential Mayhew: Representing and Communicating the Poor*, (London: Rivers Oram, 1996).

¹⁸ *Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians: An Historic Revaluation of the Victorian Age* (London: Sylvan Press, 1949), p. 11.

¹⁹ Michael Woolf, 'Preface' in *The Victorians since 1901*, pp. x-xv.

²⁰ Jon Lawrence and Miles Taylor, 'Introduction: Electoral Sociology and the Historians' in *Party, State and Society: Electoral Behaviour in Britain since 1820*, ed. by Jon Lawrence and Miles Taylor (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1997), pp. 1-26.

²¹ I explore the 1950s and 1960s wave of Victorian social history in my *Popular Politics in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1998). See also Miles Taylor, 'The Beginnings of Modern British Social History?', *History Workshop Journal*, 43 (1997), pp. 155-76; Jim Obelkevich, 'New Developments in History in the 1950s and 1960s', *Contemporary British History*, 14 (2000), 125-67; Martin Hewitt, 'Culture or Society?: Victorian Studies, 1951-64' in *The Victorians since 1901*, pp. 90-104.

²² Asa Briggs, 'Middle-Class Consciousness in English Politics 1780-1846', *Past and Present*, 9 (1956), 65-74; Harold Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society, 1780-1846* (London: Routledge, 1969).

²³ W.L. Burn, *The Age of Equipoise: A Study of the Mid-Victorian Generation* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1964). On Burn, see Martin Hewitt, 'Prologue: Reassessing *The Age of Equipoise*' in *An Age of Equipoise?: Reassessing Mid-Victorian Britain* ed. by Martin Hewitt (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp.1-38; idem, 'Culture or Society?'

²⁴ Keith Thomas, 'History and Anthropology', *Past and Present*, 24 (1963), 3-24; idem, 'The Tools and the Job'. *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 April 1966, pp. 275-6; see also Peter Burke, Brian Harrison and Paul Slack (eds.), 'Keith Thomas' in *Civil Histories: Essays presented to Sir Keith Thomas*, ed. by Peter Burke, Brian Harrison and Paul Slack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 8-10.

²⁵ For an application of anthropological techniques to the Victorians, see David Cannadine, 'The Transformation of Civic Ritual in Modern Britain: The Colchester Oyster Festival', *Past and Present*, 94 (1982), 107-130.

²⁶ see also E.P. Thompson, 'Anthropology and the Discipline of Historical Context', *Midland History*, 1 (1972), 41-55.

²⁷ Hobsbawm was of course not born in Britain but in Egypt and spent his childhood in Europe before coming to Britain. See his autobiography *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life* (London: Allen Lane, 1992). Edward Thompson's father was a missionary in India which possibly explains the consciousness of empire that is present in some of his work: see his *Alien Homage: Edward Thompson and Rabindranath Tagore* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993).

²⁸ William Palmer, *Engagement with the Past: The Lives and Works of the World War II Generation of Historians* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001).

²⁹ R.K. Webb, *The British Working Class Reader, 1790-1848: Literacy and Social Tension* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1955); Richard Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900* (Chicago: Chicago University Press 1957); Louis James, *Fiction for the Working Man, 1830-1850: A Study of the Literature Produced for the Working Classes in Early Victorian Urban England* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963).

³⁰ Steven Marcus, *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth Century England* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1966). See also Brian Harrison's response, 'Underneath the Victorians', *Victorian Studies*, 10 (1966), 239-62.

³¹ On American Victorianism see the special issue on 'Victorian Culture in America' in *American Quarterly*, 27 (1975), 507-625.

³² David Cannadine, 'Welfare State History' in his *The Pleasures of the Past* (London Collins, 1989), pp. 172-183; see also his 'The Present and the Past in the English Industrial Revolution, 1880-1980', *Past and Present*, 103 (1984), 131-72.

³³ W.W. Rostow, *British Economy of the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948).

³⁴ See Arthur John Taylor, *The Standard of Living in Britain in the Industrial Revolution* (London: Methuen, 1975). The two major protagonists in the standard of living debate were Eric Hobsbawm and R.M. Hartwell.

³⁵ Francis D. Klingender, *Art and the Industrial Revolution* (London: Noel Carrington, 1947); Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958).

³⁶ The exception would be his work on Mayhew published in 1971: see *The Unknown Mayhew*.

³⁷ Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement*, chapter 9. As author of books such as *Victorian People* (London: Odhams, 1954) and *Victorian Cities* (London: Odhams, 1963), Briggs cannot, of course, be accused of lacking an interest in the category of 'the Victorian'.

³⁸ Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*; John Saville, *Memoirs from the Left* (London: Merlin Press, 2003).

³⁹ *New Statesman*, 29 May 1983; see also Raphael Samuel, 'Mrs. Thatcher's Return to Victorian Values' in *Victorian Values*, ed. by T.C. Smout (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 9-30.

⁴⁰ Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty*; idem, *Poverty and Compassion: The Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians* (New York: Knopf, 1991) and idem, *The De-Moralization of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values* (New York: Knopf, 1995).

⁴¹ For the Labour Aristocracy debate, see Robert Gray, *The Aristocracy of Labour in Nineteenth-century Britain, c.1850-1900* (London: Macmillan, 1981). On the theme of

respectability and consensus, see F.M.L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain, 1830-1900* (London: Fontana, 1988).

⁴² Keith Joseph, 'Introduction' in Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help* (London: Penguin, 1986), p.16.

⁴³ Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); James Vernon, *Politics and the People: A Study in English Political Culture, c. 1851-1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

⁴⁴ Erika Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Simon Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class: Ritual and Authority and the English Industrial City, 1840-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); Christopher Breward, *The Hidden Consumer: Masculinities, Fashion and City Life, 1860-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

⁴⁵ J.C.D. Clark, *English Society, 1688-1832: Ideology, Social Structure and Political Practice during the Ancient Regime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Frank O'Gorman, *The Long Eighteenth Century: British Political and Social History, 1688-1832* (London: Arnold, 1997). Richard Price has offered the ultimate 'long eighteenth century' argument running it up to the 1880s: *British Society, 1680-1880: Dynamism, Containment, and Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁴⁶ N.F.R. Crafts, *British Economic Growth during the Industrial Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); Raphael Samuel, 'The Workshop of the World: Steam Power and Hand Technology in Mid-Victorian Britain', *History Workshop Journal*, 3 (1977), 6-72.

⁴⁷ On the other hand, it was also possible to read this literature in such a way as to suggest that the notion of the Victorian period should be abandoned because it merely represented the tail-end of earlier forms of social transformation. See Richard Price, 'Does the Notion of Victorian England Make Sense?' in *Cities, Class and Communication: Essays in Honour of Asa Briggs*, ed. by Derek Fraser (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), pp. 152-171. This was an early version of the arguments in Price, *British Society*.

⁴⁸ Lynn Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1989); Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt (eds.), *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

⁴⁹ Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and spectacle, 1851-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); Erika Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*; 'Roundtable on Commemoration and Material Culture', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 10 (2005), pp.96-131.

⁵⁰ P.J. Cain and A.J. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion, 1688-1914* (London: Longman, 1993).

⁵¹ Geoffrey Ingham, *Capitalism Divided? The City and Industry in British Social Development* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984); Will Hutton, *The State We're In* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995).

⁵² Martin J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

⁵³ For a recent installment of this, see Peter Mandler, 'The Problem with Cultural History', *Cultural and Social History*, 1 (2004), 104-109.

⁵⁴ Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*.

⁵⁵ Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988); Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the fin-de-siecle* (London: Bloomsbury, 1991).

⁵⁶ The same would be true of national identity, nationalism and patriotism which were formerly downgraded in the postwar work on the Victorians and have now acquired greater resonance, although figures such as Eric Hobsbawm have gone on to write about nationalism: Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth and Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁵⁷ Kali Israel, *Names and Stories: Emilia Dilke and Victorian Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999).

⁵⁸ Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects*, pp. 85-146; Miles Taylor, *Ernest Jones, Chartism and the Romance of Politics, 1819-1869* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁵⁹ Anne Janowitz, *Lyric and Labour in the Romantic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Sally Ledger, 'Chartist Aesthetics at the Mid-Century: Ernest Jones, a Novelist of the People', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 57 (2002), 31-63; Ian Haywood, *The Revolution in Popular Literature: Print, Politics and the People, 1790-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Miles Taylor, *Ernest Jones, Chartism and the Romance of Politics*; Beth Harris (ed.), *Famine and Fashion: Needlewomen in the Nineteenth Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

⁶⁰ John Saville, *Ernest Jones: Chartist* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1952).

⁶¹ Rohan McWilliam, 'The Mysteries of G.W.M. Reynolds: Radicalism and Melodrama in Victorian Britain' in *Living and Learning: Essays in Honour of J.F.C. Harrison*, ed. by Malcolm Chase and Ian Dyck (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996), pp. 182-198; Owen Ashton and Stephen Roberts, *The Victorian Working-Class Writer* (London: Mansell, 1999).

⁶² James A. Jaffe, *Striking a Bargain: Work and Industrial Relations in England, 1815-1865* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 130-43.

⁶³ Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), idem, *Civilizing Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Oxford: Polity, 2002); idem (ed.), *Cultures of Empire: Colonizers in Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries (A Reader)* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

⁶⁴ Exceptions would include Ann Pottinger Saab, *Reluctant Icon: Gladstone, Bulgaria and the Working Class, 1856-1878* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); David Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture, 1840-1914* (London: Yale University Press, 1994); Miles Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism, 1847-1860* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Maura O'Connor, *The Romance of Italy and the English Imagination* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998).

⁶⁵ Peter Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); idem, 'Adventures in Space: Victorian Railway Erotics; or, Taking Alienation for a Ride', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 9 (2004), 1-21.

⁶⁶ Peter Bailey, 'Introduction: Social History, Cultural Studies and the Cad' in his *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City*, p. 8.

⁶⁷ W.J.T Mitchell, 'The Pictorial Turn' in his *Picture Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 11-34.

⁶⁸ Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (London: Reaktion, 2001).

⁶⁹ James Vernon, *Politics and the People*.

⁷⁰ Richard Price, *British Society 1680-1880*.

⁷¹ Eric Hobsbawm, *Worlds of Labour: Further Studies in the History of Labour* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984).

⁷² Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987); Simon Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class*.

⁷³ Patrick Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City* (London: Verso, 2003); David Wayne Thomas, *Cultivating Victorians: Liberal Culture and the Aesthetic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Jordanna Bailkin, *The Culture of Property: The Crisis of Liberalism in Modern Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Elaine Hadley, *Living Liberalism* (forthcoming).

⁷⁴ Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society and Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁷⁵ Matthew Sweet, *Inventing the Victorians* (London: Faber, 2001). The allusion to the 'Society of the Spectacle' is of course derived from Guy Debord. For new thinking about the role of the press, see Mark Hampton, *Visions of the Press in Britain, 1850-1950* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

⁷⁶ Philip Harling, 'The Centrality of Locality: The Local State, Local Democracy, and Local Consciousness in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 9 (2004), 216-234.

⁷⁷ David Nash, 'Reconnecting Religion with Social and Cultural History: Secularization's failure as a master narrative', *Cultural and Social History*, I (2004), 302-25.

⁷⁸ Peter Mandler and Susan Pedersen, 'The British Intelligentsia after the Victorians' in *After the Victorians: Private Conscience and Public Duty in Modern Britain*, ed. by Peter Mandler and Susan Pedersen (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 1-28.

⁷⁹ Raphael Samuel, 'Mrs. Thatcher's Return to Victorian Values'.

⁸⁰ Tristram Hunt, *Building Jerusalem: The Rise and Fall of the Victorian City* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2004); see also 'A Prophet for the Left', *The Economist*, 18 April 1992, pp. 11-12; Mandler and Pedersen 'The British Intelligentsia after the Victorians'; Andrew Marr, 'Blair's Big Secret: He's a Liberal', *The Observer*, 26 July 1998, p. 21; Tristram Hunt, 'It wasn't all Mills and Morals', *The Guardian*, 22 May 2004; David Marquand, *Decline of the Public: The Hollowing-Out of Citizenship* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004).

⁸¹ Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The De-Moralization of Society*; Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, 2003).

⁸² Tom Standage, *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century Online Pioneers* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1998).

⁸³ Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz (eds.), *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). This is very much a transnational collection covering the United States, Britain and Europe with a strong interdisciplinary focus.

⁸⁴ Rohan McWilliam, 'The Licensed Stare: Melodrama and the Culture of Spectacle', *Nineteenth-Century Studies*, 13 (1999), 153-175; see also Grahame Smith, *Dickens and the Dream of Cinema* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

⁸⁵ C.A. Bayley, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2003).

⁸⁶ Cannon Schmitt, Nancy Henry and Anjali Arondekar, 'Introduction: Victorian Investments', *Victorian Studies*, 45 (2002), p. 7.