

Childers also focuses on work: he gives us nothing less than a condensed but incredibly useful reading of what seems like every major and many minor works of “industrial fiction.” Also fascinating are Ronald Thomas’s theoretically provocative essay on detection and the policing of subjectivity that the detective novel accomplishes both within and beyond its own pages, and Patrick Brantlinger’s wide-ranging meditation on the meanings of race and its cultural deployment in a wide range of novels and their relationship to texts like travel and exploration memoirs as well as to “scientific” treatises on race. Any of these essays would be extraordinarily useful in organising various kinds of courses on the Victorian novel; they also sum up with great economy and interest the work of the past ten to fifteen years on the subjects they cover.

Curiously, I found the group of essays with the most predictable and now-hackneyed (thank goodness) titles and topics – “Race and the Victorian Novel,” “Gender and the Victorian Novel,” “Sexuality and the Victorian Novel” – to be the richest and the most readily useful to me as a teacher and scholar. Less successful, and less apparently useful, were the essays that broke out of what would seem to be the overly-formulaic approach of the “... and the Victorian Novel” model. Essays that were more tightly focused, like Linda Shires’s essay on the aesthetics of the Victorian novel and Robert Weisbuch’s “Dickens, Melville, and a Tale of Two Countries,” seemed less companionable and more journal-like than the more freewheeling and bibliographically suggestive essays discussed above.

I have two kinds of questions for Deirdre David. First, I wonder how exactly Professor David imagined this *Companion* to be used. Is it meant primarily for teachers, or was it imagined as a possible textbook? Or, is it more of a reference work for a student setting out to do a particular kind of paper or project? I can imagine directing such a student to one of the essays here, for example, for the purposes of understanding the state of gender studies or the critical work on race in the period.

My second set of questions simply offer me the opportunity to solicit speculations on the future of our field, and specifically about the study of the novel. How might this *Companion* change when it is compiled again in ten or fifteen years? Where are we going in the study of the Victorian novel; what issues will we be looking back on in 2011? Will some of the categories posited here remain, or might such newly reified categories as sexuality or the idea of industrial culture be transformed? Such speculations would be a nice bookend to the celebration of the endless richness of the Victorian novel and the study of it that the volume so generously and usefully provides.

Barry Qualls

“They take us everywhere,” Deirdre David says of Victorian novels. In her introduction to this collection of essays on the Victorian novel as it is read a hundred years after Victoria’s death, she reminds us of how this fiction that was once discredited as all too evocative of its culture – part of what H.G. Wells labelled “the

clipped and limited literatures that satisfied [the Victorians'] souls" – has been "enshrined" by us as "an imaginative construction of nineteenth-century life." For David "the Victorian novel is generous, expansive, and always deeply entertaining" (2). For the essayists in this collection, the Victorian novel is also social history and a – perhaps the – formative influence on the "real" ideas and beliefs of the period. Indeed, reading these essays, I have appreciated anew how much cultural work the novel did – and how much cultural criticism it anticipated.

This collection is striking for the cogency of its essays. It is as thorough and stimulating a "companion" to the Victorian novel as one could imagine because it covers, with an originality and breadth of argument rare in such collections, the issues that really do matter in reading these loose baggy monsters. Science, religion, industrialism, and the novel's realist aesthetic are here, survivors as it were from decades of discussion of Victorian literature. They are joined by topics that sometimes now seem predictable: gender, sex, race, and class. But all are made fresh and put into fruitful conversation with each other: Kate Flint and Simon Eliot on what readers wanted or feared and how publishers created and served the demand for fiction; Nancy Armstrong and Jeff Nunokawa on gender and sexuality; Patrick Brantlinger on race, recalling the comment of Disraeli's *Sidonian*: "All is race; there is no other truth" (149); Lyn Pykett, Linda Shires, and Ronald Thomas on realism and its discontents as reflected in detective fiction, sensation fiction, and the permutations of the Gothic; Joseph Childers and John Kucich on the ways the novels confronted and used intellectual debates over industrialism and the conflicts between religion and science; Robert Weisbuch on Americans' concern about how the novel might function and what stories it had to tell in a culture determined not to be British.

All of the writers here see the novel not as *our* "imaginative construction of nineteenth-century life," but as offering deeply complex constructions of that life even as they, indeed, often constructed modes of thinking and living beyond the text. All essayists operate from the idea that the Age of Revolution had been succeeded by the Age of Capital. All see the novel as deeply embedded in the historic events that transformed English life and the novel. All see the novel as profoundly a part of the project of creating national order because it is profoundly implicated in the construction of the domestic, or feminine, space that is so quintessentially a Victorian response to capitalism, industrialism, and urbanism. For Jeff Nunokawa, "the spectre of market society everywhere haunts the scenes of desire that everywhere haunt the Victorian novel" (134). For Joseph Childers, the novel is a "good example" of the "mutual dependence of the cultures of information and industrialism" (77). For Kate Flint, the availability of so much to read produced a "desire for reading material which reinforces moral norms," especially for working-class readers (29). For John Kucich, scientific and novelistic discourses "coincide in their quest for some grounds of consoling belief in either social or moral order" (217) that sustains individuals in a materialist age; the age may be secular, but "the providential organization" (216) of the novel endures. For Linda Shires, who takes *Wuthering Heights* "as paradigmatic of a structure that appears throughout the entire Victorian period," healing "the ideological split between Romantic individualism and social consensus that rests at

the heart of the novel form” becomes an increasingly difficult and finally impossible goal, at least for those whose novelistic practices were founded in realism. For Kucich and Ronald Thomas, the figure of the professional, whether detective or lawyer or doctor, comes to be an increasingly important and complex character in novels as the century progresses because of the need for certain authority in a fragmented age. For Nancy Armstrong, whose essay on how “culture bound gender to economics in a way that put the fate of the nation in constant risk from female desire” (100) is a brilliant application of new historicist and cultural studies readings, “middle-class sexuality [. . .] grew uniquely capable of travelling almost anywhere the novel could, both up and down the social hierarchies organising the modern metropolis and outward to the remote corners of an expanding Empire” (100-01).

For Thomas, this complex world produced what “is arguably the most significant and enduring contribution to the history of English literature made during the Victorian era,” the literary detective (170). Indeed, he asserts, “the terms ‘detection’ and ‘the Victorian novel’ increasingly become synonymous as the nineteenth century progresses” (169). In a remarkable discussion, Thomas shows how detective fiction’s cultural work focused on “bringing under control the potentially anarchic forces unleashed by revolutionary movements, democratic reform, urban growth, national expansion, and imperial engagements” (170). In this Age of Capital, the detective story replaces the increasingly problematic idea of character with the idea of identity (and identity needs professionals to certify it as “real”). Thomas sees this “transformation of persons into identities [. . .] as the central story of modern civilization” (182-89).

As much as I admire all the essays in this collection, Thomas’s is the one students of the Victorian novel need to know first. Its sense of the inextricable connection of Victorian history and Victorian fiction, a given in all of the essays, is represented through astute discussions of the Newgate novel, realist novels, subgenres like sensation novels (which get remarkable attention from many of the writers here), and the work of Arthur Conan Doyle. The provocative reading of Dickens’s Detective Bucket leads to Thomas’s claim that *Bleak House* is an “allegory of the transfer of social power from a heartless and unjust aristocratic society dominated by privilege and secrecy to a more democratic world ruled by a sense of duty and justice” (178). Though I would want to argue the details of this claim (admitting, too, that I remain under the sway of Q.D. Leavis’s 1970 reading that suggested Dickens’s ambivalences about Bucket and Sir Leicester Dedlock, if not about Esther), Thomas’s discussion is as rich as any available, and asks us to rethink the entire history of Victorian fiction.

So these novels do take us everywhere; and these essayists take us everywhere into the culture. But in my enthusiasm for the strength of this volume, I have one question that goes back to Deirdre David’s assertion that “the Victorian novel is generous, expansive, and always deeply entertaining.” Yes, absolutely. I have read Trollope late into the night, disturbing all around me because of my laughter about Mrs. Proudie and her magnificence; I have cried, even now after many readings and much teaching of her novels, over George Eliot’s ability to evoke sympathy, whether for Philip Wakem or Mr. Bulstrode; I still cannot manage Mr. Guppy’s proposal to

Esther Summerson without giggles; and I have debated with students the merits of sensation novels – trash for me, “real” popular culture for them – when taught alongside George Eliot, Dickens, and the Brontës (also popular culture!). These novels *are* “generous, expansive, and deeply entertaining.”

Tellingly, amongst so much discussion that is brilliant here, that makes this “companion” a really necessary volume, the expansiveness is everywhere recognised and appreciated in all its complexity. But attention to the generosity of experience, and of narrative reflection on it, *and* any sense of how – and how much – these novels produced laughter and tears in their readers are rarely present. The disciplining of anarchic desires and the rage for order in a metaphysically homeless world command the attention of these readers. Kate Flint and Jeff Nunokawa do recognise how the romance form so deeply embedded in realism constructed narratives that articulated a basic need for a “happy ending.” For Nunokawa, this desire “is in no small part because of the sentimental education we receive from the Victorian novel and its afterlife in more recent narrative forms”; books like *Jane Eyre* and *Middlemarch* have been a crucial part in narrating “the secular scripture of desire” (125, 131). As Victorian novels give witness to their culture in all its complexity, they are clearly not losing their capacity to delight us. Contemporary readers do still respond to *Jane Eyre* and *Maggie Tulliver* as intensely as Nunokawa, and do still laugh at the performers in the Dickens world.

If the Victorian novel is the great signifying witness to the Age of Capital and “the defining literary genre” of the period (David 15), it is also a reminder that in an age that produced many competing forms of entertainment (and Simon Eliot lists them), this often expensive commodity managed to speak to Victorians in such numbers as to become the chief genre of the period. It is *their* “defining literary genre” and their popular culture. The generosity and laughter that it brought to readers are worth attention. The novels take us there as well.

RESISTING REALISM

Response by Deirdre David

In one way or another, each of these reviewers finds that most of the essays in the *Companion* skirt what Ian Watt, almost fifty years ago, so usefully termed “formal realism,” the narrative strategies that produce the verisimilitude we associate always with the novel form. Professors Bodenheimer, Freedgood, and Qualls pose cogent questions that should point us now, I think, in the direction of asking a grander, overarching one: why is it that current readings of Victorian fiction tend to skimp formal analysis in favour of thematic and political approaches grouped under the rubrics of gender, social class, and race? Bodenheimer asserts that “realism seems to stand for a way of reading Victorian novels we have rejected”: in our desire to celebrate transgression from what we see as dominant and repressive Victorian ideologies, we neglect to talk about how the multiple narrative strategies deployed by novelists actually make the formal arrangements, if you will, for what we name