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VICTORIANS LIVE

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WATERHOUSE REVISITED

By Carole G. Silver

J. W. Waterhouse: *The Modern Pre-Raphaelite* is described by its organizers as the first comprehensive retrospective exhibition of the painter's work in England. Originating at the Groningen Museum in the Netherlands in collaboration with the Royal Academy in London, where it was on view from June to September 2009, it had a final venue in reduced form and newly sub-titled "Garden of Enchantment" at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts from October 2009 to February 2010. With its three venues and some ninety works of art, it continued the trend of revisiting Victorian painters, most recently John Everett Millais (Tate Britain, 2007–08) and William Holman Hunt (Manchester Art Gallery, 2008–09), while it added new critical questions to an already sizable roster.

George Bernard Shaw raised one of these questions when he remarked somewhat caustically that "Giving reminders of other artists is quite a speciality [sic] with Mr. Waterhouse" (*The World*, 12 May 1886, qtd. in *J. W. Waterhouse* 38). Shaw was clearly aware of the Waterhouse tendency to "borrow" ideas and images from his contemporaries. Many Waterhouse works closely resemble those of Lawrence Alma-Tadema, the Dutch painter who came to London in 1870 during Waterhouse's apprentice years and whose

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renditions of middle-class lives in a glorified ancient Rome the younger painter greatly admired. But the question of originality and imitation goes beyond a reverence for Alma-Tadema. So many later Waterhouse works "borrow" from Millais, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and Edward Burne-Jones as well as from contemporary French painters that one wonders when allusion becomes direct quotation. Imitation may be the sincerest form of flattery, but when does it exceed valid artistic practice?

The very title of the exhibition at the Royal Academy raises other questions. Is Waterhouse a Pre-Raphaelite, albeit a late one, and if so, what makes him one? And is he modern and in what sense? Is his modernity a matter of new techniques, of the rejection of narrative, of a fresh conception of art? The exhibition's elegantly illustrated catalog attempts to answer the second set of questions and, while not interrogating the originality of given works, is generally forthright in noting numerous visual sources and analogues. Nevertheless, neither the chronologically arranged exhibit nor the catalog does answer the aesthetic issues raised. Is Waterhouse an important Victorian artist or a slick, professional, commercially successful but essentially empty imitator of other Victorian painters? The question hovers in the air.

The problems of evaluation are complicated by how little we know of Waterhouse's inner life and artistic credo. Peter Trippi's useful "Biographical Overview" suggests how mysterious Waterhouse was; his personality is rarely mentioned by his contemporaries; his letters are few and unrevealing; and his papers, if they exist, are unlocated. We learn that he was born in 1849, significantly the year that the PRB burst onto the art scene, that his parents were painters, and that he married another artist, but had no offspring. We know that he was always associated with the Royal Academy; he trained in its schools, was elected an Associate and ultimately a "full" academician, and exhibited his paintings there nearly every year from 1874 until his death in 1917. We know that he frequently visited Europe, both ancient sites like Pompeii and modern cities in France and Italy, and that in his later years he became acquainted with a group of artists, including Frank Bramlee and William Logsdail, considered more *avant garde* than his fellow academicians. As with his paintings, we know only the surfaces of his life and can merely guess at his social and political views.

Waterhouse began by emulating and imitating Alma-Tadema and, to a lesser degree, Frederic, Lord Leighton. All had been fascinated by the archaeological excavations at Pompeii during the 1860s, which had left rooms, baths, and material objects *in situ*. All too had been influenced by the vivid scenes described in Bulwer-Lytton's endlessly popular *Last Days of Pompeii* (1834). Like Alma-Tadema, Waterhouse painted a world with which an aspiring and upper middle-class Victorian public could identify. His *Sick Child Brought into the Temple of Aesculapius* (1877), for example, is an antiqued version of the numerous Victorian genre paintings of grave doctors visiting sick children. Many pictures are strikingly close to Alma-Tadema's, appropriating subjects, composition, colors, settings, and even reconstructions of ancient Roman artifacts. Waterhouse's *Flower Stall* of 1880 reverses the positions of the human figures and simplifies the background of Alma-Tadema's *Flower Market* of 1868, but the utilization of major elements of the earlier work is disconcerting. Alma-Tadema titles a picture of a nude exhausted female *After the Dance* (1875); in what may be an act of *homage*, Waterhouse substitutes two weary children for the adult dancer in his 1876 painting with the same title. In "Waterhouse's Imagination," Elizabeth Prettejohn argues that the Waterhouse works are "more spacious and more sparing of antiquarian detail" (25), but to any but the expert eye, essential differences are hard to find. In both cases, there

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is a disjunction between the settings and the people in them, for the latter look like English ladies and gentlemen transported to an ancient Rome too clean and shiny ever to have existed.

When, in the late 1880s Waterhouse shifted from classical scenes to romantic and mythical subjects, he did not cease to borrow. Robert Upstone suggests that Waterhouse was profoundly influenced by seeing John Everett Millais's *Ophelia* re-exhibited in 1886 ("Between Innovation and Tradition" 38). It's worth noting that, at roughly the same time, classical genre-studies were going out of fashion. Thus, Waterhouse, recreating himself as a late Pre-Raphaelite, began to use many of the subjects, though not the techniques, popularized by earlier Pre-Raphaelites, drawing materials from Shakespeare and from Keats and Tennyson. Keats influenced his *femme fatale* depictions of Lamia and La Belle Dame Sans Merci; Tennyson's poetry was behind not only three paintings of "The Lady of Shalott," but pictures derived from "Mariana," "Mariana in the South," "The Palace of Art," and even "Maude" (*The Soul of the Rose*). Waterhouse utilized poses and compositional elements from Millais and Rossetti; his *Mariana in the South* (1897) is a visual replay of Millais's famous *Mariana* (1850–51); his "*Gather Ye Rosebuds . . .*" (1908) is a Rossettian "woman and flowers" painting (cf. Rossetti's *Fair Rosamund* and *Regina Cordium*). Burne-Jones's slender, classical Danaes and Psyches stand behind many of Waterhouse's Ovidian beauties, and even Frederic Sandys's studies of Medea and Helen of Troy seem to have triggered a response. With the notable exception of one version of *The Lady of Shalott*, Waterhouse does not emulate Holman-Hunt's hard-edged style, though he appropriates Hunt's circular mirrors and small rear windows as narrative devices. Although in his last phase, Waterhouse sometimes moves away from narrative literary painting into "aesthetic" mood pieces, works without visible narratives like *Windflowers* (1902) or *Narcissus* (1913), there is a final return – perhaps again influenced by Rossetti – to scenes from Dante and Boccaccio. And his best works are attached to literature, whether Ovid or Tennyson.

What Waterhouse doesn't paint is almost as significant as what he chooses. Subjects are always drawn from the distant past; there are no allusions to the modern world. There are almost no landscape paintings or modern portraits, although there are splendid drawings of female heads that will be worked into nymphs and sirens. Religious subjects are surprisingly rare, with the possible exception of his dramatic *St. Eulalia* (1885). Here the emphasis on the saint's nude pubescent body and on the visual miracle of the white snow veiling it, undercuts any pious emotions it might have conveyed. The Waterhouse *St. Cecilia* (1895) is derived from Tennyson's "Palace of Art," not hagiography; his theatrical *Miriamne* (1887) from Josephus, looks, as Shaw remarked, like a scene from a melodrama played by Sarah Bernhardt. There is less Arthurian material than might be expected, but, more significantly, there are almost no works without female figures.

For Waterhouse is primarily a painter of women, recreating female figures from the realms of Homeric and Ovidian myth (as well as from medieval legend) and depicting them as romantic victims and powerful victimizers. He is clearly influenced by contemporary approaches to classics as well as by the re-popularization of classical texts. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* – somewhat sanitized – had been retranslated by Henry T. Riley (1851), Edward Brooks (1899), and several others; modern retellings of classics like William Morris's *Life and Death of Jason* (1867) with its account of "Hylas and the Nymphs" and *The Earthly Paradise* of 1868–70 with its lengthy tale of "Cupid and Psyche" were highly popular. Morris, Samuel Butler, and Andrew Lang had all offered new editions of Homer to the public.

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Additionally, by the 1890s *femmes fatales* were in vogue, whether as mermaids, sirens, or enchantresses. Perhaps because Waterhouse tended to use the same few models, "One face looks out from all his canvases." The pictured maidens are all young, slender, pale, and brown or auburn-haired; their eyes are set in a dreamy gaze and their lips are slightly parted. Usually seated or reclining, the classical beauties are arrayed in diaphanous garments with one small breast either revealed or lightly veiled. This pose – and it is almost obsessively repeated from his early "Household Gods" (1880) through multiple Circes and Lamias and Psyches as well as in paintings of Echo, Pandora, Ariadne, and Venus – is clearly one he finds erotic. The Mermaid, the Siren, the Naiad, the Hamadryad, and the seven Nymphs who seduce Hylas are depicted with both breasts bared, and Waterhouse apparently found these states of half-undress both sexy and saleable. Yet the women are languid rather than sensuous, lacking even the intensity of the half-sleeping beauties in Leighton's *Flaming June* (1894). Perhaps the provocative dress and subject matter serve commercial purposes; the pictures may be designed to titillate potential purchasers looking for Victorian pinups within the bounds of decency. The models' somnambulant postures seem appropriate for bachelor bedrooms. The fully dressed female figures in his medieval, Renaissance, and late non-narrative paintings have a somewhat different effect. They too lack force, but being less obviously erotic, they can (as in *Fair Rosamund* of 1916) suggest psychological complexity.

In this way, this last group has one of the traits we associate with the Pre-Raphaelites (as the catalog and exhibition title states). Focusing on women and full of literary allusions, the pictures have something in common with those of Millais, Rossetti, and Burne-Jones. However, returning to the Pre-Raphaelite mode in the 1890s was not "modern" and, by the time Waterhouse was painting, Pre-Raphaelite subjects had become visual commonplaces.

Moreover, Waterhouse's technique is not the bright and careful coloration laid on white ground associated with the early movement; his material objects are not often freighted with symbolic meaning, and his landscapes are anything but closely detailed. Upstone's excellent catalog essay ("Between Innovation and Tradition") explains that by the late 1880s Waterhouse had begun to paint in what was thought of as the "French" style, that is, with broad, visible brushstrokes, a sense of rapid movement, and a lack of high finish – techniques which connect him to the French Naturalists and Impressionists as well as to the "new British" painters who followed them, like Frank Bramley. The exhibition curators argue that this choice of technique constitutes part of the Waterhouse modernity and that his images of mythic women connect him to the European Symbolists. (See, for example, Patty Wageman's "Dream or Reality: Waterhouse's Women and Symbolism.") However, when the techniques of the new art proved unappealing to the public, excited disapproval at the Academy, and led to diminished sales, Waterhouse moved away from the innovative style. Moreover, only similarity of subject connects his women to those of Moreau or Redon or Klimt. That he paints mermaids, sirens, and the severed head of Orpheus does not prove that he inhabits the same world of imagination as the Symbolists. The paintings have neither the resonant images nor the sexually perverse implications of Symbolist works, nor do they transcend their realist surfaces.

Nevertheless, a few Waterhouse paintings are truly memorable, suggesting in their power and effect the artist he might have been. Waterhouse is almost obsessed with Circe – as a symbol of female power and enchantment – painting her at least four times, and *Circe Offering the Cup to Ulysses* (1891) is among his finest works (Figure 16). Although the circular window behind Circe is reminiscent of the mirror behind Holman Hunt's Lady in

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Figure 16. John William Waterhouse, *Circe Offering the Cup to Ulysses*. Oil on canvas, 1891. Gallery Oldham. Gift of Marjory Lees, 1952. Courtesy of Gallery Oldham.

most versions of the *Lady of Shalott* and the lions' heads on her throne are reused from a work of Leighton's, the dramatic image of Circe is his own. Here, what is appropriated has been brilliantly transformed. Circe, the gazer rather than the object of gaze, holds center stage in an intense and claustrophobic painting.

The Lady of Shalott of 1888 is another such memorable work (Figure 17). Trippi and Upstone remind us that the reeds and bushes of the foreground are from Millais's *Ophelia* (17, 45) while the gaze and facial angle of the dying lady are from Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix* (45) and other details come from Rossetti's illustration for the *Moxon Tennyson* and Millais' *Bride*. Once again, the resulting picture transcends its sources. What is borrowed has been

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Figure 17. John William Waterhouse, *The Lady of Shalott*. Oil on canvas, 1888. Tate Britain. Gift of Sir Henry Tate. © Tate.

recreated. The melding of the Pre-Raphaelite Lady and the freely painted landscape makes the painting seem simultaneously naturalistic and hyper-real, while symbolic objects add nuance and complexity. Upstone notes that only one of three candles on the prow of the boat remains lit – emblematic of the Lady's impending death (45), as is the nearly extinguished lantern beside the candles. The tapestry on which the Lady has been working (according to Tennyson's poem) is draped over the side of her boat; viewers can see "an abbot on an ambling pad," "Knights riding . . . two by two," and, most significantly, a "funeral." The Lady's name is barely visible on the side of the boat; the tower and the window from which she dared not look are "shadows" in the left background. Even the muted colors of the background suggest the fading and approaching demise of the ill-fated Lady. All contributes to a haunting portrait of a tragic woman victimized by love.

These two pictures are examples of Waterhouse at his most impressive; they suggest powers not often used and roads not taken. In the end, Waterhouse's commercial aspirations and capitulations to artistic fashions reduce many of his works to provocative, visual footnotes to other more important Victorian paintings. Nevertheless, they are still worth seeing.

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J. W. Waterhouse : The Modern Pre-Raphaelite was organized by the Groninger Museum in the Netherlands, where it appeared from December 2008 to May 2009, with the collaboration of the Royal Academy of Arts, London, where it was on view from June to September 2009, and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, where it appeared from October 2009 to February 2010. It was curated by Elizabeth Prettejohn, Peter Trippi, Robert Upstone, and Patty Wageman.

J. W. Waterhouse: The Modern Pre-Raphaelite. Groninger Museum, Royal Academy of Arts, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 2008.

Prettejohn, Elizabeth. "Waterhouse's Imagination." *J. W. Waterhouse* 23–35.

Trippi, Peter. "John William Waterhouse: A Biographical Overview." *J. W. Waterhouse* 15–21.

Upstone, Robert. "Between Innovation and Tradition: Waterhouse and Modern French Painting." *J. W. Waterhouse* 37–49.

Wageman, Patty. "Dream or Reality? Waterhouse's Women and Symbolism." *J. W. Waterhouse* 51–61.

YOUNG VICTORIA

By Gail Turley Houston

THE "PERVASIVE MASCULINITY OF 'the State,'" as Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer refer to it, came under interrogation during Queen Victoria's long reign (12). As I note in *Royalties: The Queen and Victorian Writers*, British rejection of Salic law nevertheless saw the monarch as essentially male, with a queen ascending the throne only in cases of "a failure of male issue" (Blackstone I: statute nos. 218, 224). If Victoria was the representation of a failure of masculinity, as it were, Albert, legally known as "Consort," could hardly have been taken as a success (or succession) of manhood. Victoria herself worried that "The position of a Prince Consort, must be painful and humiliating to any man," and Albert feared being seen as "puling," "effeminate," or "delicat[e]" (RA QVJ, 9 June 1842; Grey 227).

The film *Young Victoria* (2009) illustrates many of the anomalies the Queen (Emily Blunt) and her Prince Consort (Rupert Friend) strained against. That the male filmmakers, writer (Julian Fellowes), director (Jean-Marc Vallée), and producers (Graham King, Martin Scorsese, and Tim Headington) valiantly endeavor to get this "chick flick" right in terms of being generally true to the historical record, as well as resolving conflicts about gender roles to the satisfaction of the modern audience, only reiterates the delicacy of the task. Indeed, one wonders if the scene showing Victoria's first meeting with the all-male Privy Council, whose ludicrous gawking at their new monarch is cinematically visualized through a distorting lens, is not also a self-referential wink-wink from the filmmakers meant to reassure us about their own gaze at this preeminently female subject.

If the screenplay focuses on what the individual woman Victoria really wanted, it also attempts to manage the subliminal expectations of all the ostensible princesses in the audience. Thus Blunt's Victoria actually skips when she finally becomes queen, for, rather than mooning about romance, this princess likes being a reigning sovereign. The historical record tells us that the unmarried Victoria experienced this *frisson*. In June 1837, she wrote, "I receive so many communications from my Ministers but I like it very much." A year

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later she still felt the buzz, effusing, "I *delight* in this work" (RA QVJ, 24–25 June 1837; 22 June 1838). The early journals also reveal that the virgin queen viewed marriage as a "shocking alternative." "Dread[ing] the thought of marrying," because "I was so accustomed to having my own way," Victoria spurned suggestions that she wed (qtd. in Longford 105, 106, 133). Instead, she immersed herself in the celebrity of monarchy, attending the theatre, and receiving the plaudits of her subjects as though she were the star of the show; dancing into the wee hours of the morning at palace balls; and engrossing herself in reading and responding to memorials from her ministers.

But, as everyone in the film keeps reminding the heroine, she must marry, for her own sake and the sake of the kingdom. Lavish production values and superb acting underwrite the goal of helping Victoria (a.k.a the modern career woman) navigate the difficult shoals of fairytale romance. This is a love story, after all, about a princess, who, from childhood, is surrounded by ogres, both benevolent (the governess Lehzen) and malicious: a kind of Rapunzel, imprisoned in Kensington Palace by the Irish lout Conroy (Mark Strong) and his partner in crime, Victoria's mother (Miranda Richardson), the princess is ravishing and self-confident. Like the women Katherine Heigl plays in the slacker-makes-good Judd Apatow brand, Victoria is anxious to be taken seriously as a career woman and thinks she prefers to go *sans* the complementary prince. When Queen Consort Adelaide (widow of William IV) enjoins her to marry, the audience is given to understand that historically the best Victoria could expect was to wed a man who could play the public functionary admirably and enhance her private pleasures.

Without putting too fine a point on it, it is regrettable that the screenwriter did not consult current feminist analysis of Victoria's reign instead of falling for the old chestnut that Albert was the real brains behind the throne. The work of Dorothy Thompson, Margaret Homans, Adrienne Munich, Elizabeth Langland, Susan Casteras, Lynne Vallone, and myself might have helped to correct this assumption. For example, these scholars could have explained that Victoria was a capable ruler after Albert's death and that she was a self-aware, savvy engineer of her public image. Indeed, the historical Victoria would never have allowed the poster for the film to be a depiction of her reign, picturing as it does the sovereign resting her head on Albert's chest, her ruling hand inertly pressed against his commanding, sheltering body. Victoria knew that her sovereign prerogatives had to be implicitly displayed in any public image. Edwin Landseer's *Queen Victoria at Osborne* (otherwise known as *Sorrow)*, for example, limns the newly widowed queen all in black on a jet-colored horse, her head seemingly lowered in mourning. But the key to the painting, its very center, is not the massive black block of color but the small white pieces of paper Victoria holds in her hands. The message is that despite her grief, Victoria Regina – who is reading memorials from her ministers – is still working on matters of state.

In contrast, the makers of *Young Victoria* hint that even in the twenty-first century there is no one more unlikable than a self-assured, ambitious female executive (think: Hillary Clinton, Nancy Pelosi, and Carly Fiorina). The awkward slacker to Victoria's career woman, Albert at first slavishly obeys the protocols that have him literally waiting upon Victoria's every whim, not because he loves her but in order to snare her in her Uncle Leopold's schemes. When Albert has been feminized too long by waiting for Victoria to call him back to court, his brother provides the decidedly anachronistic advice that "it's your life," so "live it for yourself and Victoria." This is coupled with the film's maxim that only when Victoria listens to her heart – her real, honest self – will she become a wise queen. The assumption is

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that since Victoria does not know what she really wants, Albert will have to guide her. The scene in which she proposes to Albert, then, recreates the old coverture model under the guise of the new egalitarian marriage proposal. Victoria haltingly begins to ask for Albert's hand and Albert completes the sentence for her, as the two giddily become one in language and spirit.

Henceforth, Albert will act the master to Victoria's apprentice, teaching her how not to become a pawn to menacing court intrigue. Thus, before her official coronation, she dreams that Conroy and Lord Melbourne are fighting over her (doesn't every woman really dream that?) but is pacified when her future husband's voiceover exhorts her to "Make your move." Likewise, mastering the game with Albert's aid, at the coronation ceremony the nervous Queen is reassured because Albert beatifically watches from his all but hallowed place above her. The coronation ball, with its iconic dance between the lovers, figures the culminating sensual moment of self-conscious knowing as the two beautiful young people realize that the sexual intimacy of their private game has merged with the public counterpart. The roguish Lord Melbourne (Paul Bettany) watches their *pas de deux* from the sidelines, knowing that it signals his own demise as puppet-master to the queen. The fact that the historical Albert was not present at Victoria's coronation – nor was he yet affianced to her – is conveniently ignored in the film.

Once they are married, the problem becomes how to make Albert feel more like a man. At this point, the viewer is directed to desire what is seen as the only option that will ensure Albert's virility and Victoria's happiness: in another kind of coverture, we must wish for the couple to rule as one, with Albert's maleness trumping Victoria's legal entitlement to the throne as *femme sole*. As the film's postscript infuriatingly informs us, "Victoria and Albert reigned together for twenty years." After Albert slays the dragons that have menaced his Queen – the vile Conroy, manipulative Leopold, unctuous Melbourne, and overbearing Lehzen – the screenplay suggests that he deserves more than Victoria's self-important response. "I wear the crown," she shrilly declares, and "the mistakes I make will be my mistakes."

The need to relieve Albert of his slackerdom culminates in a preposterous scene. Victoria was certainly shot at a number of times by disgruntled and/or crazed assailants, but Albert never took a bullet for her. Nevertheless, such shenanigans are enough to bring the fictionalized queen to her senses, and, if not, we have Sinead O'Connor to set the heroine straight with such bombastic lyrics as "With you beside me I am standing strong," "You took my life and made it beautiful," and "You made me shine even walking one step behind." Alas, every queen must have her king.

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DARWIN IN THE GREATER BRITAIN OF THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE

By E. Warwick Slinn

IN DECEMBER 1835, CHARLES DARWIN visited New Zealand for nine days as part of his voyage on HMS *Beagle*, landing in the Bay of Islands. In November 2009, he appeared again in New Zealand as part of the worldwide Darwin celebrations, performing for twenty-one days at Downstage, a theater in Wellington, the capital. This second appearance was commissioned by a New Zealand research center that indirectly resulted from Darwin's first visit – the Allan Wilson Center for Molecular Ecology and Evolution that was established at Massey University in 2002 as a national focus for biological and evolutionary enquiry. In 2009 the Center commissioned the performance of a celebratory play about Charles Darwin to commemorate his achievements for the 200-years anniversary of his birth and the 150-years anniversary of the publication of *On the Origin of Species*, while nevertheless leaving all themes and dramatic focus to the author and director.

Thus a young New Zealand playwright, Arthur Meek, wrote *Collapsing Creation* with the express purpose of dramatising a modern perception of Darwin the man: the struggles, fears and ambitions, the historically specific intertwining of an emotional with an intellectual life that has had so many consequences for human knowledge. Possibly Robert Browning, Darwin's contemporary who was so fascinated by the possibilities of re-creating past selves, might have proposed poetic "resuscitation" or "galvanism" (*The Ring and the Book* I.719, 740) as a means of presenting an historical figure; but this Victorian live, as dramatis

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persona, was less a re-inspired soul or retrieved breath than a live rendition of accumulated knowledge and imagination. And yet the historical specificity of a once-lived life and its inevitable connections could hardly be avoided. While the play's title, *Collapsing Creation*, need not make Charles Darwin the referent, surrounding publicity made the connection explicit: "1859: Charles Darwin risks everything for an idea." Some publicity allowed the potential for Victorian melodrama: "the courage of a visionary who must battle his conscience and soul to change the world – and find the strength to face the fallout." And some local casual discussion proposed that the determined focus on a Victorian historical figure led to the limits of a Victorian stage production; after post-modern representations of famous lives in Philip Glass's *Einstein on the Beach* or Robert Lepage's *Andersen Project*, this was dead theater.

But there remains a debate about how best to portray a dead Victorian live, and conventional theater behind a proscenium arch with identified "characters" and accessible dialogue may still remain the best medium for portraying an historical figure like Charles Darwin as a focal point for nineteenth-century beliefs about selfhood and intellectual originality. If the very history of evolution has challenged assumptions about an originating genius (and the play incorporates this history, including the Wallace treatise), Charles Darwin nevertheless still represents for many people the possibility of unique intellectual creativity. Surely the *idea* was his? But it was not of course. Darwin's famous idea (natural selection) emerged from the same brilliant act of synthesis that characterises so many advances in human understanding, and the Wallace treatise shows it could be done twice, independently, at the same time. The "Darwin" who stands for the theory is hardly the same unfolding diurnal "Darwin" who tended his plants and pondered their structural details. So perhaps Meek's decision to focus on the person missed an opportunity to dramatise another dimension to the Darwinian saga – its challenge to the conventions of selfhood or boundaries of identity. While the actor/protagonist occasionally walked across the arch into audience-territory, such transgressions did not disturb the underlying drama of a discrete identity and internalised conflict.

But Meek admits to being a conservative writer, and audience response suggests New Zealand remains a conservative society, at least in its enthusiasm for the realist assumptions of conventional theater. Reviewers described the drama of ideas as apposite and well-performed; audiences laughed at topical jokes (such as "he hates God but he's not an atheist," or an in-joke about nineteenth-century emigrant New Zealanders lacking the wit to steal bread and get a free trip to Australia); they laughed at Victorian beliefs that assumed a ladder of ascent from lowly creatures to "white, Christian men"; they took anachronisms, including modern slang, in their stride; and the play was voted the best production of the year in Wellington's theater awards for 2009. Altogether then, *Collapsing Creation* was a successful celebration, but if uneasy tensions remain around the inseparability of modern perception and historical context, what was actually being celebrated?

One of Meek's answers to questions about how to deliver a Victorian live in the twenty-first century is the collapsing of several historical figures into a single persona. After spending much of the first half wondering why Alfred Wallace was called Alfred Thomas, I understood in the second half when Alfred transforms into the proselytising Huxley, a Thomas of another name. Eventually Alfred shifts further, beyond even the historical Huxley's antagonisms to organised religion, into the fanaticisms of which all believers are capable, with hints of eugenics and the misappropriation of natural selection. Notwithstanding this shifting focus

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there is continuity of character in Alfred Thomas, and while he disintegrates into rhetorical travesty, there is point to that dramatisation given what happens to evolution in the minds and mouths of some of our contemporary extremists. Meek collapses other figures as well. John Roberts, for example, manifests not only Darwin's teachers and supporters but also those who, like Samuel Wilberforce, were horrified by the affront to Biblical creationism (Wilberforce's anonymous critique of *Origin* in the *Quarterly Review* is given in the play to Roberts), and a working class persona called (perhaps too obviously) Joseph Gardiner absorbs the roles of scientific helper and devoted workman, the blueprint for endless laboratory technicians. If it was strange to hear famous repartee from the Wilberforce/Huxley debate transposed from the Oxford University Museum into the drawing-room tensions of Down House, this was nevertheless an indication that the broader social conflict hit home for the often invalid Darwin and his earnest wife, Emma.

So what manner of Victorian sensibility was thus presented to the New Zealand audience? Certainly there was a reminder that evolutionary theory was always already a fundamental challenge to theological explanations of creation. But that is effectively an intellectual cliché and while broader cultural tensions are acknowledged, the play focuses generally on the immediacy of Down House and its daily routine. Here the God issue is simply an unfortunate consequence. Darwin focuses instead on the minutiae of evidence and detail, on establishing the scientific grounds for his theorising, on spending eight years writing about barnacles in order to establish his biological credentials. He is also devoted to wife and family, retaining, without compromising his science, respect for individuals and their feelings. Darwin is portrayed therefore as the quintessential Victorian intellectual: liberal, tolerant, humane yet obsessive in the pursuit of truth, reluctant to proselytise yet wanting recognition, compassionate to fellow human beings (and sensitive to different cultures), uxorious, devoted to family, and supported by a loving and understanding wife. And Emma is also a significant mover in the play, herself shifting from class-ridden social etiquette to liberal inclusiveness; she comes to accept the Gardiner in the drawing room, and when John Roberts complains about Darwin's threat to God, it is she who retorts that "God can look after himself." In a final tableau that echoes Victorian death bed scenes, she is given the effective last word when she reads from Proverbs to her husband, now distraught with the news of Roberts's suicide: "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding." In such an ending evolutionary theory may be reconciled with Biblical authority, but all this remains very middle-class Victorian, and the Victorian literary intelligentsia – Arnold, Newman, Mill, Eliot – would have little problem recognising these values.

Notwithstanding the intervening 150–200 years, Darwin's second appearance in New Zealand along with its accompanying cultural responses basically reminds us therefore that Victorian intellectual liberalism – the humanity and potential wisdom of disinterested inquiry – still retains its attractions and force, at least in New Zealand. Perhaps that is a more important celebration than the "courage of a visionary" or the principles of natural selection and species variation, and a theme the commissioning Allan Wilson Center might find perfectly welcome.

In addition to producing the play, the Downstage Theater Company joined with the Royal Society of New Zealand to arrange a series of lectures and a panel discussion to precede the performances. This was the science side of the sesquicentenary celebration, focusing on the theories and investigations, but it was also an occasion for interaction

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between experts and non-experts. At the panel discussion, three differing professionals – a scientist, a theologian, and a science writer – briefly presented their views about evolutionary theory, and these were immediately followed by audience responses and questions. If any occasion were to produce witness from the fundamentalists, it was here, but that did not occur. Fundamentalism was certainly mentioned, including United States surveys that suggest more than 50% of Americans reject evolution, but New Zealand Darwinian events have generally focused on the science, the history, and the biography. Darwin the person has not been lost, in memory or disciplinary translation. There were extremists at the forum, but these were fringe intellects more concerned to outdo standard science with their own theoretical refinements, to claim that they personally had reconciled religion with science, or to propose a new model of "evolutionary supernature," than to affirm intelligent design. Firmly and diplomatically chaired by the Downstage Director, the gathering overall was more interested in pondering the reasons why of all scientific theories evolution was so vulnerable to perversion or subject to attack – where are the protesters against relativity, or declarations that the uncertainty principle should be banned in schools? Is it all just to do with the desperate need for a personal God? Local fundamentalists do exist, but they were not flaunting intelligent design on this occasion.

Another Darwinian event in New Zealand, generating less social energy and dramatic focus, and yet manifesting more scholarly significance, was an exhibition of Darwinian materials arranged by Special Collections in the University of Otago Library, Dunedin. *Beetles, Barnacles, Orchids, and the Origin of Species: Charles Darwin and his Legacy*, curated by Donald Kerr, also presented a Victorian live, but this was the textual Darwin, the Darwin beloved of scholars and historians who is known through diaries, notebooks, letters, and publications. Visitors to the exhibition could hardly miss this focus; they had to walk past a series of vitrines that, apart from the mandatory yet solitary fossil, displayed piles of editions, most notably the fifteen or more volumes of Darwin's correspondence. So there was no escaping the world of print and its connections, particularly since this event was also about the Darwin milieu: not just Charles, but his predecessors, correspondents, and interlocutors. And it was a reminder that Victorians were interminable letter writers and that Darwin could by this means sustain Down House as a hub for international discussion and enquiry. His publications were the outcome of that painstaking enquiry, but the notebooks and correspondence as well as his research projects were essential to the process.

The Otago exhibition provided an overwhelming impression of these textual energies and Darwin's contribution to them. No performed simulacra, the books and letters were themselves, with their original type face and graphics. Thus eighteen cabinets, with accompanying drawers, covered the gamut of the nineteenth-century Darwinian phenomenon: the family background and the *Beagle* experience; early thoughts and early works; the many precursors including Buffon, Cuvier, Malthus, Lyell, Matthew, and Chambers; the production and debate surrounding *Origin*, including two significant Victorian editions, critical responses by Owen, Agassiz, Sedgwick, and Wilberforce, and forays by Lyell, Lubbock, and Huxley; all the other major works by Darwin on barnacles, volcanic islands, orchids, emotions, climbing plants, insectivorous plants, human descent, fertilisation, plant movement, and mould; extracts from Asa Gray's *Darwiniana* (New York, 1877), the American sympathiser who argued with Louis Agassiz (also represented) on Darwin's behalf; and a copy of *The Evolution of Man* (London, 1879) by Ernst Haeckel, a German biologist and enthusiastic Darwinian.

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This was an imposing collection, therefore, and Donald Kerr, the Special Collections Librarian, did an excellent job as curator, arranging the material in roughly chronological groups and providing informative notes for every item. He also chose well when opening books or letters at strategic or engaging moments. One light-hearted example was from Darwin's early years at private school, when he listed his options for marriage. These might best be forgotten, except they capture youthful male prejudices that may or may not remain Victorian: the plus side includes "female chit-chat," "constant companion in old age," and "taking care of the house," while the minus side notes "fatness and idleness" (whose is not clear), "anxiety and responsibility," and "less money for books." In similar vein, Dr. Kerr opened a copy of Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies* (London, 1896) to display a caricature by Linley Sambourne of Richard Owen and Thomas Huxley peering at a captured water baby. But a more serious example involved Kerr's selection of a letter Darwin wrote to Alfred Wallace in 1860 about Patrick Matthew. Matthew's exceedingly rare 1831 publication *On Naval Timber and Arboriculture* was included in the exhibition; in an appendix to that book, Matthew outlined the principle of natural selection. In a comment that impinges on the history of evolutionary theory, Darwin wrote to Wallace that Matthew "gives *most clearly* [Darwin's emphasis] but very briefly . . . our view of Natural Selection. It is a most complete use of anticipation."

One item in the exhibition that was undoubtedly of amusing interest to New Zealanders was a letter from Darwin that included a prediction about the country's future. In December 1880 Dr. Thomas Hocken on behalf of the Otago Institute sent Darwin an illuminated copy of an address given at the Institute. Two months later (February 1881) Darwin responded, saying he had read every one of the volumes produced by the Institute from its inception, indicating immediately the amazing capacity for his textual enterprise at Down House to keep up with the international field. He also went on to praise the success and zeal with which science was being pursued in New Zealand, in a country that was "destined," he believed, "to be in the future the Greater Britain of the Southern Hemisphere." No doubt Darwin the Flatterer will provoke non-New Zealanders into forming their own views about his ability as a sooth-sayer, but he was clearly well acquainted with scientists who were following his theories in New Zealand and generous in his praise of their work.

These connections were fully illustrated in the exhibition's final display case. Cabinet eighteen provided extensive documentation of the evolutionary-influenced studies that were being pursued in Victorian New Zealand. While only two of the authors (Cheeseman and Buller) were educated in New Zealand and only three (Hutton, Cheeseman, and von Haast) pursued scientific careers, they nevertheless contributed to making New Zealand an active location for Darwinian research: Frederick W. Hutton was a firm supporter of Darwin's theories and published on New Zealand fauna, including birds, fish, and marine molluscs; Thomas Cheeseman was a botanist who developed extensive studies of New Zealand's flora and applied Darwin's study of orchids to local conditions; William Colenso, who had met Darwin when he landed in the Bay of Islands, developed a study of moa bones (an extinct flightless bird); Julius von Haast wrote on the geology of Canterbury and Westland and promoted Darwin's theories to the early Philosophical Institute of Canterbury; and Walter Buller became a leading ornithologist, publishing *A History of the Birds of New Zealand* in 1873. Both Haast and Buller (who have given names to well-known South Island passes and rivers) were sponsored by Darwin as Fellows elected by the Royal Society of London, in 1867 and 1879 respectively (Hutton was also elected a Fellow of the RSL in 1892).

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If those connections showed Darwin in Victorian New Zealand, a series of lectures broadcast by Radio New Zealand in August and September 2008 showed his lingering scientific influence in contemporary New Zealand. Sponsored by the Royal Society of New Zealand, the series included prominent New Zealand scientists giving talks with titles such as "Darwin and the Evolution of an Idea," "The Evolution of Biological Complexity," "The Principle of Evolution: Absolute Simplicity," and "The Fossil Record." One of the more interesting items for readers of *Victorian Literature and Culture* was a talk by Brian Boyd from the University of Auckland. His lecture, "The Storytelling Age," focused on the possibility of biological explanations for art as a "human universal" and on reasons why humans compulsively invent stories they know to be untrue. It emerged from his recent book, *On the Origin of Stories*, which interconnects fiction with evolution and cognition, a biocultural approach to narrative that provides another connection of Darwin with New Zealand in 2009.

And that returns me to the Allan Wilson Center with its focus on research related to evolutionary theory and its desire to ensure that the focus of these celebrations remained on the memory of Darwin's scientific contribution rather than on speculations about intelligent design. As I hinted earlier, this focus provides some distinctiveness for the Darwinian events in New Zealand from many in the Northern Hemisphere. Noting the extraordinary activity surrounding these current celebrations in the Western world, with their "immense outpouring of Darwinalia," Richard Lewontin suggests that the primary reason for this attention "is the rejuvenation in recent years of theories of divine creation of the earth and the organisms that inhabit it" and that the response of an embattled scientific community therefore was to use the occasion "to carry on the struggle against obscurantism" (21). Certainly the Royal Society lecture series sought to explain current scientific thinking, but generally in New Zealand the emphasis has been rather on the scientific tradition that Darwin himself knew had begun in this country in the nineteenth century, making these local celebrations more to do with the continuity of human enquiry than the proving of truth or positing of faith.

The final word on Darwin as a Victorian Live in Greater Britain in 2009 might go to the scientific citing in the Downstage forum: "Nothing in biology makes sense except in terms of evolution." But I rather like the quotation from Proverbs, with its emphasis on wisdom as the principal thing: not because of its potential for reconciling religion and science, but because "wisdom" might provide an appropriately value-laden focusing concept for the connections between Darwin's Victorian liberalism and the aims of the present multi-disciplinary enquiries that he began to foster over 150 years ago.

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STEAMPUNK AT OXFORD

By Herbert Sussman

THE REIMAGINING OF THE VICTORIAN world called steampunk has captured the popular imagination. The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen – Mina Murray (nee Harker); Allan Quartermain; Captain Nemo; Henry Jekyll with his alter ego; Hawley Griffith (a.k.a. The Invisible Man) – pursues villains through late-Victorian London in graphic novels and film. In his graphic novels, Sydney Padua takes up an unlikely crime-fighting duo in *The Thrilling Adventures of Lovelace and Babbage*. In the neo-Victorian novels of Michael Moorcock, such as *The War Lord of the Air*, armies fight from highly ornamented steam-powered dirigibles. William Gibson's and Bruce Sterling's *The Difference Engine* brilliantly depicts a nineteenth-century world controlled by enormous steam-powered Babbage computers. An on-line chatroom shares suggestions and photos for creating the Steampunk Home.

Steampunk, like much that is neo-Victorian, has also entered the academy with a degree of respectability. The newly-formed website Steam Scholars shares information on the growing number of college courses on the topic and the blossoming of steampunk scholarship. And with the mounting of an exhibition called simply *Steampunk* by the august Oxford Museum of the History of Science, this twenty-first century version of the Victorian has penetrated the citadel of traditional English culture.

What exactly is steampunk? The best answer is that steampunk, a term coined in the late 1980s, describes an extensive contemporary sub-culture whose verbal, visual, cinematic, and material forms are grounded in an alternative history of the Victorians. In this neo-Victorian vision, technological change stopped with the development of steam power, hence the first half of the name. The second industrial revolution of electricity, the internal-combustion engine, and wireless radio has not taken place. But rather than being Luddite in its attitude, steampunk imagines sophisticated innovations employing steam power and the Babbage proto-computer. Without the internal-combustion engine, air travel and aerial warfare takes place in swift steam-powered dirigibles. Steam-powered Analytical Engines control social movement. Steampunk values the Victorian mythos of the individual heroic engineer and inventor. Its heroes are Isambard Kingdom Brunel; Charles Babbage; Ada Lovelace, Babbage's popularizer; Jules Verne; and H. G. Wells.

The "punk" in Steampunk derives from an earlier SF genre of the early 1980s, cyberpunk. Both genres transfer the 1970s punk sub-cultural sensibility to a technologically transformed world as a means of commenting on the present day. William Gibson's classic cyberpunk novel *Neuromancer* (1984) imagines a near future in which people survive bodily death as computer codes and hackers battle vast cyborgian corporate structures. In his substantial steampunk novel *The Difference Engine* (1990), computer hackers and Luddites battle

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in a world that employs steam-powered iron Babbage engines for social control. More specifically, connecting counter-cultural punk to Victorian steam technology draws upon the contemporary sense of Victorian England as the site of intense and often perverse sexuality, of violence, inchoate rebellion, and accelerating technological change – the world of Brunel and Babbage, of Sherlock Holmes and Jack the Ripper. *The Thrilling Adventures of Lovelace and Babbage* recasts Ada Lovelace, a reclusive mathematician, as a leggy action hero.

As graphic novel and film, steampunk has a distinctive visual style. Entranced by the extravagance of Victorian ornamental technological styling, steampunk quite self-consciously rejects the modernity of functionalism and streamlining. If in this alternative history neither the airplane nor the internal-combustion engine has been invented, the Crystal Palace has not been built. For steampunk the visual models are the curlicues, fretwork, and Doric columns that ornament early steam engines, and the Grecian cast-iron capitals that top the supporting columns of the great train sheds.

In a skillful curatorial turn, the curators at Oxford brought out from the museum's own extensive collection some steam-age devices of the sort that inspired the steampunk illustrators and artisans in the exhibition. These mechanical artifacts showed the Victorian machine shaped with decoration, anthropomorphism, and visual intelligibility as well as demonstrating the craftsmanship of the skilled artisan working in metal for new instruments and engines. Actual Victorian small-scale models of steam engines bear witness to the importance of craftsmanship in the steam age. A Victorian clockwork metal bird scarer with its open spaces suggests a vocalizing person. A wonderful fragment of intricate gearing from a Babbage Difference Engine machined by a single worker rather than mass-produced shows again the visual openness (no black box here) and the visual attractiveness as complex steam-age machinery approaches the condition of sculpture. The coherer device from the receiver of a Marconi wireless of 1896 looks to the mechanical rather than electronic basis of early radio.

The nineteenth-century literary sources of steampunk are the descriptions and the original illustrations of the ornate dirigibles and submarines of Jules Verne and the humanoid Martian fighting machines and spaceships of H. G. Wells's scientific romances. In our visual world such fusion of technologically advanced machinery and retro forms continues in such highly popular films as *Dune* and the *Star Wars* series. In the show, Stéphane Halleux's "Robotpet," its awkward dog-like shape made of leather and junk metal, resembles the menacing humanoid fighting machines of the *Star Wars* films. For the schoolboys in blazers and ties on a school trip to the Museum, whose visual consciousness was shaped not by the Bauhaus but by the baroque visuals of *Star Wars*, the neo-Victorian steampunk artifacts were anything but remote. The boys moved about enthusiastically, continually speaking the current term of highest praise among the pubescent – "Cool."

Contemporary steampunk art, objects made or, more accurately, crafted in this steampunk aesthetic by artisans within a global sub-culture, formed the core of what the Oxford Museum of the History of Science described as "the first museum exhibition of Steampunk art." In the exhibition, curated by Art Donovan, a noted American steampunk artist, the objects took a distinctly post-modern stance in self-consciously and ironically transforming the ornamental Victorian machine aesthetic into a contemporary idiom.

For a Victorianist, the historically interesting point of this neo-Victorian steampunk art lies in its recuperation of certain neglected aspects of Victorian technology and visuality

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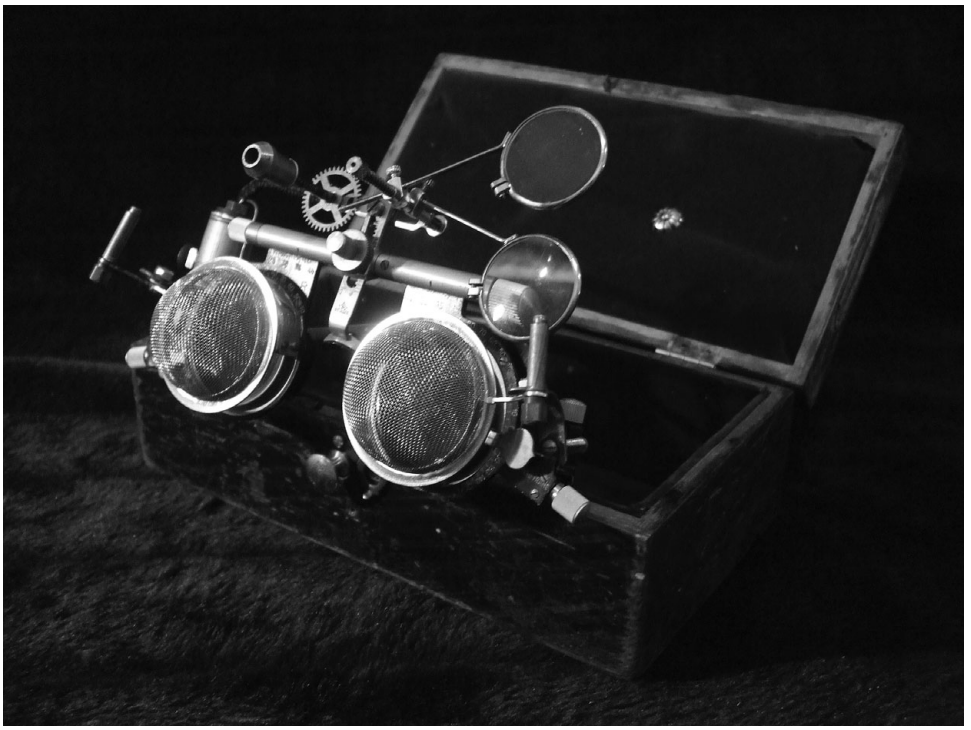


Figure 18. Mad Uncle Cliff [Cliff Overton], *Inspectacles*. Mixed media, [c. 2008]. Courtesy of the Museum of the History of Science, Oxford.

while reshaping these in a "punk" mode as a critique of contemporary technological culture. For one, the exhibition calls to consciousness the decorative extravagance of the Victorian technological imagination, now lost in the triumph of the International Style. After all, the triumph of functionalism and streamlining was contingent, rather than inevitable. The world could have been built in the model of Gaudi's Barcelona or the Secessionist style of Vienna. Steampunk art with its baroque, even mannerist aesthetic of ornamented mechanical objects also recaptures the look of nineteenth-century mechanical devices as a form of visual pleasure that has been lost with functionalism. Such elaborate décor appears in the three-faced watch of Vianney Halter and the bronze curlicues and elongated clock hands in the timepiece of Eric Freitas. Furthermore, the artifacts seek to recapture the transparency in the operation of machinery that so fascinated the Victorians. As one-of-a-kind objects, the artifacts occupy the boundary between technology and art, recalling the centrality of artisanal work to the development of nineteenth-century machinery and evoking the pleasure of craftsmanship in working with machines.

Inspectacles by Mad Uncle Cliff (Cliff Overton) (Figure 18) is one of a number of optical instruments in the exhibition, such as the bronze goggles with attached thread and pincushion by Doctor Grymm (Joey Marsocci) and a small telescope with clock by Molly "Porkshanks" Friedrich. This preoccupation of steampunk artists with optical devices references the interest

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of the Victorians in new instruments to expand vision, such as the actual Victorian compound telescope exhibited from the museum collection, as well as, in a self-referential mode, their own artistic purposes of re-visioning modern technological thinking. These spectacles, or inspectacles, offer a riff on functionalism. Indeed, the basic artistic joke of much steampunk art is that it creates functional objects that are not meant to function according to our ideas of technological efficiency. These artifacts challenge our valuing of technological change as swift, ever accelerating movement. Instead, referring to the slow food movement, Mad Uncle Cliff states his "desire to move from high tech to slow technology. Time can never move fast enough for people today" (Broad Sheet #9). This contraption may work, but in a retro fashion. Here is a return to metal levers, metal gearing, and adjusting screws. In the sub-culture of steampunk, electronics and miniaturization have no part.

In these "inspectacles" the slow mechanical work of adjusting the lenses is self-consciously, outwardly, and proudly made visible. The design is open. The lenses are clearly shown. The gearing mechanism and the crank for changing and adjusting lenses are large and visible. The protective covering of the lenses, something like largish inverted tea strainers, is chunky and stands out aggressively. The project of these goggles is to oppose the values of simplification and streamlining by referencing the Victorian pleasure in mechanical operations made visible, as in the power looms and steam hammers that operated to the adulation of crowds at the Crystal Palace or the complex gearing of Babbage's engines that attracted visitors to his house. This slow clunky device with its parts made visible implicitly refutes contemporary ideals of making technological workings invisible, as in the indiscernible transitions in the lenses of contemporary eyeglasses and the invisible currents in the black boxes of computers. As Mad Uncle Cliff says, "I want to move away from the latest amorphous satin steel device with no visible parts back to a product that shouts out its function by showing you how it works" (Broad Sheet #9).

Underground Explorer by Tom Banwell (Figure 19) ironically references the Victorian spirit of adventure and discovery. For an imaginary journey into caves, the analogue of the journeys under the sea in Verne or into space in Wells, Banwell has made what he calls a "fantasy" helmet (Broad Sheet #9). This is headwear with a purpose; it incorporates technology for exploration, such as bottled oxygen and an arc-light headlamp. As in *Inspectacles*, the function is open and exaggerated, as in the metal tubing connecting the helmet to the gas cylinder, the outsized goggles, and the extended nose- and mouthpieces. And as in other steampunk works, as in steam-age machinery itself, the devices are distinctly anthropomorphic, as are the machines of Wells's Martians and of the *Star Wars* saga. And, again referencing the age of steam, there are embellishments that move beyond function to the ornamental baroque, as in the metal crest of the helmet, more Grecian warrior than explorer, and the studs around the metal vents in the breathing apparatus. Then there is the highly decorated metal border around the edge of the neckpiece as a purely decorative element – studded, pointy, and pierced. The materials also refuse contemporary innovation. The basic material is leather, rather than an industrial metal, and the leather pieces are joined by hand-stitching. The object is set against a purple Victorian ornamental fabric. Here, then, is an ostensibly purposeful object that incorporates a surplus of non-functional decorative elements to become purely fantastical. Perhaps, too, the *Underground Explorer* also carries the sexual frisson of punk. The leather helmet resonates with the conventional apparatus of bondage and fetishism within the sado-masochistic narratives of the nineteenth century that survive into our time.

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Figure 19. Tom Banwell, *Underground Explorer*. Mixed media, [c. 2009]. Courtesy of the Museum of the History of Science, Oxford.

If *Inspectacles* and *Underground Explorer* move to the fantastical, other steampunk artifacts challenge our distinction between art and technology in a different fashion by hand-crafting models of functional Victorian machines. Jos de Vink offers three hand-made, small-scale replicas in bronze of Stirling hot-air engines, comparable to the model steam engines with brass finials and Doric columns on view from the museum holdings. De Vink's miniature Stirling engines, early nineteenth-century devices that compress hot air rather than steam, lack the decorative fantasia of steampunk work; they are smooth-surfaced and streamlined. These small engines are functional, fully operating, built to work. For de Vink these engines comprise an homage to nineteenth-century inventive skill; they show "the possibility of setting a heavy mass in motion by means of a difference in temperature, using very little energy" (Broad Sheet #9).

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Like the hand-made spectacles and the exploring helmet, these hand-crafted atmospheric engines call attention to the centrality of artisanal making for nineteenth-century invention. The value of such handcraft is often lost in the attention paid to the rise of mechanized mass production. James Watt's early engines demanding fine tolerances were first shaped in scale models by skilled artisans within his workshop. The Babbage engines demanded an accurate gearing that had to be machined by hand. But the hand-crafted models made in Watt's workshop or Babbage's were prototypes, intended as mock-ups for eventual mass production for a commercial market, as in Watt's own very successful engine works.

For the steampunk artisan, however, the carefully crafted engines, like the ornamented helmet or goggles, mimic prototypes for industrial replication but self-consciously subvert the uses of such craftsmanship for the purposes of industrial capitalism. These artifacts are made by artisans who often choose to have their workshops in remote regions at the margins of the industrial grid; Banwell lives in the town of Rough and Ready in the foothills of the northern California Sierra Nevada. De Vink's engines are not prototypes, but one-off, unique, non-utilitarian creations that employ hand and intuition for the satisfaction of the artisan maker. Compellingly, de Vink argues that his miniature Stirling engines dissolve the boundary of technology and art: "These machines can also be regarded as Steampunk Kinetic Art Objects. I achieved this by unifying the design technically and artistically" (Broad Sheet #9).

In looking backwards to handcrafting in the age of steam, steampunk art complicates the powerful narrative constructed by the nineteenth-century arts and crafts movement, and still alive today, which limits the pleasure of working with the hands to the revival of pre-modern handicrafts such as hand-weaving or wood carving. There is, however, a pleasure felt by the machinists of Babbage's gearing and the artisans in Watt's workshop and seen today in folks tinkering under the automobile hood. Such artisanal pleasure in the mechanical device is recalled and displayed in the adjustment mechanism of the *Inspectacles* and the decorative collar of the *Underground Explorer* or the hand-modeled miniature engines. The steampunk art shown at Oxford looks to revive the joy of making in a machine age by evoking an alternative Victorian technological universe of steam, proto-computers, and hand-made optical instruments.

The New School

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PLAYING WITH PICTURES: THE ART OF VICTORIAN PHOTOCOLLAGE

By Talia Schaffer

A RECENT SHOW AT THE METROPOLITAN Museum of Art, *Playing with Pictures: The Art of Victorian Photocollage*, displayed arresting images: photographs of aristocratic family members snipped and pasted into bizarre scenes that were carefully drawn with pen and ink or painted with watercolors. The upper-class female artists, including Georgina Berkeley, Lady Mary Georgiana Caroline Filmer, Kate Gough, and even Alexandra, Princess of Wales, had depicted themselves and their social circles as pickles in a pickle jar; ducks floating on a river; cards dropped by a jester; apes perched in a tree (Figure 20). The images make one think of Alice in Wonderland or Charles Darwin, as humans morph into animals and people sit contentedly on mushrooms (Figure 21). In one particularly pleasing image, plump ducks sail proudly on a lake, bearing the regal heads of society beauties (Figure 22). As Elizabeth Siegel, the exhibition's curator, commented, "the chance to combine photographic portraits with painted settings inspired dreamlike and often-bizarre results. Some images are mysteriously odd: a turkey with tail feathers boasting portraits," for example (28–30). What exactly did such photocollages mean? How do we account for the invention of an innovative form of bricolage, by, of all people, wealthy Victorian matrons?

One way to make sense of Victorian photocollage is to read the images as part of the widespread practice of amateur handicrafts. Throughout the nineteenth century, but especially between the 1840s and the 1870s, Victorian women engaged in a vastly popular hobby, the production of artifacts, including: wax flowers, acorn-encrusted boxes, scrap screens, Berlin-wool work slippers, diaphanie (pasting magazine illustrations on glass), potichomanie (pasting illustrations on porcelain), seaweed and shell arranging, taxidermy, making leather brackets, using a poker to burn patterns on wood, painting wood to resemble marble, creating spangles out of fish scales. It's easy to see how photocollage fits this pattern. In all these crafts, intensive labor dignifies inexpensive, disposable, mass-produced materials. Just as early nineteenth-century craft involved rearranging and disciplining elements of nature, so too mid-Victorian craft involved subduing the unruly efflorescence of commercial images. I argue elsewhere that Victorian amateur handicraft is thus intimately concerned with mass-produced objects, which the craft works to reappropriate, imitate, or rival.

Victorian photocollage, typically, refashions a mass-produced item: the carte de visite. These were photographic calling cards, and by the 1860s and 1870s they were inexpensive, widely-distributed, and commonplace. By reusing cartes de visites in their photocollages, the craftswomen made them mean differently. Roberta Smith noted in the *New York Times* that photocollage is reversing "the mechanical impersonality of photography and re-establishing it within handmade, time-consuming, implicitly upper-class works." The photocollagist literally cut up the carte de visite, reinserting it into a carefully hand-drawn landscape in which it took on a unique meaning. Often this meant that the image acquired an elite association,

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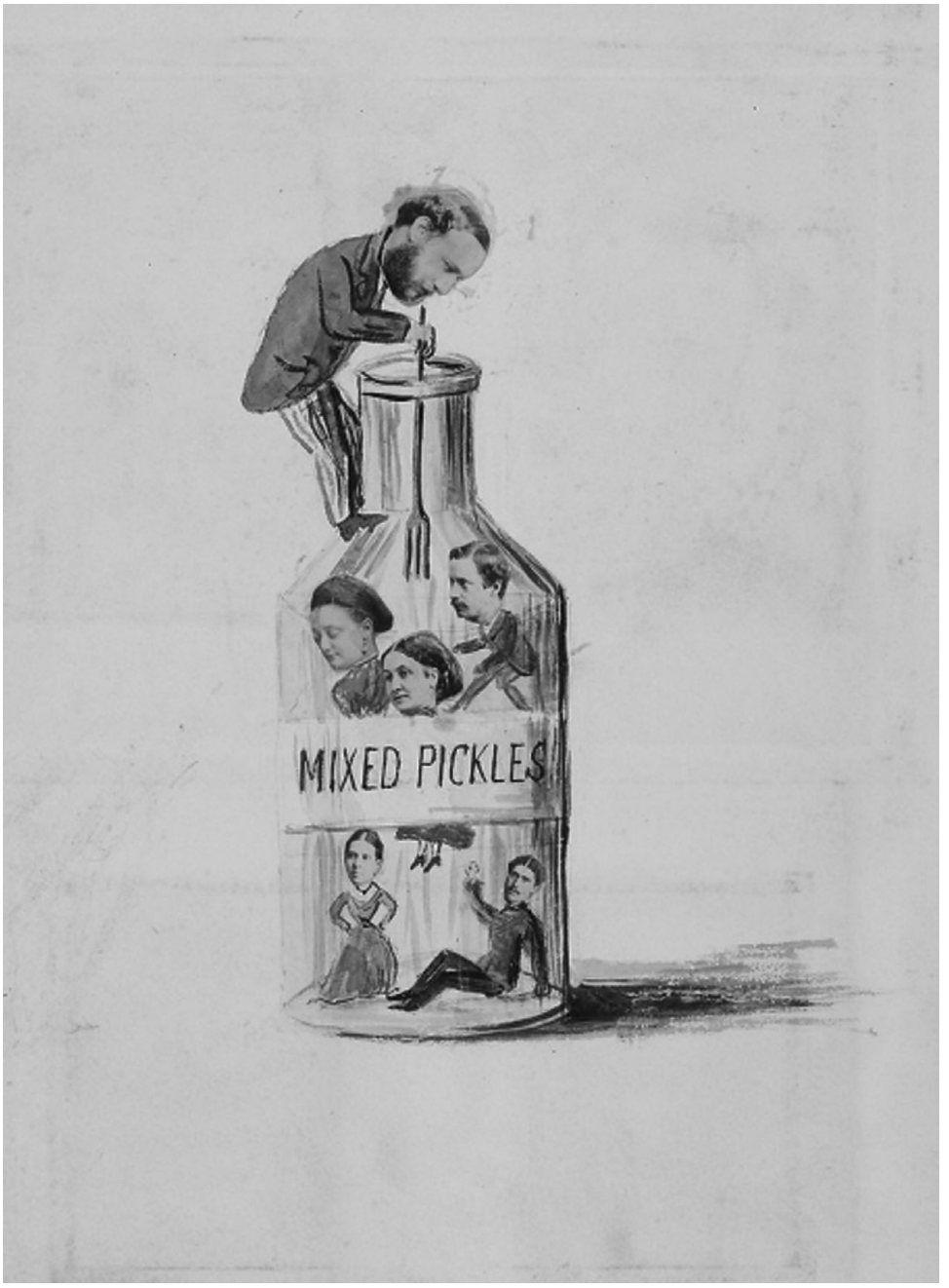


Figure 20. Victoria Alexandrina Anderson-Pelham, Countess of Yarborough and Eva Macdonald, detail from "Mixed Pickles." Collage of watercolor and albumen prints. From the *Westmorland Album*, 1864/70. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

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Figure 21. Kate Edith Gough, untitled page. Collage of watercolor and albumen prints. From the *Gough Album*, late 1870s. V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

as the photocollagist inserted it into class-based settings of fans, jewelry, or aristocratic social groups (di Bello, "Photocollage," 52). By snipping the faces, painting new bodies and backgrounds, the woman imbues the craft with her own personality and transforms an image meant for public circulation into a private familial joke. Photocollage, then, domesticates photography – it turns a threateningly impersonal, widespread, inexpensive disposable object into someone's painstaking personal record of her own social milieu.

Photocollage is not so much a celebration of photography as it is a record of the anxieties of the photographic age. It speaks of the limits, the failures, and the threats of this new art. Daniel A. Novak has argued that Victorians did not see photography as documentary truth. Photographs distorted and misrepresented the sitters' faces (according to Novak, Victorian sitters frequently complained that people looked unrecognizable in photographs). They depicted contemporary people in fictitiously classical garb, as in the work of Julia Margaret Cameron, who dressed her children, neighbors, and servants as mythic beings. It is not surprising, then, that viewers might regard Victorian photographic subjects as interchangeable human forms, not necessarily resembling their sitters. Thus Victorian photographers quite frequently combined, fragmented, and excised elements of the photographed bodies. As Novak explains, "critics saw *ordinary* photographs as always already cut into pieces, already a set of parts without connection or context. In this way,

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Figure 22. Elizabeth Pleydell-Bouverie, Jane Pleydell-Bouverie, Ellen Pleydell-Bouverie, and Janet Pleydell-Bouverie. Untitled page. College of watercolor and albumen prints. From the *Bouverie Album*, 1872/77. Courtesy of George Eastman House, International Museum of Photography and Film.

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montage acted as a literalization of and a response to the fragmentation and abstraction that characterized ordinary photographs." The particular photocollages in the show at the Metropolitan Museum of Art typify what Novak describes as a specifically "Victorian theory of photography." Other scholars who discuss women's photographic albums include Geoffrey Batchen and Patrizia di Bello, who stress women's achievements as collectors, memorialists, and artists in this amateur pursuit. Siegel confirms that women's photocollage did not seem unusual in its period. It was, she writes, "an occupation that was perfectly acceptable within Victorian culture, [but] album makers unwittingly anticipated the modern era and issues that would later preoccupy the avant-garde: the infiltration of mechanically produced materials into art; the fluid mixing of diverse media; the convergence of multiple authors; and the creative act as a process of collecting and assembling rather than origination. Victorian photocollage is unquestionably of its era, and yet it is also remarkably modern" (13). Siegel perfectly captures the disorienting nature of Victorian photocollage, the way it feels both modern and traditional, avant-garde and typically Victorian, and the way that this dual effect sparks both delight and unease in viewers of this exhibition.

While Siegel regards photocollage as "remarkably" modern, art historian Ann Bermingham argues that in fact, the photocollage is traditional. She regards the Victorian photocollage as quite opposed to amateur handicraft practice like scrapbooking. According to Bermingham, the scrapbook juxtaposes commercial images in apparently random combinations. The combination of odd elements, like a violet cut out of wallpaper and a wagon wheel drawing from a magazine, do not point to a unitary, original artistic subjectivity. Rather, the scrapbook – and scrap-screen, decoupage, potichomanie, and similar craft collage activities – primarily express collecting in the age of mechanical reproduction, in which commercial prefabricated scraps overwhelm the individual. The viewer experiences an onslaught of heterogeneous data. By contrast, the photocollage references a unitary subject. The photocollage constructs a sense of the maker's self, a familial being with relationships and memories, with taste, skill, and social networks. Victorian photocollage articulates a traditional sense of subjectivity, whereas the scrapbook, with its fragmented assemblage, suggests something like the (post)modern media subject.

We can see the complexities of Bermingham's position when we look more closely at one of the Victorian photocollages. Consider Maria Harriet Elizabeth Cator's picture of a jester dropping family photographs (Figure 23). Certainly it had some meaning to its producer, but that meaning is not fully recoverable to a modern viewer. What does the jester mean? Why are the pictures in the order in which she has placed them? Are the ones on the ground (including the one on which the jester is stepping) supposed to differ from the ones in the air? The comedy of this image seems to come from the almost shocking sight of valued images of special people becoming trash hurled by a triumphant comic. In other words, Cator's picture works because it sneers at the very ideas of emotional sanctity and personal feeling that Bermingham claims the photocollage enshrines. It is true that Cator is taking for granted that we imagine her to possess a coherent emotional subjectivity; if we didn't believe this, we wouldn't grasp the subversive humor of her joke at her own expense. Yet the fact that she establishes private emotional meaning only to satirize it suggests an unsettling complicity in the deconstruction of that essential subjecthood.

At the same time, one might say that the heterogeneity of the scrapbook challenges us to develop theories about its maker. The viewer must generate a sense of a unitary subject precisely because the scrapbook does not provide a ready-made one. The baffling composition

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Figure 23. Maria Harriet Elizabeth Cator, untitled page. College of watercolor and albumen prints. From the *Cator Album*, late 1860s/70s. Hans P. Kraus, Jr., New York.

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almost forces us to inquire: might the violets and the wagon wheels derive from a memory of a rural day? Or did they share some shape or color that pleased the scrapbooker? The scrapbook works because it forces the viewer to posit a narrative, to connect dots that seem, initially, unrelated.

Perhaps that desire for a coherent narrative is what we can take away from the Victorian photocollage show, precisely because it remains frustratingly unfulfilled. For these works of art challenge the narratives of art history into which we try to fit them. We want photocollage to fit into binary oppositions. It only makes sense to us if it is either traditionalist or avant-garde; women's handiwork or a mass-produced object; photography or watercolors; experimental or typical. Yet Victorian photocollage manages to be all those things at once. Siegel writes that "Victorian photocollage thus suffers the double indignity of being the product of both industrial photography and feminine craft; it also falls uneasily between the cracks of separate fields, as it is neither strictly photography nor fully painting" (14). Neither industrial photography nor feminine craft has received much scholarly attention, and rarely are they viewed together. Yet most women's handicrafts in the nineteenth century incorporated mass-produced elements as a way of grappling with (even participating in) industrial modernity. The mixed fields of Victorian photocollage invite us to rethink our assumptions that women's homemade objects were worlds away from industry. Siegel is also right to speculate about how photocollage bridges the fields of photography and painting. At the Met, these fields occupy separate galleries and are handled by different curatorial departments. Yet these photocollages merge drawings, paintings, and photographic elements, and moreover, do so in a way that often baffles one's attempt to identify the genre. The photographic snippet looks painted; the painted background looks photographed. In peering at the photocollages, trying to identify which art produced which elements, one becomes aware of one's own need to differentiate genres – a need the Victorians did not necessarily feel. The photocollage may work best by forcing us to reflect, not on the Victorian sense of photography, but on our own.

When popular reviewers grapple with the photocollage show, their explanations reveal this uneasiness. Given an array of anomalous, miscellaneous artifacts, the reviewers work to pin them down into an orderly arrangement. For instance, Roberta Smith, writing for the *New York Times*, links the Victorian women's photocollages to *Alice in Wonderland*, Darwinism, English fairy painters, the cut-paper cartoons in Monty Python's Flying Circus, Surrealism, Gilbert and George, Saul Steinberg, and the Pictures Generation of the 1970s and 80s. This plethora of references indicates an anxiety to find Victorian photocollage's place in art history. Yet this is not a study of influence; Smith does not claim that any of these later artists knew about Victorian women's photocollage. Rather, it seems as if the main way we can read these images is by connecting them to already-known entities. Just as Lady Filmer ensconced her bits of photograph amidst drawings that lent them a factitious alternative meaning, so too, Smith inserts the art of Victorian photocollage amongst other texts, working hard to imbue it with meaning by associative logic, even when we realize that these connections are inauthentic. The fragments of photographs tease us into wanting to glue them down. We need to find a story for them; we need to slot them into other images; we need to decide which qualities they satisfy; we need to draw connections with other pictures. In the spidery lines that connect Lady Filmer to Saul Steinberg, the jester to Julia Margaret Cameron, the carte de visite to scrap screens, we take random elements hurled at

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us by history and try to make them make sense. Writing about these images means we, too, become implicated in the logic of photocollage.

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