



# GENDER AND THE VICTORIAN PERIODICAL

HILARY FRASER, STEPHANIE GREEN AND  
JUDITH JOHNSTON

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*To our families and friends*

## Preface

This book investigates the role of the periodical press in mediating gender ideologies at a time when, as the most significant organ for disseminating knowledge, information and social attitudes, it wielded considerable cultural power. The periodical press in Victoria's day had a sustained influence on the gendered assumptions of both the home and the colonial culture over which she presided. Journals and magazines became sites of intensified representations of gender and sexual identity and our evaluations and re-evaluations will, we trust, contribute to an understanding of the centrality of journalism in the construction of gender in Victorian cultural history.

We are the first to acknowledge that the scope of our study, given the many thousands of periodical titles published in the Victorian period, is too vast to enable an exhaustive coverage of the field. Indeed the variety is almost irresistible and every title has its fascinating characteristics and personalities, and is redolent with possibilities – comic, political, social and historical. However, we determined that this would be a different kind of work from the many previous excellent studies of individual titles (so invaluable to us) because it was our decision to stand back and examine the larger questions of gender rather than focus closely on particular titles. For this reason our study omits, for instance, regional journals, and we have limited ourselves to journals published for the most part in those powerful publishing centres, London and Edinburgh.

We have, except on rare occasions, avoided reviews and serial fiction in our discussions, because these have been admirably dealt with in such detail and some profusion in other publications. Only exceptionally, where an article served a particular cultural or social function, like for example George Eliot's review essay for the *Westminster* titled 'The Natural History of German Life', is it included. It has been only recently that other kinds of journalism, outside fiction, have been taken up, recognised now as of very real interest to both literary and cultural studies, as well as relevant to the study of history.



While we mention by name perhaps 120 periodical titles, we have read many more, including a significant number which began publication before the Victorian age, such as the *Gentleman's Magazine*, the *Anti Jacobin Magazine* and the *Select Magazine for the Instruction and Amusement of Young Persons*. Moreover, although no study of the periodical press could omit those dominant journals of the nineteenth century, the *Quarterly* and the *Edinburgh Magazine*, we have chosen to be judicious in our use of them, attempting to balance discussion of these with consideration of other kinds of journal. Those periodicals that continued publishing into the twentieth century were also a part of our study, so that we could gain an understanding of a press not arbitrarily restricted by a specified 'age' or a particular date, but as a continuing phenomenon which came to its zenith as part of that innately Victorian sense of a new, innovative and progressive world.

Material quoted from the various periodicals has, for the most part, retained the original spelling, grammar and punctuation. Obvious errors and misprints have been silently corrected and variant spellings likely to disrupt the reading process have been normalised. Where possible, the anonymous author of a particular article has been located through that wonderful boon to every student of the periodical press, the *Wellesley Index*, or through other means. Where such authors have been located, their publications are listed in the Bibliography under their names. Where an author has not been located, the work has been cited under the title of the article, rather than 'Anon.', for ease of reference.

At the back of the book we have included an Appendix offering brief details about the periodicals cited in this work. These notes provide, where possible, the run of the journal, the cost of the first issue, the key editor or editors, place of publication, publisher, politics, target readership and a brief general description of the contents. The studies from which the bulk of this information has been gleaned are listed at the head of the Appendix.

## *Acknowledgements*

This book could not have been written without the generous support of the Australian Research Council, which awarded a large grant to Hilary Fraser and Judith Johnston as Chief Investigators in 1998 for a period of three years. Stephanie Green was appointed half-time Research Associate under the same grant. In the fullest sense this has been collaborative work but the major responsibility for it rests with the two named Chief Investigators. We have also received other valuable financial support. Judith Johnston was awarded an Australian Bicentennial Fellowship by the Menzies Foundation in 1998, which enabled her to take up an Honorary Visiting Fellowship at the University of Leicester Victorian Studies Centre. Stephanie Green won an institutional ARC Grant which enabled her to travel to conferences and libraries in the United States and the United Kingdom and to take up a Visiting Research Fellowship at St. Deiniol's College. We jointly convened a conference in Perth in the year 2000 under the auspices of the Australasian Victorian Studies Association, which was generously supported by the University of Western Australia and the Ian Potter Foundation. And Hilary Fraser was given a year's study leave by the University of Western Australia during which she was able to complete the book as a Visiting Fellow at Clare Hall, Cambridge. We give our warm thanks to the individuals, institutions and funding bodies who have enabled the project to go ahead in this way.

Thanks are due to Professor Joanne Shattock, Director of the Victorian Studies Centre at the University of Leicester, who was unfailingly helpful regarding the initial periodical research carried out at the University of Leicester Library. Thanks are also due to the Library staff for their cheerful assistance and to the Librarian for permission to publish illustrations 4, 5, 7 and 8. For permission to publish illustrations 1, 2 and 3 we thank the British Library. We acknowledge with gratitude the assistance of Sten Christensen, Humanities Librarian, the University of Sydney Library in obtaining the image for illustration 6 and thank the Library for permission to publish.

For permission to publish extracts from the letters of Mary Howitt, held in the Department of Manuscripts and Special Collections, the University of Nottingham, we thank the Keeper, Dorothy B. Johnston, and gratefully acknowledge the help that she and the Assistant Keeper, Caroline Kelly, gave us during this research period. Kate Perry, Archivist at Girton College, Cambridge, provided, as always, invaluable assistance.

Our book is a collaborative enterprise, not only because it is co-authored, but because so many friends and colleagues have had a significant input. Over the past four years we have all given papers related to the project in both local and international forums: work-in-progress seminars and a dedicated 'Gender and Victorian Journalism' seminar at the University of Western Australia; the aforementioned Australasian Victorian Studies Association Conference on the theme of 'Victorian Mediations: Gender, Journalism and the Periodical Press'; the British Association of Victorian Studies Conference; invited papers at the Universities of Cambridge, Oxford, Exeter and Aberystwyth. It is impossible to acknowledge the input of all those who asked probing questions and made helpful suggestions in these and other contexts over this period, but we would like to single out some who have helped us to clarify the issues we are confronting, and given us the benefit of their own knowledge of Victorian gender issues and the periodical press. We are particularly grateful to Gillian Beer, Laurel Brake, Patrick Brantlinger, Marysa Demoor, Kate Flint, Regenia Gagnier, Lyn Pykett, Valerie Sanders and Joanne Shattock for their generous contributions to our project. Alex Tyrrell generously gave us access to his article on Samuel Smiles before publication, and our indebtedness to other scholars in the field will be evident from the range of our critical references.

Monica Anderson and Victoria Burrows, as Research Assistants at various periods, made an important contribution to the project, not least the extensive wealth of information uncovered by Monica for the material located in the Appendix from which we were able to construct what we trust is useful information on the journals referred to throughout this work. Our colleagues in the Discipline of English, Communication and Cultural Studies, the University of Western Australia, have also supported the project in various ways both intellectual and practical. In particular we would thank Daniel Brown, Kieran Dolin, Gail Jones, Andrew Lynch and Bob White for their unfailing interest and enthusiasm. We would also like especially to thank Sue Lewis and Jocasta Davies for their cheerful administrative support.

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## GENDER AND THE VICTORIAN PERIODICAL

Periodicals in the Victorian era portrayed and reinforced current gender notions and ideals. Indeed, the Victorian periodical press was a critical cultural site for the representation of competing gender ideologies. This is the first full-length book to examine masculinities and femininities as defined and interrogated in these periodicals. It investigates readers, editors and journalists; and it considers the power of the press at home, in the domestic space, in metropolitan centres and at the margins of empire. The work is based on archival research into a wide range of publications from the 1830s to the *fin de siècle*; from enduring intellectual heavyweight quarterlies through more ephemeral women's and working men's magazines, to magazines for boys and girls. The study is informed by the theories and approaches of media and cultural studies and women's studies. A valuable appendix supplies information about the many periodicals of the period mentioned in the book.

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Nineteenth-century British literature and culture have been rich fields for interdisciplinary studies. Since the turn of the twentieth century, scholars and critics have tracked the intersections and tensions between Victorian literature and the visual arts, politics, social organisation, economic life, technical innovations, scientific thought – in short, culture in its broadest sense. In recent years, theoretical challenges and historiographical shifts have unsettled the assumptions of previous scholarly synthesis and called into question the terms of older debates. Whereas the tendency in much past literary critical interpretation was to use the metaphor of culture as ‘background’, feminist, Foucauldian, and other analyses have employed more dynamic models that raise questions of power and of circulation. Such developments have reanimated the field.

This series aims to accommodate and promote the most interesting work being undertaken on the frontiers of the field of nineteenth-century literary studies: work which intersects fruitfully with other fields of study such as history; or literary theory; or the history of science. Comparative as well as interdisciplinary approaches are welcomed.

*A complete list of titles published will be found at the end of the book.*

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## Introduction

In an anonymous article of 1868 in the *Saturday Review*, part of its notorious series on 'Modern Women' which introduced the 'Girl of the Period' phenomenon, Eliza Lynn Linton takes as her topic 'Mistress and Maid on Dress and Undress'. Responding to a letter in the *Pall Mall Gazette* purporting to be from a 'Clergyman's Wife' which indignantly laments 'the present disgraceful style of dress among female servants' (262) and proposes the adoption of suitable uniforms for women below stairs, Linton makes it the occasion for a disquisition on the sartorial morals of the fashionable women who are their employers. Linton's caustically witty piece nicely illustrates a number of the themes that will emerge in this study. It demonstrates, first of all, that the journalism of the periodical press was a fundamentally provocative and reactive medium, initiating dialogue on topics of the day, and demanding a response; that important debates about gender and class were often displaced into discussions relating to the apparently trivial and ephemeral world of fashion; and that ideologies of gender and class were always connected, always competing and always under construction in writing for the periodicals. It also shows how embedded such debates were in the commercial and consumerist culture of Victorian publishing. Linton criticises the rival *Pall Mall Gazette* for its contradictoriness in carrying in the same number as the 'Clergyman's Wife's' recommendation that servants be guided by their mistress's standards of dress a report on the latest Paris fashions which shows the lady of fashion to be morally delinquent, in a way that also draws attention to the multivalency of the periodical press, another question that will be further explored. The article similarly exemplifies the variety of competing voices to be found in periodical writing, including, as it does, the female (but anonymous) professional journalist, an amateur contributor (the 'Clergyman's Wife') to a letters' page and a male fashion writer. It is an article that insistently raises questions about gender that will be probed in the chapters to come. What is the gender of its anonymous writer and its implied reader? What does it suggest about

the tensions between the construction of Woman as a cultural category and the diversity of women, both as they are discursively represented and in all their materiality? What does it tell us about the contingency of their status, as wives, maidservants, women of fashion? Broadening out from the article to consider its author, and the series to which it belongs, what part did they play in the articulation of the 'Woman Question' and the associated questioning of masculine identity in the 1860s, and how did they relate to the debates about gender of the 1830s and the 1890s? Eliza Lynn Linton, herself a clergyman's daughter, was a woman who followed a male profession for five decades, assumed a masculine voice in much of her anonymous journalism and adopted a male subject position in her own fictional autobiography, the *Autobiography of Christopher Kirkland* (1885), at the same time as she was an anti-feminist who became infamous for her conservative prescriptions for an essential womanhood. What effect did her own gender instability have on her writing? And then what were the cultural spin-offs of series of articles such as these about women? What, finally, was the relationship between the girl of the period and the girl of the periodical?

This book aims to address the role played by the periodical press in the formulation and circulation of gender ideologies in Victorian Britain, and to examine the contribution of women in particular, as editors, proprietors, writers and readers of periodical journalism, to their dissemination. In Mary Poovey's account of the ideological work of gender in mid-Victorian cultural and institutional life, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (1988), she argues that ideological formation is an uneven and reciprocal process. It is our contention that the medium that most readily articulates the unevennesses and reciprocities of evolving gender ideologies is the periodical press, which offers material realisation, generically and formally, of that dynamic and relational cultural process.

# I

The Victorians themselves were acutely aware of the pivotal role of the periodical press in such socially, politically and intellectually volatile times as their own. An article of 1862, 'Journalism', in the *Cornhill* predicts that '[j]ournalism will, no doubt, occupy the first or one of the first places in any future literary history of the present times, for it is the most characteristic of all their productions'. Indeed, '[i]n the state of society in which we live at present, [good leading articles] form the greater part of the reading even