

## *Victorian Popular Fiction Association*

**Inaugural meeting at 2pm, Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> October at Kingston University**  
Penrhyn Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT1 2EE  
Room 1005, John Galsworthy Building

**Dr Andrew Maunder (University of Hertfordshire)**

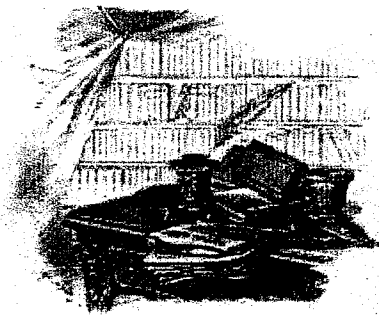
**“Scarcely improving reading for young men and maidens”: Lucy Clifford’s *Mere Stories* (1896) in the canon and the classroom’**

Andrew Maunder is Principal Lecturer in English at the University of Hertfordshire. His research covers the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His interest in popular fiction has resulted in a number of projects. These include a co-edited collection of interdisciplinary essays entitled *Victorian Crime, Madness and Sensation* [co-edited with Grace Moore] published in 2004 and a book on *Bram Stoker* (2006). In 2004, he was the General Editor of the Pickering and Chatto series *Varieties of Women's Sensation Fiction 1855-1890*, which sought to recover works by popular novelists of the Nineteenth Century, analyzing the wider literary arenas in which these writers worked. Other publications include *A Companion to the British Short Story* (2007) and *Wilkie Collins. A Literary Life* [with Graham Law] (2008).

**Dr Nickianne Moody (Liverpool John Moores University)**

**‘The Best Defence is a Good Methodology: Studying Popular Fiction in a Hostile Academic Environment’**

Nickianne Moody is Principal Lecturer in Media and Cultural Studies at Liverpool John Moores University. She acts as the Convenor for the Association for Research in Popular Fictions and edits the journal *Popular Narrative Media*. Publications include work on most popular genres, nineteenth- and twentieth-century fiction, popular culture and more specifically cultures of reading. Her most recent publications include *Children’s Fantasy Fiction Debates for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, *Reading the Popular in Contemporary Spanish Texts*, and *Judging a Book by its Cover*. Current research includes a survey of method and theory for the study of *Popular Narrative Media: Analysing Print, Play, Film and Television* to be published by Liverpool University Press.



The Victorian Popular Fiction Association has been established to offer a regular forum for the dissemination and, hopefully, publication of the vast amount of research currently being done on Victorian popular fiction. The planning of the Victorian Popular Novelists 1860-1900 conference of September 2009 confirmed to the association’s founders that research into this area of Victorian studies was both diverse and rewarding. We hope to hold a biennial conference but also anticipate that regular research seminars would be productive and informative, enabling academics working in this field to share their work and establish and maintain a vibrant network of collaborative scholarship.

**Greta Depledge and Jane Jordan, September 2009**

<http://fass.kingston.ac.uk/research/victorian/>

## “Scarcely improving reading for young men and maidens”: Lucy Clifford’s *Mere Stories* (1896) in the canon and the classroom

### Victorian Fiction in the classroom:

1. Teachers will have their own views of how to deal with long prose works, a novel by Dickens for example. Plainly, neither teacher nor class can read the whole of *David Copperfield* or *Pickwick* in a single term. It is unfair to protract the reading of any work. The class will do much by silent reading but occasionally the teacher will read scenes or passages as a treat – if his reading is not a treat he ought not to be a teacher – and occasionally members of the class will be expected to read to the others. Any book that a class finds ‘dry’ should not be pursued to the bitter end, however sweet the teacher may think it...In fact, the whole idea of compulsion is alien to the world of art. This is certain, that if you make boys read *The Fair Maid of Perth* when they would rather be reading *Ivanhoe* you will make them dislike Scott altogether. To persist with an unpopular work merely because it has been begun is to make a discipline of what should be a delight, and to disallow a rational exercise of the taste we are trying to cultivate. We must be ready to try any new adventurous experiment in education; we must be just as ready to scrap our failures.  
(Sampson, George, *English for the English. A Chapter on National Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921, p.89)
2. ‘We have become a novel-reading people...Novels are in the hands of us all; from the Prime Minister down to the last-appointed scullery maid . . . Poetry also we read and history, biography and the social and political news of the day. But all our other reading put together, hardly amounts to what we read in novels’  
Anthony Trollope ‘On English Prose Fiction as a Rational Amusement’, *Four Lectures*. Ed. Morris L. Parrish (London: Constable & Co., 1938, p.94; p.108).
3. Novels: “ordinary commodities . . . [to] be sold at the drapers, & with pounds of tea” (Frederick Greenwood, qtd. in Waller, Philip, *Writers, Readers and Reputations: Literary Life in Britain 1870-1918* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 61).
4. 1890s: ‘Short stories broke out everywhere....Kipling was writing short stories, Barrie, Stevenson, Frank Harris; Max Beerbohm wrote at least one perfect one, “The Happy Hypocrite”; Henry James pursued his wonderful and inimitable bent; and among other names that occur to me, like a mixed handful of jewels drawn from a bag, are George Street, Morley Roberts, George Gissing, Ella D’Arcy, Murray Gilchrist, E. Nesbit, Stephen Crane, Joseph Conrad, Edwin Pugh, Jerome K. Jerome, Kenneth Graham, [sic], Arthur Morrison, Marriot Watson, George Moore, Grant Allen, George Egerton, Henry Harland, Pett Ridge, W.W. Jacobs (who alone seems so inexhaustible). I dare say I could recall as many more names with a little effort  
(Wells, H.G., *The Country of the Blind* London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1913, p.5)

### English Literature as university subject

1. Terry Eagleton: ‘in the early 1920s it was desperately unclear why English was worth studying at all; by the early 1930s it had become a question of why it was worth wasting your time on anything else. . . . English was an arena in which the most fundamental questions of human existence . . . were made the object of intense scrutiny’  
(qtd. in Elaine Showalter, Elaine, *Teaching Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003, p. 22-23).
2. F.R. Leavis: ‘The great English novelists are Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, and Joseph Conrad... significant in terms of that human awareness they promote; awareness of the possibilities of life’  
(F.R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962, pp. 9-10).
3. William Cain: ‘[the] attitudes, values, and emphases’ of New Criticism are ‘[s]o deeply ingrained in English studies . . . that we do not even perceive them as the legacy of a particular movement’  
(qtd. in Vincent Leitch, *American Literary Criticism from the Thirties to the Eighties* New York: Columbia University Press, p. 26).

4. Antony Easthope: 'institution, sign system, gender, identification, subject position . . . [and] the other' (Antony Easthope, *Literary into Cultural Studies* (London: 1991), p.71).  
See also Peter Widdowson (ed.), *Re-reading English* (London : Methuen, 1982).
5. Valerie Sanders: Victorians as 'modern, self-conscious and sexually aware; as driven by consumerism and possessed of serious misgivings about domestic stability, or imperial expansion' all of which 'makes them sound more like us than they did twenty years ago' ('Where Next in Victorian Literary Studies? – Historicism, Collaboration and Digital Editing', Valerie Sanders, *Literature Compass* 4 (2000), p.1294.)
6. Margaret Davison: works which 'speak to the anxieties, desires of the twentieth [and twenty-first] century'  
(*Bram Stoker's Dracula: sucking through the century, 1897-1997*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997, p. 30).

### Lucy Clifford

- 1846: Born in London  
 1875: Married mathematician and philosopher William Kingdon Clifford.  
 1879: William Clifford dies.  
 1882: *Anyhow Stories, Moral and Otherwise*  
 1885: *Mrs Keith's Crime*  
 1892: *Love Letters of a Worldly Woman; The Last Touches and Other Stories, Aunt Anne; The Last Touches and Other Stories*  
 1896: *Mere Stories, A Flash of Summer: The Story of a Simple Woman's Life*  
 1897: *The Dominant Note and Other Stories.*  
 1902: *A Long Duel: A Serious Comedy; Woodside Farm.*  
 1904: *The Getting Well of Dorothy.*  
 1915: *A Woman Alone.*  
 1919: *Miss Fingal.*  
 1929: Dies & buried in Highgate Cemetery

### Contemporary Encounters

1. Vernon Lee: 27 June 1881: 'She lives at the worlds end, & the visit cost me 5 shillings, certainly more than it was worth. She is an agreeable sort of intellectual Lallah, try & understand that, with extremely bad manners in the way of talking across her visitors and so forth.' (p.66)

After Collier's departure, Mrs Clifford who is a great big bouncing young woman rather like a cook...became once more spasmodically friendly & confidential. While the discussion about illustrations was going on, I took up some books & saw invariably written inside them 'WK and Lucy Clifford' which struck me as rather odd in books printed some five or six years after Clifford's death. Then just before I left Mrs C asked me to write an inscription in the copy of *Euphorion* which had been sent to her "Write to William & Lucy Clifford. I always have that on my books". It is of course a very touching idea; but the routine matter of fact way in which she said it did savour strangely of craziness. (p.144)

2. 'Some Woman Novelists' *Woman at Home* (6 Dec 1897): 169  
 At a large oak writing-table, placed in a bay window where cathedral glass and a wealth of greenery shut out the opposite houses, Mrs Clifford's pen is ever busy; for like many another writer of fiction she has been drawn into the vortex of journalistic work. It is, however, the writing of fiction that she loves best, and she frankly confesses: 'If I were a rich woman I would do only creative work and it should be strictly anonymous.' She thinks that the personality of the writer is best kept in the background; the work should stand by itself....Busy woman as she is, Mrs Clifford finds time to be a charming hostess to her many literary friends and to distinguished strangers from other lands who hold her husband's name in reverence.

3. Virginia Woolf: “wattled all down her neck like some oriental Turkey, and with a mouth opening like an old leather bag, or the private parts of a large cow.”  
 (To Vanessa Bell, 2 April 1920. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*. Ed Nigel Nicolson. 5 Vols (London 1975-8), ii. p.426)

“false teeth...hair frizzed out...browned by art...large codfish eyes & the whole figure of the nineties – black velvet – morbid – intense, jolly, vulgar – a hack to her tips...an atmosphere of rancid cabbage & old clothes stewing in their own water”

“How these old women spoil my life”

(Virginia Woolf to Lytton Strachey, 1 December 1908, in *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, I, 375).

4. “The Bookman Diary”, *The Bookman* (May 1929) p. 115  
 Her most successful ‘Mrs Keith’s Crime’ appeared anonymously in 1885 and had obtained an extraordinary popularity before its author’s identity was discovered....Her work seems lately to have fallen into neglect which is undeserved, though probably inevitable in these overcrowded days; but when most of the crowd are gone past, it seems probable that two or three of her books will be found remaining with us yet for many years.

