



Welcome

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To publish at all in a time of pandemic a rich and thought-provoking issue of a learned journal demonstrates a considerable commitment and energy in a field; to be able to publish a special number on nineteenth-century short fiction two months early is proof of the extraordinary dedication and hard work on the part of our guest editors, Lucy Andrew and Vicky Margree, of our book reviews editors, Mara Mattoscio and Anna Brecke, and, not least, of all our contributors. We shall not pretend that it has been easy, but Lucy, Vicky, Mara and Anna have wonderfully managed whatever fate and viruses, technology and work commitments have thrown at them. It is in moments of material adversity that conspire to separate us, such as we are all facing now, that the qualities and sheer resilience of colleagues becomes most visible: this issue of the *VPFJ* is a shining tribute to international and inter-institutional cooperation and community in very dark and uncertain days.

It gave us much pleasure when Lucy and Vicky wrote to us in the (comparatively) balmy and innocent days of autumn 2018 to propose this special issue. Lucy's interest in the Victorian short story, she says, arose from her research into juvenile story papers and boy detective fiction when she was astonished to discover a vast network of popular fiction which had been largely overlooked by scholars. She and Vicky had met at a VPFA conference where they bonded over their shared interest in the short story form, a collaboration that resulted in the establishment of the [Short Story Network](#) whose aim has been to promote academic engagement with the Victorian short story.

It was no surprise, therefore, that Lucy and Vicky's offer of a special number seemed to fit our mission perfectly. As Vicky points out in her opening challenge to us, the comparative neglect of Victorian short-form fiction is largely due to the priorities and legacies of modernism. Our own explorations in periodicals had made us very aware of the ubiquity of short fiction in the nineteenth century, its plurality of shape and, with rare exceptions, its huge difference from the lean "psychological" text aiming at a single effect. What Lucy and Vicky have done here is to gather and edit a collection that critically celebrates the diversity of Victorian short-form fiction which points us in new directions both in our research and in our teaching. An extraordinarily prescient and useful intervention devised long before we all had to learn how to teach in new ways with unfamiliar technologies, Vicky's overview in

particular is concerned to help us think through why and how we might use short fiction in the online classroom.

In this same issue, we are delighted to introduce our readers to an innovation that we hope will become a regular feature of the *VPFJ*: annotated critical editions of previously unpublished texts. We are very aware that such editions are unusual in a learned journal, but the reality is that the economics of an online journal allows a greater latitude of form. Elsewhere I have commented on how constrained as well as enabled we are by institutional factors - and how, even if we prefer not to engage with them, we need to think through the implications of those constraints. The “institution” of the *VPFJ* has two immediate components: the heavy labour gifted by contributors, readers and editors, and the fixed costs of the website and the DOIs. The latter are, unlike paper journals and those run by publishing houses behind paywalls, comparatively small and covered by the VPFA, and the online medium allows a certain flexibility in form and size. Furthermore, though firmly committed to established practices of academic excellence, we are as yet unburdened by a long history of our own and are correspondingly more open to adapting our form. The combination of flexibility and commitment to traditional academic excellence is why we feel annotated editions of hard-to-find material will offer new and useful possibilities for both readers and contributors.

Given the importance of Mary Elizabeth Braddon to the history of popular fiction in general and to many members of the VPFA, it is appropriate that the first edition we are publishing should be of an essay by Braddon about her scandalous contemporary, Zola. It was a great pleasure to work with Scott C. Thompson to develop not just the edition itself, but the procedures that sustain it. Demanding of academic rigour, we believe that this is manifest in Scott’s editing procedures documented in the “Textual Note” on p. 104, in his scrupulously researched notes, and in the scope of his Introduction that explains why readers should find the edition a significant addition to the field.

Submissions that take Scott’s pioneering work as a starting point will be very welcome: texts should be edited to the highest and most transparent academic standards (if not following Scott’s Textual Note exactly, then taking into account its principles), annotated so as to illuminate references and allusions for our readership, and with introductions of around 4,000 words that clarify the value of the edition to our field. Texts need not be unpublished non-fiction like the Braddon essay: we would welcome editions of any other work by Victorian authors who either achieved or sought popularity that has not previously been published. Texts might comprise short stories, fragments of novels, collections of letters or poems, or even critical editions that demonstrate previously unknown significant differences between a written manuscript and a published text. It goes without saying that submitted editions will undergo the usual double-blind reviewing and rigorous editing.

We’d like to end with a glance to the future, to the special issues that colleagues from all over the world have generously offered us. In Autumn 2021, we look forward to a special number edited by Monica Cohen on piracy and literary property; the following year to Rebecca Nesvet and Stephen Basdeo’s focus on “Re-appraising Penny Fiction;” and then in 2023 to Naomi Hetherington and Clare Stainthorp’s invitation to explore the role of religion in Victorian popular fictions. We don’t stop there: in the ensuing years we shall be learning from special numbers on Victorian and neo-Victorian Engagement with LGBTQIA+ and on Victorian Transfictions and Transmedia storytelling, before, in 2026, we reach dastardly poison(s) and poisoning. By that time, *VPFJ* will be eight years old, and, like the world, will no doubt have changed yet again. What we hope will not have changed is our readers’, contributors’ – and editors’ – adaptability, resilience, energy and sheer delight in creating, sharing and debating new knowledges in fresh and exciting ways.