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"VICTORIAN" POETRY AT THE PRESENT TIME

By Linda M. Shires

Since our categories of thought produce what they claim to categorize, how are we conceptualizing Victorian Poetry today and what is the Victorian poetry we are producing? The two journal volumes and online essays under review, *Victorian Poetry* Spring 2004 (42.1) and Winter 2003 (41.4) and *Literary Compass: Victorian* online 2003–2004, feature discussions about the field's identity and new directions, while appraising where it has been. It is useful to see how recent books by Constance Hassett, Amy Billone, Ana Parejo Vadillo, Helen Groth, E. Warwick Slinn, and David Riede might be located in this larger moving picture.

The name of the field is still a topic of discussion for many scholars. From Isobel Armstrong to Susan Wolfson, nineteenth-century poetry scholars have been talking for at least ten years about field names and boundaries. Again recently, the cry has been heard about chronological, political, and national limitations embedded in the field name "Victorian," not so prevalent in "the long Nineteenth Century" or "modernity." On the other hand, some critics such as Virginia Blain critique the broadness of period markers and favor the specificity of the old term. At least two top American journals in the field are not about to change their names, even though they encourage articles and reviews pushing or transcending field boundaries. For anyone interested in disciplinary identity, the politics of naming, and the state of nineteenth-century literary history as practiced today, I recommend Joseph Bristow's online analysis in *Victorian Compass*. There he suggests that we attend carefully to the ways in which the nomination came about as well as to the ways nineteenth-century intellectuals and writers conceptualized the period themselves, and why.

Whether one agrees with Bristow or not about renaming, his essay invites our attention for various reasons. Bristow argues that it is more than just politically correct in today's climate of global multiculturalism to reassess our monarchically defined field name. He claims it is intellectually responsible to do so. It may also be pragmatic. In light of the continuing administrative push for interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity, which saves money and seems intellectually safe and exciting at the same time, it is important to think carefully about the boundaries and permeabilities of one's discipline of study. Just how interdisciplinary can we be and still hold on to the distinctiveness of nineteenth- century literature and culture? What would we now say that distinctiveness might be? More to the point, how do we generate a mutually informing dialogue among disciplines as we move beyond old names and old "fields"? For those students who once learned high theory as a second discipline to literature, are we now imagining we can teach geography, anthropology,

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art, music or other subjects in English departments as we expect more of our work to cross disciplines? It is utopian at best, of course. But the questions beg more debate.

For as Rohan McWilliam has argued in *19* with regard to the discipline of History and method, a "genuine interdisciplinary approach" should move beyond "multi-disciplinarity," which merely juxtaposes approaches or mixes discourses. Rather, "it needs to produce conclusions that cannot be obtained through the normal academic channels." It generates new knowledge by asking new questions. This is the pay-off today of performance studies or of visual studies, the latter called by W. J. T. Mitchell more appropriately an *indiscipline*. Has Nineteenth-Century Poetry of late generated new ways of thinking about itself or about the nineteenth century or subsequent literature and culture? It has been widely acknowledged that Isobel Armstrong did so when she introduced what she called a new-Hegelian method of reading. She yoked the linguistic turn, a Marxist-inspired politics, and cultural critique in her magisterial study of dialogic poetics. But that was in 1993.

An impulse for reassessment and new directions stands behind the two interesting volumes of *Victorian Poetry* and an online review essay "Compass Points for Victorian Poetry Studies 2002–2004 and Beyond" in *Victorian Compass* online, respectively edited and authored by Linda K. Hughes. Referring to the journal contents and several books, Hughes uses the online essay to chart what she defines as the new directions in Victorian Poetry, locating them in three recurrent clusters of inquiry: Form, Apparatus, and Body. By *Form* she means neoformalism and the politics of form in relationship to identity politics or political power. By *Apparatus* she means poetry's relationship to technology, not only verbal (the press, print technology) or visual (especially photography), but primarily acoustic, whether the printed voice, historical prosody, recitation, phonograph, or electronic archives. By *Body*, she means both content and embodiment: transatlantic exchange, representations of the body, and poems as articulations of embodied experience. These groupings are not very different from Isobel Armstrong's in her shrewd response essay, which assesses the current state of the field: "The Victorian Poetry Party," located at the start of the second of the special issues of *Victorian Poetry*.

The two *VP* volumes ostensibly are structured by generations of critics, the elders and the new, but it is more accurate to say that they are organized by reputation quotient. Six distinguished and influential field experts, three women and three men for balance: Isobel Armstrong, Herbert F. Tucker, Yopie Prins, E. Warwick Slinn, Virginia Blain, and Joseph Bristow comment in the second volume on the opinions of a cohort of other, established but currently less well-known scholars in the first volume. This review will take up points made by a few, but hardly by all, contributors to the two volumes. My omissions and inclusions have to do with space constraints of this review and with my own predilections about the field, not with my judgment overall of specific essays or the volumes' rich, combined contents.

As might be expected in a current reassessment about a small field within a small field, there is much worry expressed in one way or another about survival. We meet various kinds of apologias, warnings, fears, and solutions. Some writers reflect on the value of single-author books that can treat a topic in depth versus those that take up several texts or issues; one maintains that critical books on the novel are preferred by publishers; another suggests that we should link the novel with poetry more in our criticism; many feel that the best future work must be interdisciplinary. Despite my agreement, I admit to preferring the specific arguments which, instead, suggest that we should bring critical race theory to bear on nineteenth-century

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poetry or that we more rigorously investigate, as do Florence Boos and Kirstie Blair, poetry written by the lower classes.

Erik Gray opines that single-author books in the field are often "our finest pieces of criticism"; yet suggests that if the field consists of only such books, it shuts itself off. "A single-author monograph presupposes interest in its subject; it does not compel it" (469). I am not sure the field is in much danger of shutting itself off through single-author books. Probably I would argue the opposite – that the field is in danger of becoming absorbed into oceans of overly general, loosely argued, single-author chapter thematizations published under the umbrella of nineteenth-century cultural studies. Gray's comment, though, is part of his larger agenda for Victorian Poetry to become more intertextual and interdisciplinary. Constance Hassett's new book certainly demonstrates Gray's first point – it is a fine piece of criticism – though she complicates his view since her work is also the most intertextual, if the most focused and least interdisciplinary.

Constance Hassett brings an array of reading skills and a life lived with poetry to *Christina Rossetti: The Patience of Style*, recipient of the 2006 Robert Penn Warren prize for superb close reading. It is the most quietly accomplished book under review. Patient, authoritative, and at times thrilling in its sensitivity to language, the book shows that Hassett has benefited greatly from prior formalist scholars like Stephen Booth or Lawrence Lipking, whom she praises for readings of "gorgeous precision" (4). Despite her generous marking out of a lineage of critics who have inspired her, however, this book is very much her own.

Hassett reads poems as performative, but remains relatively less focused on cultural phenomena or power dynamics and more on aesthetics. She paraphrases Heather Dubrow from *Echoes of Desire: English Petrarchanism and Its Counterdiscourses* (8): "if we wish to understand a poem as a response to an issue, we must treat it not only as a statement but as an action; what it says is inseparable from how it moves" (3). To some degree Hassett touches upon Anne Hartman's recommended theories of performativity (in *Victorian Poetry* 41.4 reviewed here), since it would be difficult to write a book on Rossetti without doing so. Attuned to puns, to mimicry, to doubleness, and to an aesthetic of hiding and display, Rossetti is, after all, the poet of that most flirtatious performance, "Winter: My Secret." But Hassett's social analysis is less prominent than her linguistic, rhetorical, intertextual, and biographical analysis. So while she does not rely on theories of performativity, she is very attentive to the rhetorical and linguistic moves a poem makes, including, of course, the moves of silence or pause. Her social analysis, then, which treats female poetics and authority generally, comes to the reader as an intricate part of Hassett's demonstrations, rather than as a discrete deduction or addendum or outgrowth of other kinds of analysis in the book. It is an organic part of the neoformalism.

Hassett smartly re-reads critical assumptions and challenges them through much primary research and intelligent argument. Most notably, perhaps, she has a generous dialogic imagination, including the ability to imagine two things to be true at the same time. By way of example, in a chapter on poetic influence, she reconsiders the Rossettis'joint artistic efforts while she corrects critics (Chapman and Greer) who have "mistrusted Gabriel's involvement with Christina's poetry and worried about violations of her aesthetic autonomy" (85). Although Gabriel's egoistic self-assurance about his aesthetic decisions is well known, he was also confident in his sister's talent. After reading Hassett, it is far less possible to read Gabriel as bullying or dominating Christina. As Hassett makes clear, with wide-ranging references to primary sources and poems, he fostered Christina's networking; he entertained

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his friends by reading her poetry aloud; he attended early and continually to her work as an admirer; he internalized much of her work so as to remind her later of bits and pieces cast aside. Perhaps most important, he shared with her a private humor about writing poetry, one which was able to accommodate criticism and bold directives, on either side, because it emerged from mutual admiration, as well as a sense that something larger than personality or personal feelings was at stake. This might look like bullying to some. If so, then she bullied in return. Given the Brotherhood's documented working methods, it might better look like a devoted intelligence.

In short, Gabriel's collaboration was not only "collegial," rather than harmful, but was based on a model of "consultation" used widely in his circle and at that historical moment. Rather than violating her autonomy, Gabriel took his sister seriously. To defend the working relationship, Hassett offers much background about working practices but also focuses closely on the letter exchange of February-April 1865 (of which only Christina's letters exist) in which she welcomes her brother's very active engagement with shaping *The Prince's Progress, and Other Poems*. "Together the letters of 1865 and the volume of 1866," she says, "give us a picture of Christina as a writer very much in contact with her precursors, accepting, resisting, modifying what they offer, and presenting the results to a living poet for his reaction" (85). Of course there were sometimes disagreements between these two siblings about directions of creative energy due to moodiness, due to Gabriel's shifting mental state, or to aesthetic misjudgments on both sides.

To correct the critical overemphasis on male domination, Hassett mounts a careful argument. She spends a number of pages citing many instances of Gabriel's own requests for help from Christina and from his friends about what to "omit" and what to "include" in his own work. Though he reserved the final decision to himself, he often sought and gave assistance to others concerning form, subject matter, dramatic elements, derivativeness, the handling of topicality, mode, ethics, and how readers might read or misread poems. In another elegant turn of argument, Hassett carefully reads the tone of Christina's replies to the most stinging of Gabriel's critiques. She finds that the poetess replies "not as an offended sister, but as a poet who takes another poet's criticism as a stimulus to aesthetic self-scrutiny" (104).

I have spent so much time on this section of the book to indicate the care with which Hassett treats a vexed problem in our reception of the Rossettis. The assumptions she corrects here are sadly still sometimes replicated in other areas of Rossetti scholarship, particularly in the popular construction of D. G. Rossetti's art and poetry as only and always objectifying women. Linda Nochlin and Jerome McGann do not succumb to this view, but many have and some still do. Gabriel's oeuvre is too often read through the "resistance" of a text such as Christina's "In An Artist's Studio," as if the only thing the poem could be were a woman's condemnation of Gabriel's attitude towards Lizzie Siddal, and not an analysis of Petrarchanism, or an observation itself about observation, or a warning about the loss of distinctions in the narcissism of love.

Adding to the achievement of *Christina Rossetti, The Patience of Style*, Hassett exhibits a close attention to the aural effects of the poetry throughout, and a keen appreciation of the difficulty and joy of language and writing, often expected but missing from many books on poetry. In other chapters Hassett treats *Goblin Market and Other Poems*, *Sing-Song*, the sonnet tradition, *The Face of the Deep* and *Verses* from the 1890s. She is especially interesting in her remarks on the education of a child reader through *Sing-Song*. Hassett's

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feel for line, word, or rhyme is palpable and contagious. Her book does not carve out new ways to think about Victorian poetry. Still, it serves the field by reminding us of what the best contextualized close reading can do and it corrects misimpressions and misreadings often perpetuated by critics who do not read as intelligently as Hassett does.

Amy Billone's *Little Songs: Women, Silence and the Nineteenth Century Sonnet* also deserves a wide and warm reception. It is a short, deep book characterized by conceptual acuity, integrative thinking, and exciting close readings. Like Hassett, whom she has read, Billone commands a remarkable ear and eye. She also evinces a deep grasp of the British poetic tradition, including texts by Milton, Wordsworth, Keats, and others. Clearly she does not just know these texts, but she has absorbed them to such a degree that they live again on the page through her writing. Of all the texts under review, Billone's is the one that repeatedly sends the reader back to the poetry itself – to re-read it, to reflect upon it, to enjoy it, and to think freshly and analytically about it. This surely is what the best criticism of poetry must assume as its responsibility.

Unlike Hassett's book, which enlarges our ability to read and to hold contraries and ambiguities in mind, Billone's offers new ways to think about Victorian poetry and women's poetry. She redirects the way we think about silence, absence and the female-authored sonnet, enlarges work done on gender and poetry, and revises the ways in which we read (especially) Charlotte Smith, Elizabeth Barrett, and Christina Rossetti. Working in the long nineteeth century, Billone first offers extended discussion of Charlotte Smith and two women poets who responded to her work, Helen Maria Williams and Maria Smallpiece. After chapters on Barrett and Rossetti, Billone turns to several women poets who respond with praise and critique while reformulating Barrett's and Rossetti's claims – Maria Norris, Dora Greenwell, and Isabella Southern. This range, matched by depth, is no little feat for any book, much less a first one.

Billone's title does not call attention to itself overtly. Yet while "Little" refers to that part of the nineteenth-century female poet's aesthetic of modesty or, as Armstrong suggests, secrecy, "Songs," celebrates the survival of the woman's voice. Expressivity speaks through, against, and with silence. Possibly Billone puts her thesis best when she explains that Barrett, schooled as all nineteenth-century women poets were in the paradox of repression and expression, "proposes that poetry stand in metaphorical relation to these terms [silence and death] without being equivalent to them; its task is to act like silence while it speaks or sings" (58).

It seems as if Elizabeth Barrett and "the silence of womanhood" (48) may have been the impetus for *Little Songs*. In a careful analysis of Barrett's complex textual relationship to Wordsworth's sonnets, Billone offers wonderful insights, such as her section pivoting on both poets' use of the words *silent* and *bare*, through which she argues for Barrett's reassessment of the sublime. Yet, Billone's analysis of Christina Rossetti's silence struck me as the most advanced analysis of this poet since Jerome McGann's essential insights into her devotional poetry. It should be read alongside McGann and Hassett and considered in light of the practices of later women poets.

Billone proposes that "silence operates on two different levels in Rossetti's poetry." First "her ostensibly female speaker reminds the reader that she cannot express herself and second her poetic lines contradict themselves, creating an ambiguity of context and an instability of voice" (82). Billone names the first "stated" silence and the second as "semantic" silence. Rather than reading Rossetti's reticence as a barrier, as do many other critics, Billone sees

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it as "method of reading them [silences]" (83). Rather than focusing on "the way words audibly and visually function" in a singleness of poetic voice, Billone takes a direction that none of the mapmakers for Victorian poetry studies has adequately forecast, even with the new stress on performance and aural effects.

In her analyses of sonnets in "The Thread of Life" and "Monna Innominata," Billone's ability to see into and out of words, enables her to argue that Rossetti's sonnets "cloak" and "embed" a rearticulation of selfhood – with wordplay of *my* and *me*, and *I* – through words appearing in other words, some with sound, others without, words that cross between phrases, words suggested by rhymes, and words that serve as homophones of printed text (83). The subtlety with which Billone reads poetry is matched by her mastery of the British poetic tradition and the ease of her deployment of Judith Butler's gender theories.

By obscuring the identity of her speakers, Rossetti, Billone argues, takes Charlotte Smith's habit of using multiple identities to a new level. While Smith names identities, Rossetti leaves them unnamed and hence multiply interchangeable. Indeed, Billone argues that the very selfhood that sonnets have traditionally asserted becomes, in Rossetti's hands, a means for an endless interaction among interchangeable selves, gender roles, and speaking and addressee positions, including those of the nameless women poets of history, not just within a single sequence or poem, but also within a line, a phrase, a title, or a even a single word.

Like Armstrong, Hartman, Slinn, and Tucker in *VP* 41.4 and 42.1, Hassett and Billone view poems as performances. Their books do not totally exemplify, however, what Anne Hartman in *VP* 41.4 notes as current scholarship's shifting away from the textual to the phenomenological and performative, at least not in the theoretical terms Hartmann establishes, though Billone comes closest to this method. Hartmann notes how interpretations of nineteenth-century poetry stressing doubleness as expression and critique, mimesis and mimicry, are becoming more the norm. Performative reading, which she endorses, can attend to both historical context and the processes of signification, reconciling cultural materialism and deconstruction, history and epistemology. Read as cultural forms, Hartmann suggests that poems interpret cultural phenomena, while becoming themselves part of cultural experience, and revealing a potential to transform that experience.

E. Warwick Slinn, with *Victorian Poetry as Cultural Critique: The Politics of Performative Language*, discusses poems that "offer social criticism in terms of their own intrinsic performance" (30) without making claims for transformation. In his carefully-argued book, Slinn continues the study of subjectivity and representation he started with his earlier work on Browning and discourses of subjectivity. Along with scholars of nineteenth-century poetry such as Susan Wolfson, J. Hillis Miller, Jerome McGann, and Herbert F. Tucker, Slinn consistently revisits form and the theoretical relationship of text and context. Introducting performativity here as a nondualist theory of speech acts, he offers in his first chapter a highly detailed, theoretically nuanced argument about reading and enacting Victorian poetry as critique. Drawing on J. L. Austin, as well as refinements about performativity from Judith Butler, Paul de Man, Slavoj Žižek, and Jacques Derrida, especially, Slinn shows how poems can function simultaneously as mediational and constitutive (as well as sometimes just one or the other; yet he also argues for these functions as inseparable). It is to his credit that his references to theorists are always introduced as integral, even necessary, parts of his argument.

Slinn's main interest and his critical affiliation, as I have indicated, lie with those scholars who wish to explain a complex relationship between literature and society. He

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selects Victorian poetry because it is hardly passive. If performativity "offers an excellent model for attending to the critique provided by dramatic monologues and by the emphasis on dramatic modes that occurred in nineteenth-century poetry and continued well in to modernism" (28), that poetry is also an excellent field for the theory he puts forward here.

Slinn reviews theories of performativity, differentiates new critical reading from cultural studies close reading, discusses various poetic forms and their differences, and painstakingly explains his use of speech act theory. He makes no claims for critique as subversion, but only for poetic acts that expose ideological assumptions, practices, and their production. Indeed, he argues that the critique to be found in Victorian poetry is most often an *institutional* one. Poetry performs critique by showing us a consciousness produced by certain conditions (we might relate this to Armstrong's discussion of Tennyson's "Mariana" as a double poem in her *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics Politics*) or by enacting the idealizations of expressivity.

The bulk of Slinn's book offers contextualized readings of Browning's Bishop, Barrett's Slave, Clough's Dipsychus, D. G. Rossetti's Jenny, and Webster's Castaway. With a chapter on each, Slinn offers us some of the best interweavings of biographical, historical, cultural and theoretical readings we now have within the study of Victorian Poetry. From his reading of "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" in its first published context of *The Liberty Bell* (64) to intelligent remarks about the young man in Jenny's mirror, who is also "part of that reflection" and with "no more permanence than a Jenny" (149), Slinn shows the poetic texts as self-reflexive processes about their own coming into being as representation. Locating each poem in varied historical debates about church architecture, the cult of the dead, slavery, prostitution, aestheticism, matter vs. spirit, and idealism, Slinn shows poetic form as struggle, form as product/form as process, and culture as a never-ending dynamism of forces. Of all the critics here, he is the most attentive to poetic form as having its own, moving agency.

Women Poets and Urban Aestheticism by Ana Parejo Vadillo fulfills at least part of Ivan Kreilkamp's call in *Victorian Poetry* 41.4 for a fuller consideration of Victorian poetry as part of a "nineteenth-century modernist consciousness." Drawing on "Modernity – an Unfinished Project," by Jürgen Habermas, Kreilkamp reopens the question of the moderns' rejection of the Victorians, which has been taken up by many before him. Habermas, he argues, offers terms and concepts he would "like to see more fully explored in relation to Victorian poetry: shock, mobility, acceleration, discontinuity, the transitory, the elusive and the ephemeral" (qtd. *Victorian Poetry* 41.4, 604). I do not agree with Kreilkamp's assessment that we are not thinking of mid-Victorian, canonical poets such as Robert Browning, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Tennyson, or Christina Rossetti as "participating in the formation of a new nineteenth-century modernist consciousness" (604) – I think of work in the 1980s and 1990s by Loy Martin, Alan Sinfield, Isobel Armstrong, W. David Shaw, E. Warwick Slinn, and others clearly leading in that direction. Nor am I convinced we need to import Lukàcs as point of reference in order to re-evaluate mid-century poetry, since the poetry itself blows away the rigidities Kreilkamp locates in its critics, as I assume he wants to prove. But I am sure his arguments have had to be compressed for the occasion of a special issue. I certainly share his concern that the majority of work on modern consciousness and poetry leads us narrowly to a reappraisal of late nineteenth-century poets. Equally or more interesting poetic experiments occurred earlier in the century.

While not satisfying Kreilkamp's timeframe, then, Vadillo at least explores his topic and also satisfies Katharine McGowran's request in *VP* 41.4 for more studies of female aesthetes. She notes that most feminist criticism of the 1890s has focused on the New Woman to the

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neglect of female aesthetes who did not participate in political intervention or debate. Books by Kathy Psomiades, Yopie Prins, and Talia Schaffer, argues McGowran, focus our attention on the inadequacy of prior feminist paradigms and literary history. Presumably she would welcome Vadillo into this trailblazing group.

In examining the poetics of a group of late Victorian women writers, namely Amy Levy, Alice Meynall, Graham Tomson, and Michael Field, Ana Vadillo locates their lyrics in a mobile urban aestheticism of the passenger. Whereas earlier critics established that women's role in a new urbanism had been effectively erased, current scholars are still working to respond to this insight. Vadillo argues that at this point we should no longer privilege an aesthetics of urban walking, which was already losing centrality at the end of the century. Rather we should look at mass transport and an aesthetic and experience of flux and movement (23). Leaning on Jonathan Crary's insights about vision and transience and a new sedimentation of the structure of visual memory (34), Vadillo rightly distinguishes among various kinds of transient figures of modernity. Her interest lies in the passenger and in the modified visual field created by relatively fast moving vehicles. From the passenger seat of the omnibus, for instance, one gained access in a new way to the private and the public lives of urban dwellers so that, as she puts it, everyday life became a cinematic event.

Women poets embraced not only the omnibus, but the underground and suburban railways, experiencing a mass-transport revolution that eventually turned into a commuter revolution. They did so in various ways and to various ends in their poetry, as well. Like many first books, this one is a series of readings, offering various examples of a controlling metaphor and idea. Whereas Levy used mass transport as a way to destabilize social categories, Meynell used it to explore an impressionistic poetics. Vadillo reads Graham Tomson in terms of velocity, ephemerality, and the fast life; she investigates Michael Field in terms of suburbia and commuter trains, arguing specifically that the South Eastern and Chatham Railway Line was central to the production of *Sight and Song* (1892).

The originality of the book surely lies in its connection of geography/London neighborhoods of Bloomsbury, Kensington, St. Johns Wood, and the suburbs with four individual authors and their poems. Yet I worry that arguments applied to the poetry come ready-made from the reputations of the geographic spaces to which they are related, rather than inductively. For instance, Kensington as a shopping space, a "feminized" space, and the birth space of Queen Victoria is noted and applied. But how exactly does it birth the theory of impressionism Vadillo fleshes out in terms of spectatorship, ethics, and movement or how does it afford, in Meynell's vision, cultural critique? In other words, Vadillo too often, it seems to me, contents herself with thematization about restless movement – which leads to general statements or loose analogies among roads, mass transport, shock, vision, movement, and circulation.

It is a difficult topic. As one might imagine, the larger terms themselves slip, slide, and travel; ephemerality, which is linked to Thomson, becomes a category to talk about Meynell. On the other hand, interesting local observations, such as Vadillo's treatment of the image of raindrop – distinguishing among Meynell's sense of the object, the impression of the object, and the larger movement of rain – counteract what seems like a swift and sometimes under-developed conceptual argument. Insights into specific poems, set in new contexts of understanding, help ground the book.

Vadillo brings various theoretical arguments – by Walter Benjamin, Michel de Certeau, and others– to establish the project's defining terms and to lend weight; yet one yearns

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for some engagement with theories of modernity, space, geography, and gender even more (say work by geographer and cultural studies theorists David Harvey, Kathleen Kirby, and Edward W. Soja, or with reference to the nineteenth century, the Helena Michie and Ronald Thomas collection, for instance). The lack here of cultural geography seems an enormous oversight. Moreover, there could be a greater attention to the language and the movement of the poetry itself (transport on another level, or two). A very good example of the new interdisciplinary cultural history (the history of transport, the history of women, poetry), the book stands out for its strong primary research and for its combination of discourses, not for a dazzling argument. It does not quite elicit the new ways to think about the poetry that it so wants to stimulate. It is very likely most valuable to those focused on the fin de siècle or women's poetry generally, rather than those seeking a book with much wider implications. And for many this will be enough and most welcome.

With her wide-ranging and accomplished *Victorian Photography and Literary Nostalgia*, Helen Groth traces the ways in which a desire to arrest time was taken up by poets, photographers, publishers, and consumers. She notes that both poetry and photography share a desire to take a moment out of time and intends in her book to trace that "affinity" (8). She too has been influenced by Jonathan Crary, noting that a variety of perceptual experiences and new visual technologies created a new nineteenth-century observer. At the same time, she wisely engages with critiques of his work and supplies her own examples to support them. She also supplements his ideas with those of Walter Benjamin on memory and nostalgia and Richard Sennett on personality and longing. In her case study chapters, Groth explores the permutations of literary and cultural nostalgia inspired in photographers and publishers by writers such as William Wordsworth, Sir Walter Scott, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Augusta Webster, and Agnes Mary Francis Robinson.

In the context of Vadillo's book, this one might be said to trace the urgency for slowing down time, rather than for registering or critiquing its speed. "Poetry as an idea," Groth argues, "emerges from various illustrated texts of the period as an idea of tradition, a repository of cultural memory, a time-keeping device, and as a means of deferral and deceleration in the midst of the flux and chaos of modern life" (17). It is impossible, however, for Groth to extrapolate one defining idea of photography from her many sources and it is to her credit that she does not try, but harnesses that diversity to her argument. Rather she finds photographic discourse inconsistent and contradictory.

Her first chapter grips the reader as it analyzes the use of an idea of poetry in early photographic discourse. Groth traces the implications of what she sees as a developing cultural link between nostalgia and poetry in which mythologizing and memorializing softened the forces of change felt by Victorians. She takes up this issue from a different angle later in the book when exploring how Julia Margaret Cameron illustrates *Idylls of the King* with pictures self-consciously poetic in their slowing down of time and their commitment to processes of duration. But here too, she does not easily give in to prior readings of the photographs. Lindsay Smith and Carol Mavor, for instance, have argued that Cameron's use of focus and handling of women are unconventional and subversive. Groth, wisely, will not go so far. She attends to the visual and verbal inter-relations. For Groth, the dialogism of visual and verbal also props up "the nostalgic proclivities of Victorian biographical reading practices" (158) by reinforcing the image of a Sage. In another section, her analysis of photographically illustrated books and their impact on readers buttresses her treatment of Cameron. There she argues that photographs guide repeat readings while

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solidifying reputations and images of rural English spaces. In effect, Groth illustrates in various ways how the modernity of the photograph was effectively effaced for didactic ends in order to promote a shared literary tradition.

A strong discussion of *Casa Guidi Windows* in her chapter on Elizabeth Barrett Browning traces connections between stereoscopic space and the poet's double vision. Groth shows how the poet's exploration of a moving and refocusing gaze in her poem works to allow background and foreground to be registered with the same kind of intensity and how that is related to her goals for poetry. Groth nicely articulates the nexus between memory and modern perceptual skepticism that Barrett Browning's modern poetry explores, detailing with examples from the poem how Barrett Browning's impressionistic technique worked to privilege memory and beauty at the same time that she aimed for a socially progressive poetics. Groth's reach is impressive. Her handling of authors as different as Wordsworth, Carlyle, Darwin, and Carroll, as well as relevant criticism from Leo Braudy and Andrew Elfenbein on the cult of personality, is not only matched but surpassed in usefulness by the fascinating evidence she turns up in the British archives. This is an enriching book in its understanding of individual authors and bravely smart in its criticism and its broader social conclusions.

In *Allegories of One's Own Mind, Melancholy in Victorian Poetry*, David Riede turns from the body's relationship to affect and the readership stressed by Kirstie Blair to dwell on the diseased mind and psyche. We may recall Hallam's review of Tennyson's early poetry where he refers to the "melancholy, which so evidently characterizes the spirit of modern poetry" (qtd. by Riede 3) or other major sites linking poetic theory to dis-ease. Riede characterizes Victorian poetry as marked by ambivalence, itself constitutive of melancholy. Taking up the well-known trope of the divided self and the Victorians, Riede suggests that the division is that between feeling (the aesthetic) and public language and ideology (social consciousness). The poets, he argues, want to express feeling yet lack the public language to do so. He thus seeks to explore, citing Arnold, "the ways that the 'buried life' of the infinite self, perceived as anterior to language, could find expression" (17). We are familiar from original sources other than Hallam's essay, of course, with permutations of the divided self: the mind in dialogue with itself, the mind turned upon itself, or the self wandering between two worlds. Likewise, it is a topic that has been treated before by various critics, including Masao Miyoshi.

In discussions of Tennyson, Barrett, Browning, and Fitzgerald, Riede returns repeatedly to the notion of the trapped self in poems such as "Mariana." He treats the early poetry of Tennyson, locating its culmination in *Maud*, studies the early work of Barrett and notes, as almost all critics of Barrett do, that there is a turn in *Sonnets of the Portuguese*. Riede pursues his theme through the early, less persistently studied works of Browning, closing with Fitzgerald's Rubáiyát, which he reads as a struggle with melancholy. He notes that the aesthetes celebrate melancholy as a "pathological condition, a disease" (199). Unlike the earlier melancholy of Browning or Tennyson, however, the late-century melancholy, recuperated by art for art's sake, sets aside social purpose or conscience in what Riede calls a "sad version of Epicureanism" (200). It registers and celebrates, he argues, a diseased poetic imagination.

While some may read *Allegories of the Mind* as sophisticated in its theorizations, I found it to lack a clear theoretical argument. References to numerous writers from Adorno and Benjamin to DeMan, Kristeva, and Lacan, to Foucault, mixed in with Ruskin, Carlyle,

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T. S. Eliot, and contemporary critics tend to clutter the criticism. On the one hand, this broad theoretical and critical referencing offers a rich panoply of voices meditating on loss, grief, the self, the social body, division, and melancholy. It is reiterative citation at its best. On the other hand, it makes for very rugged reading, a lack of distinction among theoretical assumptions, and an argument that often goes over known ground without offering fresh conclusions. Riede's Marxist explanation for alienation: commodification and the reification of the self under capitalism, for instance, becomes a refrain that is cogent but not developed enough historically beside highly specific poem analyses.

In her book *Victorian Poetry and the Culture of the Heart*, parts of which had been previously published in *Victorian Poetry* and elsewhere, Kirstie Blair makes a strong, interesting contribution to what Hughes names as the present cluster of inquiry on the body and reading as embodied experience. Blair is especially concerned with the relationship of heart disease, the scientific study of the heart, poetic theory, and the heart as metaphor for expressiveness. Noting that the heart and poetry has been studied up to the Victorian period, Blair continues that scholarly pursuit with two general chapters on medical and psychological discourse, discussions of major texts by Elizabeth Barrett, Matthew Arnold, and Alfred Tennyson in terms of rhythm, pulse, and affect, and welcome comments on work of more understudied poets such as the Spasmodics.

Most Victorian scholarship on medicine and literature features the novel and avoids poetry; most study of Victorian medicine focuses on the nerves and the brain, rather than the heart. Yet, as Blair shows exhaustively, Victorian poets were well-read in medical studies and keenly aware of their own medical conditions, often claiming heart disease as an affliction whether they actually were so diagnosed, or not. With poor health conditions in Victorian England and a life expectancy at birth of forty-two years, as reported by Chris Cook (and this twenty years after the 1850s, which is Blair's prime period of study), it is no wonder that writers were eager to learn about disease and concerned to prevent it or accommodate it. Yet Blair also indicates that doctors cited poetry in their discussions. There was, as with Darwin's use of literature and novelists' use of writers on evolution, a cross-fertilization between the discourses of poetry and medicine.

While Blair's study often reads thematically, and while conclusions do not always seem as fresh as some of her fine critical readings, her second chapter on prosody and medical theory should be especially welcomed by scholars interested in affect, meter, and voice. There she discusses the extent to which metrical patterns and rhythm were compared to the human pulse and how they shaped and constrained both poetic affect and emotional responses in readers and listeners. Blair reveals how various types of metrical arrangements duplicated different heart rhythms and beats, ending with an argument about the Spasmodics that deployed a regular rhythm, while it depicted a spasm-ridden heart. But lest my singling out this chapter should leave a wrong impression, Blair's welcome commitment to discussion of metrics runs throughout the book. Chapters on Barrett's and Arnold's poetry concern the heart and specific discourses. In the chapter on Barrett, Blair takes up gender through analysis of male and female poets and the feminized heart. In that on Arnold, she considers the heart and religion through discussion of Tractarian ideals and the crisis of faith.

Blair's chapter on Tennyson, the culmination of the argument, draws on her previous discussions of medicine, metrics, and gender. As may be no surprise, given her subject matter, the chapter on the Cambridge Apostles and Tennyson most convincingly supports her theory of the heart and circulation as at the center of poetic theory in the period. She rightly deals

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with the heart as a source of emotion, but not an emotion always under control. In some poetry, sensitivity, she suggests, "has become almost pathological in intensity, and has led to a dangerous abandonment to sensation" (182). As the Victorian poet who uses the physical heart, the culture of heartsickness, and the diseases of heart so effectively throughout *In Memoriam* and *Maud*, Tennyson's central concern, Blair argues, is the transmission of affect from one heart to another. Like other poets, he remains ambivalent about whether or not such transmission is always in the service of health. Whereas we might have read *Maud* through psychology (hysteria) and nerve disease, Blair proposes this poem as "sensational, even spasmodic" (204) and the most extreme instance of nervous heart disease in the canon. After reading Blair on the metaphorical, the material, and the medical, in a fully historicized discussion, one will not feel or think about Victorian poetry or the heart again in quite the same way.

While both Blair and Riede show indisputably that the Victorians are keen to develop a poetic mode that will "cultivate the feelings" (Riede 17), and that they remain anxious about their failures, I find Blair's work on the embodiment of disease and its expression through the pulses of poetry to be both more exciting and more open to complexity of argument. She would argue that we do not have a healthy imagination at the start of the period and a diseased, if celebrated, one at the end, but rather a more constant struggle with self-loss and division throughout the period. Likewise, Billone's rich analysis of Barrett's grief and melancholy or Christina Rossetti's gaps and silences, illustrates how their poetry articulates selfhood poetically, against all odds.

As Vadillo, Blain, Linley, Slinn, Picker, Prins, and others suggest in *VP*, and as Armstrong and Hughes offer in their maps, there are important directions now for Victorian poetry to follow or continue to pursue, most of them in line with avenues being taken in other areas of literary and cultural study: transatlantic inquiries; race studies; sound; the relations of aesthetics and ethics; the history of reading and print media; a reassessment of the ballad and popular poetry; poetry's relationship to the novel and to the theatre, and nuanced studies of specific emotions. Although no *VP* critic mentions it, it seems to me that we have still not completely made good on the archival work done heroically by Leighton, Reynolds, Blain, Higonnet, Bristow, and Armstrong in their anthologies of women's poetry, although Billone in *Little Songs* has scouted the British Library collections to rescue forgotten women's voices and Vadillo comes in a movement revitalizing end-of-century women's writing. Linda Peterson, Alex Goody, and Tricia Lootens, for instance, award deserved attention to Meynell, Levy, and Dutt in a recent special issue on Fin de Siècle women poets in *Victorian Literature and Culture* 34.2, 2006 edited by Marion Thain and Ana Parejo Vadillo. These are just three of fifteen essays that complement and advance work done by Bristow and others earlier.

However, there are so many women poets of whom we have only a faint understanding who remain to be studied. While we are beyond a separatist study of women's poetry, there is still much to mine in that area and continue to bring into contact with the rest of nineteenth-century literature and culture. I am especially interested in how men's and women's poetry responds to each other and in types of relationships of the visual and the verbal. But, finally, the challenge lies in the *how* and *why,* not just in the *what,* as we aim for lasting contributions that retain the distinctive features and voices of nineteenth-century poetry, while bringing it into new kinds of relations, contexts, and frames of understanding.

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