

Introduction

Welcome to the second Special Issue on ‘Water’ from *AJVS*! This turned out to be a very rewarding topic, and I thank all the contributors. A couple of articles were held over from the previous issue, while others emerged from a conference held last November at the University of Adelaide in South Australia. Many thanks to Associate-Professor Mandy Treagus and Dr Madeleine Seys for a stimulating and productive conference.

The articles by Helen Blythe and Robert Jenkins investigate how literal water sources are invoked in late-nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century fiction. Their texts cover, respectively, the Thames and the sea at Eastbourne in George Gissing’s *Thyrza* (1887), and Indian rivers in Flora Annie Steel’s *The Hosts of the Lord* (1900) and “Lal” (1891). In the cases of both novelists, nonetheless, the water sources take on larger meanings. They evoke in Gissing’s novel the relationships among class status, freedom and creativity, while in Steel’s fiction, they illuminate both the imaginative limits of colonialist thinking, and the links between the indigenous people and the rivers themselves.

More metaphorically focused are the contributions of Isadora Quirarte and Helene Connor. Quirarte’s offers an extensive study of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s epic poem *Aurora Leigh* which highlights how, whereas literal water seldom figures, water imagery is constantly deployed through the various stages of the protagonist / speaker’s life so as to trace both her personal growth and her social predicaments. Meanwhile Connor considers the letters and two novels of novelist Geraldine Jewsbury, demonstrating how often the writer draws on water imagery, both to express her own feelings and to represent the experience of her characters. Helene Connor has written as well as a supplementary article based on her visit to Jewsbury’s tomb in Brompton Cemetery (London): it points to her significance as a Victorian figure, together with that of the patron with whom she is buried, fellow novelist Lady Morgan.

Water and its direct impact on our Victorian forbears are the subjects of articles by Marisa Young and Diana Noyce. Young’s research on privately-owned schools for boys in Victorian South Australia draws attention to the varied careers of some entrepreneurial figures. She also concentrates on how the seaside location of some schools reflects contemporary concerns about health, and thus makes the institutions more marketable to parents. Diana Noyce, by contrast, focuses on the dangers to health of frozen water. She compares the fates of early Antarctic expeditions, stressing in particular the importance of diet in helping the explorers survive inclement icy weather.

Outside the theme of the special issue, Madoka Nagado offers an analysis of Frances Browne’s novel *My Share of the World* (1861), wherein the woman famous as ‘The Blind Poetess of Ulster’ deploys as first-person narrator an able-bodied male. The novel showcases the fates of several women who suffer disadvantages, but, more interestingly, it reveals how a person awarded more agency can – partly because of that very circumstance – fail in his efforts at autonomous achievement.

The three books reviewed in this issue relate Victorian literature to wider contexts. Elizabeth Kerns discusses Alex Murray’s *Decadent Conservatism*, which connects various Decadent texts to different manifestations of conservatism; Jessica Gildersleeve explores Gretchen Braun’s study of the links between the kinds of trauma covered in Victorian fiction and the

stress disorders of later decades; Neepa Sarkar reviews Renee Fox's reframing of nineteenth-century British and Irish texts and their interconnections in terms of necromantic tendencies.

Finally, I am very grateful to Dr Alison Bedford for her contribution to *AJVS* as its reviews editor over several years. Her work has always been very professional, and has prepared her well for her new role as editor of *Curriculum Perspectives*. Thanks and congratulations are in order!

Joanne Wilkes

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