Victorian Popular Fictions Today: "feel these words as mama does!"

Andrew King

Abstract

This article is in two parts. The first seeks to set an agenda for the study of Victorian popular fictions by examining what the field comprises today in terms of texts studied, methodologies and affective engagement, and then thinking through the implications of studying such fiction in a global and remediated context. I argue that Victorian sentimental popular fiction self-consciously models processes of relationship formation and exploration in its characters, its explicit scenes of reading, and above all in its plots, in order to mould and maintain readers' relationships to it. "Sympathy" and its interrogation define both the representation of characters' relations to one another and readers' relationship to that representation. Sympathy in this understanding is a textual technique used by the fiction industry to create and maintain customer loyalty. Our affective responses to this technique constitute one reason we, as students of a still marginal field, continue to read it with energy and enthusiasm. What we need to do is self-consciously think through the implications of this energy's rootedness in the commercial imperatives of the nineteenth-century publishing industry. To test that call Part 2 offers two case studies of novels by Susan Warner and E.D.E.N. Southworth, both American women writers whose work circulated globally in vast numbers. I ask what the ethical and methodological implications might be for the checking of our pleasure through what neuroaesthetics calls "cognitive elaboration."

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Part 1. Victorian Popular Fictions Today

> Ellen brought the book; "where shall I read?"
> "The twenty-third psalm."
> Ellen began it, and went through it steadily and slowly, though her voice quavered a little…
> Long before she had finished Ellen's eyes were full, and her heart too. "If only I could feel these words as mama does!" she said to herself. She did not dare look up till the traces of tears had passed away; then she saw that her mother was asleep. Those first sweet words had fallen like balm upon the sore heart; and mind and body had instantly found rest together.
> Ellen breathed the lightest possible kiss upon her forehead, and stole quietly out of the room to her own little bed.
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> (Warner, 1850: 15-16)

> The shared we-centric space enabled by the activation of mirror neurons is paralleled by the development of perspectival spaces defined by the establishment of the capacity to distinguish self from other, as long as sensory-motor self-control develops ... the more mature capacity to segregate the modes of interaction, together with the capacity of carving out the subject and the object of the interaction, do not annihilate the shared we-centric space.
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> (Gallese, 2007: 529)

How are we to understand "Victorian Popular Fictions" today? This opening article of the new *Victorian Popular Fictions Journal* (*VPFJ*) takes as its starting point a consideration of what we do as Victorianists and as members of the Victorian Popular Fiction Association (VPFA), of the paths we prefer and the possibilities we neglect.

Before considering how we might understand something, we need to define it. What, then, do we mean by "Victorian Popular Fictions?" Do we and should we define them by genre, time period, geographical location, cultural location (then and now), authors, texts, and, not least, methodologies? I shall be arguing initially that the research priorities that define us seem to be based on our affective engagement with authors and texts, on the pleasures and alliances they offer us today, perhaps even more than in fields related to ours. In the second part of the article, I shall explore the genealogy and implications of such engagement by reading two examples of sentimental fiction by American women: Susan Warner's very famous *The Wide, Wide World* (1850) and the entirely neglected *The Lost Lady*

of Lone (1876) by the otherwise much discussed and even more circulated Emma Dorothy Eliza Neville (E.D.E.N.) Southworth. I shall do that to think through how the Victorian popular fictions industry has encouraged precisely the affective relationships with texts we as critical academics still seem to feel today. But before we do that, we need to consider several basic questions, not least what texts Victorian popular fictions comprise today, where they lie in the academy, what methods can be used to describe and discuss them. We have already initiated this process in the "Welcome" to this inaugural issue, and the purpose of this article is to pursue those reflections more extensively and in more detail.

We can start with a relatively simple question. In terms of time-period, the core of "Victorian" for the *VPFJ*, as for the *VPFA*, means the long nineteenth century (c. 1790 to c. 1914), though, as we explain in the Welcome, we are also open to contributions on popular neo-Victorian texts and those that clearly link to the core period though published before or after. This flexibility in terms of dates is only logical if one considers that neither narratives, publishing nor human lives abide by convenient chronological cut-off points. Weedon (2003) declares itself to cover 1836-1916, but in fact extends both before and after that. While the influence of the Romantics on the Victorians is well established, there is still a lot more work to be done at either end of the period to specify more closely the continuities and ruptures. Charles Garvice, "the most successful novelist in England" in the first decades of the twentieth century (Waller, 2006: 681) may have been born in 1850 and in the 1880s and 1890s wrote serials for fiction periodicals on both sides of the Atlantic that brought him wealth, but what brought him truly huge sums were his 6d paperback novels. Waller (2006: 685-8) describes how Garvice published over 40 between 1903 and 1920, many of which were reworkings of his earlier serials. From the point of view of superficial chronology, his most popular works are not then "Victorian" even though in reality he was recycling narratives he had devised the century previously. Likewise the serials of J.F. Smith and many other "Victorian" popular writers continued to be in print until the 1930s (King 2004: 170-71) – proof, if it were needed, of how easily "Victorian" popular fiction continued to be written, read and published several decades after Queen Victorian died.[1] While there is now much wider recognition of these continuities than a generation ago, our fascination by the new has tended to obfuscate the details. To encourage exploration and specification of these details, therefore, we think of "Victorian" as having a core with extended and very fuzzy edges.

While we know that, in the nineteenth century, popular literature of all kinds was by and large described as inferior by those writing from the position of the literary élite,[2] we need to identify where "Victorian popular fictions" lie in the

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[1] My thanks to John Spiers for pointing me towards Garvice.

[2] I write "writing from the position of" thinking of J. Malcolm Rymer's 'Popular Writing' in the *Queen's Magazine* I (1842): 99-103 and Wilkie Collins's "The Unknown Public" in *Household Words* 18 (21 August 1858) 217-22. Rymer is now most famous as co-author (with Thomas Peckett Prest) of the decidedly popular *Varney the Vampyre* (1845-7) and

academy today. How far has a canon such as that established by the Leavises (Robertson, 1988) allowed itself to be dismantled by four decades of critical and cultural theory in order to welcome in Victorian popular fictions? Mark Bennet's survey of 50 Victorian literature curricula published in 2008 showed the overwhelming dominance in the university English literature classroom of Dickens, George Eliot, Charlotte Brontë, Hardy and Gaskell, a prose canon that is only partially expanded by Jane Thomas's chapter in the same volume that looks at the development of the English literature canon since the nineteenth century. In terms of academic publications, while my own counting of authors covered in "The Novel" section in "The Victorian Period" of the *Year's Work in English Studies* from 2009 to 2018 does show work published on Grant Allen, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Wilkie Collins, Mrs Henry Wood, Florence Marryat and others, the figure who has by far the largest number of publications covering him is still Dickens. The *Year's Work* lists North American and British authors together and Dickens is followed by an Anglo-American assortment: Oscar Wilde, Henry James, Mark Twain, George Eliot, Charlotte Brontë, Edgar Allen Poe, and, quite a way behind, Arthur Conan Doyle, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Elizabeth Gaskell, Antony Trollope and Bram Stoker. These twelve seem to constitute the current canon in English studies where teaching and publication on Anglo-American Victorian fiction seem more or less to coincide. Leavis would not have approved of Charlotte Brontë, Wilde or Stoker but he would have acknowledged many of the authors. Work on sensation novelists, perhaps surprisingly, is well down the *Years' Work* list, and Wilkie Collins regularly attracts over double the publications accorded Braddon. There is little sign, it seems, that the academy has welcomed Victorian popular prose fictions. The outsider status of Victorian popular fictions seems modified, indeed, but it continues still.

To find out how far this bigger picture is reflected in what we research as self-identified specialists in Victorian popular fictions, I went back over programmes of the first decade of the annual VPFA conferences. (VPFA Conferences 2009-18) I found that of the 110 author names mentioned, most appeared just once, suggesting that we have broadened the authorial field. Nonetheless, again a canon emerged which both overlapped with and contested the findings of the previous paragraph. The primacy of Dickens in both is beyond doubt (35 papers overall at VPFA conferences), though he is followed in second place not by Wilde (as in the *Years' Work*) but by Mary Braddon (25); then, in a clear third rank, we find Florence Marryat (15) and Wilkie Collins (14). In fourth place are Mrs Henry Wood (9), Conan Doyle (8 – 5 on Sherlock Holmes), and, with seven papers each, Rhoda Broughton, Marie Corelli, Ouida, Anthony Trollope and H.G. Wells. G.W.M. Reynolds appears five times, and, each four times, Charles Reade, Mrs Humphry Ward and Robert Louis Stevenson.

There are some surprises here, not least the frequency of Dickens and Trollope, caused without doubt by their closeness to the established canon as well

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The String of Pearls (1845-6) while, as we shall see below, Collins is the most discussed representative of sensation fiction.

as a desire to validate them as "popular." Braddon's and Collins's pre-eminence, corroborated by Pamela Gilbert's (2011) and Andrew Mangham's (2013) authoritative collections as well as Jessica Cox's 2019 "Guide to Essential Criticism" on sensation fiction, is surely the result of easily available annotated editions and decades of study, though their relationship at the conference is markedly inverted from what they enjoy in the *Years' Work*. Marryat may lack the quantity of critical engagement that Braddon and Collins have enjoyed, but that Victorian Secrets (Marryat, 2009, 2010, 2011) as well as Valancourt (Marryat, 2009a) have published excellent editions suitable for teaching may have helped boost engagement with her. More surprisingly, Bram Stoker appears only once at the conference - perhaps contributions are syphoned off into Gothic studies. However, many authors who had huge sales (and whose influence has been acknowledged for a long time) remain outsiders everywhere. At the VPFA conferences, Edward Bulwer Lytton is mentioned twice, J.F. Smith and Pierce Egan once each.[3] Despite their even bigger sales in Britain (let alone globally), Southworth and Warner are not mentioned outside the plenary this paper is based on. There is no mention of Charles Garvice at all.

In terms of geographical coverage, almost all the authors mentioned in the VPFA conference titles are British (indeed, of 110 authors mentioned only 4 are not). We seem to define "Victorian Popular Fictions" by the nationality of authors. If, however, we were to think of our field as based on where the reading of texts took place (perhaps Britain, perhaps globally), then the shape of our field will change dramatically. My choice of case studies will already have made it clear that I do not believe that we should confine our view of "Victorian Popular Fictions" to Britain. For decades we have known that there was a huge market for French and American authors in Britain, and for British authors overseas both in English and in translation. James (1963) had a chapter on "Fiction from America and France" and Mary Noel (1954: 25) had previously pointed out how the American and British markets for popular fiction were inextricable from one another. Phegley, Barton and Huston's 2012 collection explains the importance of seeing sensation as an Anglo-American phenomenon where Britain and America are in constant dialogue with one another, whereas Weber's (2012) concern is with how a selection of women writers on either side of the Atlantic (including the remarkably popular Fanny Fern) learnt from each other to alter perceptions of femininity in general and women writers in particular. Victorian popular fiction circulated transnationally just as popular fiction does today. While there is welcome work on this, we need to consider more than we do the implications of wide geographical and cultural dispersion, and that is exactly what I shall explore later in the article.

The majority of writers studied at the VPFA conferences were involved in the world of commercial rather than political or social purpose publishing. This is in line with a common understanding of popular fiction as "those books that

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[3] On these see e.g. Sutherland 1988: 388-90; James 1963: 109-113; James 2006: 208-9. More recent evaluations of Egan and Smith can be found in King 2004 and King 2011, and of Bulwer Lytton in Miquel-Baldellou 2009.

everybody reads." (Glover and McCracken, 2012: 1) If we regard "popular" as circulated widely in a textual marketplace, then the social and technological machinery that enables that production and circulation obviously merits focussed attention. (Berberich, 2015: 3) The now classic accounts of Victorian publishing like Sutherland (1976), Patten (1978), Weedon (2003), St Claire (2004) and Hammond (2006) require updating and longitudinal analysis, and despite the often excellent work by researchers both inside and outside the academy, (such as Kirkpatrick 2016; Jones 2012; Cox 2000) the material on mass-market publishing, marketing and distribution needs expansion.

If, on the other hand, we regard as "popular" those texts generated by radicals to promote a certain idea of "the people," as Vargo (2017), Haywood (2004) and Murphy (1994) have done, for example, then the political organisation of textual production also needs to be attended to as well as its political aims, potential and effects. I am not suggesting that questions of transnational circulation, the organisation of the fiction industry or the politics of textual circulation have been neglected entirely at the VPFA conferences (there has been a handful of papers on these matters), but they remain a decided minority, not much addressed by either the plenary speakers or panellists. Students schooled in the political economy of the Victorian popular fiction industry perhaps prefer to present their findings at BAVS, SHARP or RSVP. Yet attention to the wider industrial-historical context of popular fiction might help to challenge an assumption of the previous paragraphs that duplicates the practices of the marketing side of the publishing industry, that *authorship* is the organisational category that defines literary studies. (King, 2019) It may be that the study of Victorian Popular Fictions needs to consider more than it does publishers, series and periodicals after the fashion of Johannsen (1950), Stern (1980), Anderson and Rose (1991), Rose and Anderson (1991), Spiers (2011) and others previously mentioned.

Most work on Victorian popular fictions, whether associated with the VPFA conferences or not, seeks to support or explicate a thesis by focussing on authors, themes, genres or formats (or a combination of these). Thus we find Tomaiuolo (2010) focussing on Mary Braddon, but also embracing genre and theme, to show that Braddon's works beyond *Lady Audley's Secret* are worth reading too; the contributors to Parsons and Heholt (2018) explore the representation of the male body in a variety of popular texts; gender – and in particular the recovery of women writers – looms large at both the conferences and beyond it (such as Boardman and Jones 2004), indicating the continued influence of Showalter (1977). (cf. Waugh 2006: 328)

This expansion of the canon is very welcome (as long as it does not result in a new canon) but other opportunities yet to be taken up include the large-scale quantitative study of the contents or style of Victorian popular fiction such as we find of late twentieth-century and early twenty-first century bestsellers, (Archer and Jocker, 2016) by the Stanford Literary Lab and Franco Moretti (2010) in particular, and, very recently, by Katherine Bode (2018) of Australian newspaper fiction. However problematic many of the methods of such analysis are, (by their own admission – see, for example, Algee-Hewitt et al. 2016 and Bode 2018, esp. ch. 1

and 2) they have opened the way for potentially revolutionary discoveries about how, for example, we might redefine sectors of the nineteenth-century literary market.

Electronic resources have also opened another portal which we have yet to enter fully: an up-to-date survey of Victorian popular fiction that revises the ground-breaking work of Altick (1957) and James (1963) from over sixty years ago. Scholars such as Terry (1986), Waller (2006) and Palmer and Buckland (2013) have certainly updated and extended them, but the array of possibilities that online materials and data processing have yet been brought to bear as widely in our field as they might, and certainly not put to the service of understanding the global and polyglot circulation of popular fiction. Even Troy Bassett's useful *At the Circulating Library* database (2007-) lists only Anglophone adult prose fiction of 100+ pages published Britain. Ryan Cordell and David Smith's *Viral Texts* (2012-) has focused only on short-form texts available on the *Chronicling America* database. While both have generated interesting quantitative results (and *Viral Texts* some fascinating visualisations), most papers at the VPFA annual conferences, by contrast, employ a historicist cultural studies methodology concerned with the decoding of a small number of texts though contemporary sources. Close reading in various forms is common, often motivated by a deep enthusiasm for the texts and authors under discussion. Perhaps our enthusiasm for individual texts and authors is one reason for the neglect of Bulwer, Smith, Egan and Garvice. They do not enjoy teaching editions, true, but perhaps a more fundamental issue is that we find it difficult to relate to what such authors wrote: are they so conservative in their gender stereotyping and conceptions of society, perhaps, that we do not wish to be associated with them?[4] The question of relatability, in fact, underlies all the questions I am asking in this article, not only regarding our own relations to the texts we read but also to what extent we feel that those texts relate us to others today. Does that same issue explain, too, why we have refused to read distantly and set our sights on impersonal categories and Big Data? It is not the case, as has been suggested to me, that these cannot be communicated effectively within the confines of a twenty-minute paper, for in other arenas they are.

My argument in pointing out the above is that we do not need to try just to read more and more, but to read differently, and not just through computational analysis and publishers records. Pamela Gilbert (2011:3) wonders how appropriate close reading of popular texts might be when the precise words of these texts are very hard if not impossible to establish as the "authoritative" ones expressing the author's intentions. Leighton and Surridge (2009: 207), commenting on British and American serializations of Collins's *The Moonstone,* remark on how it "took on strikingly different forms—and hence different meanings—in different markets." Indeed, the novels by Warner and Southworth I shall be discussing later appeared in quite different forms on either side of the Atlantic in English as well as in various

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[4] Morton (2017: 21) raised a similar issue regarding academic preference for studying liberal and radical work in his study of the conservative and certainly not "popular" journalist-poet, Alfred Austin.

languages. They were divided up at different points when serialised, and illustrations and other para- and peritextual materials (from covers and paper- and printing- quality to prefaces, pricing, advertisements, surrounding texts and reputations of publishers) all affected the parameters of meaning within which they could be read. Texts were often substantially changed in different editions: not only were they recontextualised, abbreviated and translated, (see e.g. King, 2008) but even in English the names of characters and the settings of the plot were often changed: the mountains in Virginia in the American versions of Southworth novels, for example, could become Wales in the British, New York might be renamed London or Dublin, and so on. More disturbingly, slaves could become servants even while the stereotyping and patois attributed them in the original was retained. (King 2004: 10) What are these substitutions, cuts and additions telling us? That the cultural particularities of place and the ethical issues of race and slavery do not seem as problematic – or differently problematic - for Victorian publishers and readers as they are for us? Such a question risks going counter to today's orthodox understanding of Southworth as an active opponent of discrimination in gender and race wars. (e.g. Ings 1996; Abete 2006) She is enthusiastically endorsed as on our side as it were, but that does not mean the question of the industry's attitudes is not worth asking, especially in the context of transnational and transcultural circulation.

> Gilbert goes on to say that

> scholarly work on popular literature demands new approaches to scholarship. We must understand a new economy of reading, and see these texts as part of an intertext that may include vastly different information in the same periodical volume.

> (Gilbert 2011: 3)

Christopher Looby had raised the same point in 2004. He came to conclusions familiar to us from Ken Gelder (2004) and others, that, in order to appeal to as wide a consumer base as possible, mass-market fiction has to remain polysemous, suggesting only a vague political and social stance on potentially contentious matters. Looby had carefully excavated the original publishing contexts of Southworth's most famous novel, *The Hidden Hand* (1859), and this tradition of the archaeology of publishing is what I have operated within in my previous work. Such digging does not, however, answer the question of why there is so much energy at the VPFA today when the study of Victorian popular fictions seems to offer less practical advantage in the classroom or publication. Why indeed do we bother to read such material in historical context?

It of course grants otherness to the Other – an ethical imperative we have been exhorted to follow since the 1980s. As Gillian Beer famously put it:

> Literary history will always be an expression of now: current needs, dreads, preoccupations. The cultural conditions within which we receive texts will shape the attention we bring to them. We shall read as readers in 1987 or 1988, or, with luck, in 1998, but we need not do so helplessly, merely hauling without noticing, our own cultural baggage.

> (Beer, 1987: 67)

But what was a burning call to political activism for Beer and others can also become an automatic activity, a career-option methodology through which we can demonstrate and iterate our expertise and value in the marketplace for our labour. We may not be able to sell our expertise in J.F. Smith or Emma Robinson to appointment panels that expect Dickens, Henry James and George Eliot, but we can sell our expertise in a standard and canonised methodology. Rita Felski (2008:19) has written of how "the act of historicizing can harden into a defense mechanism, a means of holding an artwork at arm's length,"[5] and she and I will both agree that such instrumentalism can reduce a text to a dead thing, to what Martin Buber (1999/1937: 20) called an *It* – not the product or trace of people's bodies whom we address or with whom we can (in fantasy at least) enter into dialogue and form a relationship, but a dead thing we feel we have rights over and can exploit.

Such cold, rational treatment does not entirely square with the enthusiasms so evident at the VPFA conferences. Although I am certainly a cog in the educational machine, I am still at least able to *enjoy* Victorian popular fictions over and above whether I know their precise publishing, political and other contexts. Victorian popular texts appeared at the time in a variety of languages and formats, and we continue to derive pleasures in reading them in formats very different from their paper avatars on the screens and audio systems of PCs and laptops, tablets, phones. Our pleasures are in part an effect of the already built-in polysemy of Victorian popular fictions created to be distributed in a multitude of forms, but they are also a less discussed effect of digital remediation. The study of such remediation has tended to focus on its mechanics invisible beneath the user interface, and the cognitive implications of this invisibility - what Jim Mussell (2012: 193-4) calls their "formal properties" that determine use – while the affective dialogue between remediated forms and user has received far less attention in Victorian studies.[6]

Contrary to the determination of scholars who seek to anchor popular texts in particular places, times and formats, I am arguing that globally consumed texts like those of Southworth and Warner cannot and never could be localised in and by one context or set of "formal properties" (in Mussell's sense). It is one of the apparently paradoxical polemics of this article that electronic remediation works not only to grant Victorian popular fictions their specific historical otherness with greater precision than ever before possible (by enabling the mapping of textual and publishing features), but also to highlight the question of what makes us still able to enjoy them today. This latter is a phenomenological question to ask of our own reading related to that which Felski has explored in *Uses of Literature*. But it is also a question central to the apparently different theoretical approach of neuroaesthetics as exemplified by Lisa Zunshine (2006) and Keen (2010): what neuroaesthetics seem to me to do is to lend a scientific basis for the same aesthetic – and ethical - argument that, *au fond*, we read to form affective relationships, either with parts of ourselves or with others, and through forming those relations to effect change.

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[5] Felski alludes to Buber (without naming him) on p. 31.

[6] While less studied in the field of Victorian fiction, there is a good deal of work on today's fan fiction which has explored these issues. See, for example, Stanfill and Condis (2014).

While my response to the question of our continued relationship to Victorian popular fiction has recently been shaped by both Felski and neuroaesthetics, it was originally pricked by Andrew Miller's *The Burdens of Perfection* (2008). Miller suggested an ethical drive in authors and texts central to the Victorian canon (for him, Robert Browning, George Eliot, Henry James and Dickens) which he calls "moral perfectionism." He defines this as "an attempt to come to terms with, to comprehend, the bare presence of others... [it] was a response to a complex confluence of historical streams: the conversion narratives of spiritual autobiographies, Continental and British romanticisms, and Hellenism." Its immediate "conceptual frame" was derived from "the epistemological disarray, the doubt into which modernity had thrown its most sensitive characters." (Miller, 2008: 4) If we can disregard the assumptions regarding literary hierarchies underpinning Miller's book, we can appreciate his point that doubt – epistemological problem or blockage - is dispelled in much Victorian fiction not through rational argument but through *relationships* with other people, friendships with other characters, even marriages – and, crucially for my argument, through our own affective relations with characters on the page. Miller cites the narrator of George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876) who comments on the influence of Daniel on Gwendolen:

> It is one of the secrets in that change of mental poise which has been fitly named conversion, that to many among us neither heaven nor earth has any revelation until some personality touches theirs with a peculiar influence, subduing them into receptiveness.
>
> (Miller, 2008: 7, quoting George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, ed. Graham Handley, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984, p. 400)

Given my summary of Miller above, it will be clear that I regard the drive for "moral perfection" as linking epistemological with affective concerns: it is an attempt to achieve knowledge through sympathy with other people (Eliot's Romola and Dorothea are very obvious examples).

In order to address the question of what is at stake for those many of us who continue to derive pleasure from Victorian popular fiction and who are even "subdued into receptiveness" by it, I want to deterritorialise the drive for moral perfection from Victorian high-status texts in order to open it out to the popular, and, in this article, particularly the sentimental market sector. The Southworth and Warner novels, as examples of sentimental fiction, insistently explore what we readers know of other people, how we know it, and how we should behave towards them. Combining what and how we know with how we should behave, they are especially concerned with how and whom we love and should love. In twenty-first century terms, they check the empathic drive that neuroaesthetics sees as biologically hardwired into us against the "cognitive elaboration" of context (Gallese 2009:527); that is, they explore what Gallese calls in the second epigraph above the "we-space" of empathic mirroring ("sympathy" in the sentimental

tradition) in relation to the long-term well-being of the subject. [7] Ignorance or information blockage may cause their characters to become erotically fascinated just as may knowledge, and they may love either the forbidden or the licit in good or bad ways, but what is crucial in this tradition is that not just the objects of affection but the characters' relations to them are scrutinised: they need not just to love – abandon themselves to a fantasy of "we-space" - but read their beloveds as though they were texts, and, in turn, self-consciously read their reading. In other words, they ask precisely the question I began with: what is their object of study and what is their relationship to it? For the sympathetic relationship between reader and text is modelled and analysed both explicitly and, key to our pleasure as readers, implicitly, as we learn to consider how and to what extent our delight in "we-space" will contribute to our continued happiness and when not. I am suggesting, then, that Victorian sentimental popular fiction models processes of relationship formation and exploration for us in its characters, its explicit scenes of reading, and above all in its plots. The latter provide paradigms of ideal relationships that are often, but not exclusively, figured by love and marriage both in high-status and popular fiction (Dorothea and Ladislaw in *Middlemarch* quite as much as Gus and Minnie in J.F. Smith's *Minnigrey* in *The London Journal* 1851-2, or the characters in the novel I discuss below).

The centrality of marriage, and debates about it, to Victorian popular fictions – and indeed, Victorian narrative in general – is well established. (Phegley, 2012; Cohn, 1988) Yet, just as we must consider what we mean by "Victorian popular fictions", we also need to define "marriage." Mostly what Victorian popular fiction debates is not marriage itself but *kinds* of marriage. Certainly, the merely legal and economic kinds are often excoriated. But there is another that is never once in my reading ever questioned as an ideal state: the loving "marriage of true minds". The institution of marriage may be rotten, but the idea and ideal of a relationship where one person knows and accepts another perfectly is not. In this case the cognitive and the empathic (or, again to use the Victorian term, sympathetic) coincide. Indeed, it is this ideal that enables marriage in its earthbound, patriarchal and institutional form to be condemned and problematised, anatomised and anathematised.

Towards the beginning of her famous article on "Marriage" in the 1888 *Westminster Review*, Mona Caird wrote that "it is the hardest thing in the world for either sex to learn the truth of the real thoughts and feelings of the other." (Caird,

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[7] For the argumentative purposes of this article, I have conflated empathy with the dominant nineteenth-century understanding of sympathy – a suffering together – even while I am very aware that the two terms have different histories and uses. Keen (2010: 4) acknowledges the overlap of the two terms while maintaining a perceptive distinction that is certainly valuable. I nonetheless maintain that the distinction does not hold in the sentimental tradition I discuss here where "sympathy" cannot be reduced (as it has been in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries) to "empathic concern." See, for example, Picker (2003: esp. 88-100) who discusses the social role of "sympathetic vibration" in Eliot, and Lowe (2007: 14) who shows how for Dickens, George Eliot, Charlotte Young and Dinah Craik "sympathy is both a recurring object of attention… and a guiding principle" (p. 14).

1888: 187) She went on to claim that it was Luther's and the Reformation's fault that marriage was such a disaster for women, precisely because Luther did not understand women at all. (Caird 1888: 190-1) In other words, women suffered in marriage every day because they were not recognised by men as valued and valid interlocutors. The marriage Caird condemned in her article was not the marriage of true minds but the institutional form. Thirty years before Phegley (2012) explained much the same point in the British context, Leach (1981) had suggested that American feminists arrived at a typology of love which they termed "romantic", "sentimental" and "companionate." Only the latter they approved of; the others they dismissed, the sentimental as making women "the passive recipients of masculine affections," while romantic love invested the Other with one's own fantasies and passions. In either case, both men and women suffered. Companionate marriage, on the other hand, was "symmetrical and egalitarian, based on knowledge." (Leach 1981: 100; cf. Phegley 2012: 5-17) What Mona Caird complained about was a non-symmetrical relationship in which women were obliged to know men better than men knew women.

The ideal marriage in sentimental fiction, it seems to me, can be reinterpreted as the ideal relationship with texts that we as readers today can take pleasure in - precisely that ideal marriage of true minds and the creation of "we-space" that neuroaesthetics prioritises. Is it this same desire that lies at the root of our own enthusiasm for certain Victorian popular authors rather than publishers, structures or systems? If so, what are the implications for our emotional investments and the checking of that drive through "cognitive elaboration"? It is this question concerning the ability of Victorian popular fictions to still make a relationship to us today that underlies the whole of this article, from my initial enquiry into the place of Victorian popular fictions in the academy today, through my brief account of how and what we choose to study under the rubric of "Victorian popular fictions" and what marriage might mean for sentimental novelists, to the examples that follow.

Part 2: Case Studies

It is time now to turn to my case studies of Warner and Southworth. Both were American members of "the damned mob of scribbling women" that Hawthorne referred to in his now infamous letter from Liverpool to his publisher in 1855. (Hawthorne, 1910: 75) Their books often sold in the thousands, sometimes hundreds of thousands, and Hawthorn thought they drove what he considered more deserving writers (such as Hawthorne himself) out of the marketplace. Whether the fiction market worked (and still works) as Hawthorne believed is debatable, but it is certainly true that Warner and Southworth sold more copy than he did: Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* is generally considered the first American novel to have sold over a million copies and Southworth's *The Hidden Hand* (1859) sold at least as much as that in its various iterations. (Dobson 1986: 227) Southworth in many ways can be considered the American equivalent of Mary Braddon: the dime novel publishers Street and Smith recognised this when, between 1901 and 1906, they

brought out the "EDEN Series" (named after Southworth's initials) featuring the novels of them both. (Cox, 2000: 94) Both Southworth and Warner have benefitted from the recent recovery of American women's writing, and while Warner's success in Britain has been documented by Jessica DeSpain (2016), Southworth's transnational success has only been sketched. (Johnson-Woods 2000: 355-9; King 2004, ch. 6 and 7) Both wrote fiction that mixed the sentimental and the sensational and which circulated not only all over the anglophone world but was also much translated.[8] Both were still being printed in mass-market editions in the 1930s and beyond: Southworth even had a dime-novel "library" (= series) named after her. (Cox 2000: 245, 277-8) According to Williams (1990: 567), there had been at least 130 editions of Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* up to 1990; as of writing (late 2018), Jessica De Spain (Warner, 2012-) has recorded variants from 174 editions, and there are almost certainly many others. These American women's novels, written for publishers in New York, Philadelphia and London in the second half of the nineteenth century, were products of a tight profit-driven publishing industry that sought to maximise its returns and minimise its risks through a variety of control methods centring on the law (mainly copyright, contract and employment) and technology (production and distribution). The very success of these national industries was, however, also based on the exploitation of ambiguous narrative whose resonant polysemy fought against the industry's legal and technological constraints. Such ambiguity enabled its products to escape the national – and temporally-determined - industries into other systems in other times and places, to spread around the world into different languages and cultures and to prompt, of course, different effects.

The Wide, Wide World

First and at greatest length I shall discuss Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World*. Even though this novel has received considerable attention over the last few decades by students of American literature, it is less familiar to British readers despite its very wide dissemination in Britain in the nineteenth century. I shall therefore give a very brief account of Warner and her novel. Such summaries are always a necessity when venturing outside the canonical as, unlike when we talk of Dickens, Eliot or Brontë novels (or, now, perhaps, a few novels by Braddon), no common culture can be assumed.

Susan Warner was born in New York City in 1819, the daughter of a prominent and wealthy Puritan family. When she was nine her mother died and another nine years later her lawyer father's fortune started to go downhill. The family was forced to leave their mansion in New York for an old farmhouse. Aged 30, Warner began work on *The Wide, Wide World* with the hope that the novel would serve as a source of income – a typical story of Victorian popular writing.

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[8] The very incomplete entries for these authors in WorldCat give some idea of this. WorldCat does not, of course, even attempt to map serialisations in periodicals and newspapers.

After being rejected by several publishers, *The Wide, Wide World* was issued in a limited edition of 750 copies in 1850. But demand caused the book to be reissued in twenty-two editions over the next three years and quickly garnered an unprecedented record for sales. (DeSpain, 2016)

The Wide, Wide World is a *bildungsroman* with tantalisingly autobiographical elements narrating the growth from childhood to early adulthood of Ellen Montgomery. A good little girl, she does her best to look after her ailing mother. Her unloving father, seemingly incapable of human relationships, leaves for France for business and takes Ellen's mother with him, sending his daughter to lodge with his stern half-sister in the country. There Ellen makes friends with a neighbouring sister and brother some years older than herself, Alice and John Humpherys. Ellen's mother dies while still abroad and then Alice dies too. Without coming to see her, Ellen's father sends her to live with his deceased wife's grand relations in Scotland who unsuccessfully try to de-Americanise her and render her less sober and pious. John Humpherys reappears towards the very end and we are led to believe that Ellen will return to America to marry him and live happily ever after. In the famous 1987 reprint of the text by The Feminist Press, Warner's first ending was restored: a final chapter dropped by the original publisher shows John and Ellen indeed happily married.

By academics the novel is usually placed in the context of antebellum sentimentality as both a meticulous document of the constraints women endured (O'Connell 1997) and as a "training narrative" in obedience, especially to religious authority represented by reading the Bible, a view initiated by Tompkins (1985: 176). The "selling" of reading by a printed text is not, I might add, just a religious issue, but an industrial one. *The Wide, Wide World* functions for the publishing industry as a powerful advertisement-cum-justification for the consumption of not just itself or the Bible, but printed texts in general: it is as if Netflix were to run a serial justifying how good TV serials and films are for us, or a poet like Wordsworth were to publish a "Preface" arguing for the benefits of poetry.

This is all certainly the case, but it is not the text's cultural specificity or even just its self-advertising function in the culture industries that has enabled readers from many countries to read it with pleasure or that enables us to do so today. Readers who have left comments on Amazon claim they find it "inspiring" for its Christian values: they connect to it because they see it as mirroring themselves. I am not at all a Christian, but I still enjoy it very much. When I read it, I am Ellen at times, especially in the first half, living a simplified, idealised version of my past. But at other times, and even at the same time, I am not Ellen: I note not only my similarities but also my differences from her. The novel encourages me to reflect on my relationship to myself and to other people. I understand it not as an instruction manual on how to integrate myself into a religious patriarchate through reading, but as a space I enter into which enables an ideal relationship through which I can hold a dialogue with myself about similarity and difference. Such splitting is not traumatic (as some psychoanalytic theory might have it), but productive: it is a checking through "cognitive elaboration" of what is today called automatic mirror-neuronal empathy. It is because both the cognitive

and affective are essential that I regard it as a version of Miller's "moral perfectionism" where sympathetic relationships can lead to expansion of knowledge and a reflection on ethical and social responsibility.

Ellen initially lives in perfect harmony with her mother. In many ways, Ellen *is* her mother. Certainly, she mothers her mother, the elder ceding the exercise of parental power to form a symmetrical relationship of give and take. They share rituals which empower Ellen: Ellen makes her mother tea and toast every night, for example, exactly as she likes it. Of course, they read together. Ashworth's thoughtful historicist reading of reading in *A Wide, Wide World* concludes "how easily maternal approbation translates into maternal modeling" in ways of interpreting the world in general and interpreting written texts in particular. (Ashworth 2000: 150) In the quotation which forms the first epigraph above, Ellen's mother asks her to read the twenty-third psalm aloud to her, and then shows rather than tells Ellen how she should react to the words. Ellen's identification with her mother makes her want to "feel these words" as her mother does. Her mother has an ideal relationship to the text that she models for Ellen. Ellen reads *for* her mother, and, ultimately *like* her mother, and in that combination, Ellen has both to understand the text and her mother: she has to form a simultaneous bond with both, willingly subdued into a general receptivity. She comes to understand a person and a text simultaneously. She and we learn the right way to behave in relations with texts and people - the marriage of cognition and identification, the promise and pleasure of such texts.

The question of trust – the cognitive evaluation of whether what we read is true - arises in the very first pages. Ellen's mother, in the very act of telling her daughter a lie that she feels better than she does, obliges Ellen to say she believes her. (Warner 1850: 9-10; 20-21) The very next page, Ellen's mother's doctor, who knows perfectly well that the mother will die soon, lies to them both for the most "humane" of reasons. We already know that Ellen's mother knows that he is telling them a lie. Even while in a relationship where one thinks one is of one mind, the novel prods us, if gently, to question how truly we can know other people, even those - especially those - we love intensely. The novel does nor force an either/or between trust and suspicion; rather, it suggests that we can know, accept and not force our knowledge on the Other. Later, Ellen's mother will tell her that the greatest act of politeness is not to ask too many questions: one may guess, one may surmise, one may know, but one is not obliged to interrogate aggressively or state baldly. This knowing restraint, this restrained knowing, is set up as "true honour". (Warner 1850: 65) We are asked to consider acknowledgement without imposition, recognition without command that morally accommodates even little white lies. That has the further corollary that words are but the surface carriers of meaning tied to specific meanings and contexts and hence transitory. What is important is the enduring quality of relationship, the maintenance of the "shared we-centric space," not individual speech acts.

All later relationships in Ellen's life are measured against hers with her mother, even her relationship with God.[9] Various forms of love are tested out and found lacking. Ellen's aunt Fortune looks after her physically but offers no loving companionship. Similarly, Ellen's aristocratic Scottish grandmother, aunt and uncle with whom she goes to live in the last tenth of the novel are not sympathetic. Even the Scottish uncle, whose love for her Ellen acknowledges, asks Ellen to deny her history and be what she is not.

Ellen is lucky in that, after she is forced to part with her mother by distance and death, she finds a replacement in her friend Alice and then, when Alice dies, in Alice's brother John. In a gender-inverted and augmented version of the erotic triad we know so well from Kosofsky Sedgwick (1985) where a woman is passed between two men to signal and suppress their love for each other,[10] here a woman loves two women, her mother and her friend, and ends with the friend's brother because he resembles his sister both physically and in terms of her companionate relationship to the heroine. All three beloveds, naturally, have similar reading practices to Ellen. For all of them, meaning is more an enabler and marker of relationship, a social practice rather than page-bound signifying system. Ellen's induction into reading is not, then, *pace* previous critics, a training but an education into the wide world based on loving imitation of process. It involves an ethics which is not just a rule-based morality.

Finally, it is crucial that the relationship that Ellen's mother models for her is *generic*. Not only is it not gender specific; it is not even specific to people, for Ellen forms similar relationships with things, including texts. Whether she forms relationships with kettles and the ritual of tea making, vistas or flowers or paper, they all become texts whose "meaning" is social. The participants in the relationship are potentially infinitely substitutable in a chain that recalls Lacan's definition of metonymy as Freudian displacement. (Lacan 1993: 221) When Ellen has no mother she substitutes for her a nameless old gentleman in a shop, or, later, a stranger met on a boat. Then a flower, water, a view, the Bible again, and eventually Alice. Without Alice, she turns to John. This chain of substitutions is constant not in its individual objects but in its kind: the companionate which lovingly knows the Other.

It is this stress on the substitutable companionate that opens out Victorian fictions and our relationships to them to all sorts of emotional possibilities, and provides the ethical base for a critique of patriarchal fixed morality that so much Victorian popular fiction seems to perform. I self-identify as male but still I can readily identify with Ellen, just as Eliot's Gwendolen learnt from Daniel Deronda. At other times, however, there is a gender-specific chain of mirroring which we

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[9] The dedication of Ellen's Bible by her mother is ambiguous. The phrase "I will be a God to thee" (based on Genesis 17.7) seems to identify God with Ellen's mother. (see Warner 1850:49)

[10] The structure is best known in studies of Victorian popular fiction for its mobilisation in analyses of *Lady Audley's Secret* by Cvetkovich 1992, ch. 3; Pykett 1992: 103-4; Nemesvari 1995.

should not ignore. Susan Warner's fan Mary Barnes wrote to her in America from Clifton Ashbourne in Derbyshire revealing that she had learnt how to relate to Warner from Dinah Craik's reading of Elizabeth Barrett Browning:

> I always feel when thinking of you what Miss Mulock writes of E.B. Browning, 'a very dear friend, who does not know, & may never know me, but who has for years been the good influence of my life, whose name includes, & transcends all praise'.[11]

If our temporary identifications while reading may lead us to read the dissolution of gender as characteristic of the sentimental tradition, such evidence as we have suggests the continued force of the category even while the tradition allows gender overlap. Appreciation of this overlap may be an example of that acknowledgement without imposition, recognition without command, that the sentimental teaches us, but it constitutes a problem for political action and interpretation.

For how are we to extend what we have learnt from *The Wide, Wide World* to the texts of Victorian popular fictions at large? Can we treat the racism, snobbery and gender bias so visible in them as the imperfections of loved ones just to maintain our relationships with them? Are we to seek to rescue such texts by reinterpreting their biases as coded denunciations, or are we to condemn them by focusing on what we measure by our standards as epistemological failings and ethical disfigurements? If we choose the latter two options, we risk distancing ourselves from the texts. This is an important choice, familiar from the engagement of 1980s feminisms with pleasure. There is, perhaps, no necessity for a definitive response: as critics of Victorian popular fictions, we should try to open ourselves to multiple positions at once and recognise that our pleasures "are not simply liberating nor simply repressive but themselves participate in and contribute to the constant making and re-making of cultural definitions." (Ballaster et al. 1991: 36) Perhaps we can learn from the narrator of *The Wide, Wide World* to reveal failing and accept it as Other without condoning or condemning, keeping in balance cognitive assessment and we-sharing. This, it strikes me, is the education in the ideal of "moral perfection" that engagement with this text offers us, but it is only a starting point.

Despite neurological researches, phenomenological exploration and assiduous beagling on how publishers and republishers tried to make readers understand the text in certain ways through elaborate paratextual apparatus and editorial redaction, in the end we must admit that we do not really know how we or Victorian readers read beyond that we and they value an imagined marriage of true minds. DeSpain (2016: 106) confesses that the letters she quotes from real readers of *The Wide, Wide World* show that "Like Ellen, these readers make what they will out of their personal connections to the text in their hands … [they] imagined possibilities of communion and connection via their reading experiences with reprinted texts." She suggests that *The Wide, Wide World* opens itself to such

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[11] See http://widewideworlddigitaledition.siue.edu./exhibits/show/fanletters/item/442. The letter is undated. The quotation is paraphrased from the dedication to Craik's novel *The Head of the Family* (1851).

reading because its editions were "themselves amalgams of cross-cultural concerns and interests." (DeSpain 2016: 106) In other words, cultural hybridity explains transnational success. Yet that hybridity must be wider than just Anglo-American and Protestant which a historical focus on Warner's background and immediate publishing context would suggest. Despite translations into languages (Danish, Norwegian) associated strongly with Protestantism, there is a much larger number of translations in Catholic countries and provinces: thirteen French editions by 1891 and at least one Czech by 1900.[12] While the evangelical origins of the text are obvious for anyone who looks for them, it seems that the conversion narrative – which we should more properly call the relationship narrative – is of much wider applicability. It may be, of course, that the text does not, however much it wishes to, police or educate us outside of itself. We can form a temporary relationship with a text while maintaining the fiction inside the reading bubble that our love for it will last for ever.

The Lost Lady of Lone

Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* may seem an easy text to prove my hypothesis since it is well established that it is rooted in sentimental evangelical aspirations that are clearly a popular version of Miller's "moral perfectionism." How does the hypothesis work with less overtly didactic, less Protestant and far less well-known fiction? To answer that I shall pass to perhaps the doyenne of all Victorian popular novelists, the E.D.E.N. Southworth. While a detailed historical portrait of Southworth has been drawn over the last thirty years, no-one has mentioned *The Lost Lady of Lone* beyond Boyle's brief summary of it (1939: 71-2), the scattered references in Homestead and Washington's "Introduction" to their collection of essays on Southworth (2013: xiii, xv), and the very brief reference to it in Warren (2016: 264-5).

Southworth, originally from a wealthy Catholic merchant family, also wrote for money but had a very different life from Warner. She married in 1840 aged 21 and bore two children before her husband abandoned her three years later, upon which she turned to novel writing to supplement her meagre income as a teacher. She published well over 60 novels in periodicals, starting with *Retribution* in the *National Era* in 1849. A canny operator in the fiction industry, she spent three years in Britain (1859-62) in order to secure income from the publication of her novels there. On her return to the USA, although contracted to write only for Robert Bonner of the *New York Ledger*, Southworth kept providing the British press with advance copies of her work until Bonner found out in 1868 and made her stop. (King 2004: 161-2)

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[12] Since the authoritative bibliography of Warner's works was not available to me (Sander 1976), I have had to rely on WorldCat and the European Library. The French editions were very widely circulated throughout Europe, and through Klotz (2016: 223) I have identified eight separate editions of German translations before 1900.

The Lost Lady of Lone originally appeared over the first six months of 1876 in the *New York Ledger* and had to wait until 1890 to come out in volume form (published by Bonner and Sons). As Deborah Mutch (2005: xiv, 24) discovered, it was serialised simultaneously between October 1891 and June 1892 in the *Yorkshire Factory Times* and the *Workman's Times*, though whether these were pirated, syndicated or published by direct agreement remains unclear. In the 1890s, Southworth's novels, including *The Lost Lady*, were being published in penny parts by James Henderson in Red Lion Court, and in volume form in London by publishers such as Nicholson and Sons and E. Milner (the latter's edition of *The Lost Lady* was renamed *The Mistaken Bride*). As late as the 1930s, The Modern Publishing Company in London was still reprinting Southworth.

I chose *The Lost Lady of Lone* rather than one of Southworth's more famous and studied novels because, as a clearly run-of-the-mill serial by a Catholic author with no critical baggage to speak of, it is very different indeed from the widely recognised *The Wide, Wide World*. Importantly for my argument, the text suggests that it was not only Protestant readers who valued its representation and modelling of reading-as-relationship. As will become clear, the novel's religious stance seems to argue for a curious mélange that seems to refuse to be pinned down in another example of the commercial exploitation of ambiguity I remarked on above. Yet counter to my previous claim regarding the importance of recognising the free-floating nature of popular fiction, I shall be suggesting – perhaps surprisingly - that *The Lost Lady* is in conversation with a text often considered an attack on the popular, Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*. Chapter 4 of Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* on "Hebraism and Hellenism," the portion most relevant here, had originally been published in the *Cornhill* in June 1868 as Part III of "Anarchy and Authority;" in book form the whole had been published in January 1869 by Smith, Elder and Co. in London. Southworth would have had plenty of time to read this much discussed (and advertised) work. Moreover, Arnold's revised version of it came out in 1875, just a year before *The Lost Lady*. It was published again by Smith, Elder in London and by Macmillan in New York, so it had recently returned to public consciousness on both sides of the Atlantic. Reading *The Lost Lady* against *Culture and Anarchy* may answer a curious doubt regarding Southworth's heroine that made me distrust the text, distancing me from it, and which offered a way back to a relationship with it.

The Lost Lady of Lone tells the story of Salome Levison, the plain and motherless daughter of a Christianised Jewish banker newly appointed to the British aristocracy. She had been brought up in a Catholic convent in France to make her fit to be married well. When she is of an appropriate age her father calls her to London and has her introduced into society. She, melancholy, lonely, feeling out of place – and plain - is not interested in society's games and refuses several suitors, telling her father she prefers life in the convent. She seems to prefer what Arnold called Hebraic "obedience" and "*strictness of conscience*" to Hellenic "*spontaneity of conscience*". (Arnold 1875: 131, 132, italics original) Salome's father agrees that she may return to the convent for life if three seasons in London do not change her mind. Meanwhile, her father buys Lone, a Scottish castle, from a ruined nobleman, Lord Arondelle, who had spent "fabulous sums" on transfiguring a "grim old

Highland fortress" into "a mansion of Paradise and garden of Eden" (Southworth 1876/ 1894: 10, 11) - indeed not only all his money and a mortgage on his own life but also his son's entail. Arondelle is forced to sell Lone, his wife dies of grief and he goes mad. He is subsequently looked after by his now impoverished son who turns his hand to journalism in London, writing under an assumed name which the kindly publisher respects even though he recognises the writer very well (another example of restrained knowing and knowing restraint, this time man on man). Salome, meanwhile, has moved into Castle Lone and sees a portrait of the son left there. She has romantic dreams about the subject while knowing nothing about him, and starts to hear gossip about his affair with Rose, a village girl. She returns to London for one last season before taking the veil. Unsurprisingly, she meets Lord Arondelle's son, he turns out to be everything that she hoped for, she seems to understand him and he her, they fall in love and decide to marry. But the night before the marriage she believes she sees him lurking near her room in the castle, and then overhears him talking to Rose and plotting some crime. She interprets what she saw and heard as a dream caused by overexcitement at the prospect of her wedding – but wakes to find her father murdered and his safe rifled. A servant is accused on flimsy evidence and, of course, the marriage is delayed. Salome keeps any suspicions she had about her fiancé to herself. A second attempt at marriage some time later succeeds. But just after the ceremony a woman comes to see her with letters, a marriage certificate and photograph that seem to prove that Salome's husband is not only already married to Rose but that he was involved in the murder of her father.

How is Salome to react to this? She seeks guidance in obedient fashion from authoritative texts in what Arnold would have called Hebraic fashion:

> She thought of these, and other instances [in the Bible and in history] in which it might seem as if an angel and a devil lived together, animating one man's body.
> This would, of course, produce inconsistency of conduct, insanity of mind.
> (Southworth 1876/ 1894: 225)

The only thing for her to do is to flee, as she tells herself her love for and duty towards her husband means she cannot denounce his devilry or insanity. She cannot face him to ask him as she reasons that he would only deny it. More pertinently, she is too frightened. She cannot, in other words, "follow, with flexible activity, the whole play of the universal order… apprehensive of missing any part of it, of sacrificing one part to another, to slip away from resting in this or that intimation of it, however capital." (Arnold 1875:132) Hers is by no means the Hellenic "unclouded clearness of mind, an unimpeded play of thought" which allows her to "see things as they really are." (Arnold 1875: 132) Constricted by obedience to authoritative texts and having no one to discuss the matter with, the only question for her is whither not whether to fly. She leaves for the greatest representative of obedience she knows, the convent in France, where she believes her bigamous husband can never find her.

But Salome does not find in the convent the purely Hebraic "*strictness of conscience*" she sought. Instead, and perfectly in accord with the sentimental tradition exemplified by Warner, she finds a Mother Superior who listens

attentively to her story and in turn tells her own parallel story at great length (in fact it takes up almost a third of the novel). It is no surprise that this non-biological mother and daughter mirror each other, as Salome recognizes:

> "Your fate has been like my own – you, like me, were motherless from your infancy; you, like me, spent your childhood and youth in this very convent school. Your father, like mine, met his death at the hands of an assassin; your lover, false as mine, abandoned you for a guilty love. Ah! Your sorrows have been very like mine, only much heavier and harder to bear."
>
> And Salome drew the caressing hands of the abbess to her lips and kissed them over and over again, as she repeated, "Oh, yes, good mother, much heavier and harder to bear than mine."
>
> (Southworth 1876/ 1894: 326)

That she acknowledges reflection of herself enables reflection on herself: Salome notes both the similarity and the difference of the Mother Superior's story to her own, and it is her recognition of both that enables her to escape her misprision. The Mother Superior is now able to persuade Salome to devote herself to "an active, useful life of work." (Southworth 1876/ 1894: 325) Salome had been too obsessed with her own emotions: she had sunk "into a sinful and dangerous lethargy of mind and body in which [she has] brooded morbidly over [her] afflictions". (Southworth 1876/ 1894: 326) In other words, her passion for her husband has clearly been (to use Leach's terms) romantic rather than companionate. Committed to both Hellenic rationality and Hebraic duty, the Mother Superior is not entirely sure Salome is wrong, and, like Ellen's mother and the doctor in *The Wide, Wide World*, tells her "daughter" a white lie to calm her while undertaking enquiries (what we would recognise as "doing research").

Eventually, the Mother Superior discovers that Salome's husband had a half-brother who looked identical to him, and that it was the half-brother who was both involved in the murder of Salome's father and married to Rose. The wicked pair are discovered and live unhappily ever after while Salome returns to her beloved. Salome had known her husband after all: he was virtuous. She had been preoccupied with confirming her own world in which she was weak in the face of what she imagined was his hyperbolic strength: she had, in Arnoldian language, been obedient where she should have thought clearly. It was mere coincidence that her romantic views overlapped slightly with reality.

That this story seems to bear out my hypothesis will be evident: the novel both supports companionate relationships and the *judicious* reading of texts through, and with which, to form a relationship. That this is what the novel wants us to believe is evident in the principal depiction of an author by the text (Salome's husband): he is a journalist under the nom-de-plume of "Justus" working for the fictional *National Liberator*, "the great organ of the Reform party." (Southworth 1876/ 1894: 34) He is an honest, trustworthy writer who delivers on his promise to tell the truth as he sees it. Metonymically, this is what Southworth is claiming to do too, and it is also a parallel to the Mother Superior. As in the Water, the heroine is enabled to marry successfully by mirroring a mother. That this time the mother is

not biological is just another indication that it is the kind of relationship not the biology that is fundamental.

And yet, as with *The Wide, Wide World*, there are issues obvious to us today that the text fails to address and which cast us into what Miller called an "epistemological disarray" which is too egregious to regard as a pious "white lie."

First, the issue of ethnicity: how can we read this story of a Jew nurtured in a Catholic convent? No one in the novel comments on Salome's Jewishness: indeed, it is never mentioned in the novel at all. Even Salome's name is ambiguous in terms of religion, for rather than to the unnamed dancing daughter of Herodias in Mark 6, whom we know so well from Wilde's play as "Salome," the name actually belongs to a follower of Christ. (Matthew 27: 56) Are we to understand her silent assimilation into Catholic and aristocratic society as a false resolution of real problems based on the most superficial understanding and misrepresentation of the position of Jews in Britain, a view that Southworth perhaps based on the slight evidence of Rothschild being allowed to sit in the House of Commons and Disraeli, a Jewish convert to Christianity, becoming Prime Minister in 1868? Is Southworth, in a not very subtle act of anti-Semitism, effectively writing Judaism out of history and story through presenting Catholicism as the only valid religion? At the same time, is she ignoring the very real prejudices Catholics faced in Britain long after the Roman Catholic Relief Act of 1829? For just as with Salome's Jewishness, no one cares in the novel that the central characters are all Catholic (though at least this is specified numerous times). What is the nature of the utopia Southworth is offering?

It is the curious dissonance of Southworth's naming of father and daughter as unmistakably Jewish ("Levinson") and then doing nothing obvious with it that makes me wonder whether Southworth was playing out Arnold's claim in *Culture and Anarchy* that the Anglo-American character was a mix of Hebrew obedience and Hellenic rational independence. In the only passage in *Culture and Anarchy* where Arnold refers to Jews as an ethnic group (as opposed to an idea), he does so in order to claim the "essential unity of man" and thus the assimilation of "Hebrew people" with the "Hellenic" English nation of "Indo-European stock." (Arnold 1875: 145) Despite her Christian training, Salome, the daughter of a converted Jew, remains true to her racial origins as described by Arnold until, that is, the Mother Superior properly educates her in the combination of Hebraic and Hellenic thought. This is apparent in her marriage too. Lord Arondelle, who had spent absurd sums decorating the Castle of Lone, is a clear example of the negative side of Hellenism's "side of moral weakness… which in [Renaissance] Italy showed itself with the most startling plainness, but which in France, England, and other countries was very apparent too." (Arnold 1975: 145-6) Arondelle, like the Italian Renaissance princes Arnold was condemning, made of Lone "the pride of engineers, the model of architects, the subject of artists, the theme of poets, the Mecca of pilgrims, the eighth wonder of the world" (Southworth 1876/ 1894: 6) and ruined his family in the process. In making a success of her marriage, then, Salome is mixing Hebraic and Hellenic *races* and making a success of the "essential unity of man." But to do that she has herself first to combine them both as kinds of thinking rather than

biological essences: mental dialogue between Hebraic obedience and Hellenic independent thinking must precede social and sexual. While it remains a sticking point in terms of ethnic identity, this abstract process, where "race" and religion are assumed to matter less than ideas, is the utopian possibility that my reading of the novel opens to us.

Second, and even less resolvable, is the issue of gender. Again, I should prefer to understand the text as supporting metonymic slippage that allows gender fluidity. But the Mother Superior's education of Salome into working in an orphanage means that Southworth's novel, like *The Wide, Wide World* and so much other Victorian popular fiction, offers a limiting view of women as caretakers and, at best, educators. Salome's husband, on the other hand, has to undergo no such education: he seems to have escaped his father's decadent Hellenism by the time he has to earn his living as a journalist, but how we do not know. The convent is an ideal women's phalanstery where relationships are paramount and everyone is welcome, where stories are shared in good faith, where again the model for correct decoding is both a combination of Hebraic and Hellenic and the generalised companionate of mother and child that tolerates minor deceit in the interest of a larger goal. If to some extent this is characteristic of the polite world that Salome's husband and father occupy (when they first meet for example, they recognise each other but are too mindful of each other's possible embarrassment to betray that knowledge), it is nonetheless a matter of extent. Sentimental popular fictions where sympathy and cognition are in dialogue are located in an unmistakably women's world: men may share in it but such fictions show again and again that it is women who have to *work* at it. They may be the focalisers, protagonists and heroines, but the end of their narratives is to learn the gendered task that Mona Caird denounced: that women have to understand men more than men have to understand them. Women have both to create the "we-space," to judge its value and, where appropriate, maintain it, an ethically problematic gendering that science (such as Christov-Moore et al. 2014) risks seeking to justify though evolutionary biology.

Given these ethical difficulties, the question is whether we model our understanding of this text, 120 years after Southworth's death, on how Salome had read her husband's supposed bigamy and murder of her father. Do we simply condemn *The Lost Lady* for its problematic support for gender stereotypes and its disregard for Jewish and Catholic history? That is what I did at first. It was only when I connected it to *Culture and Anarchy* and saw the utopian potential of such a connection that I found I could maintain a relationship with it that faced up at least to its apparent elision of both Jewishness and anti-Catholic prejudice, if not its conventional ideas about gender. It is the same with the neuroaesthetic linkage of biology to communication: it has utopian potential in that since we have mirror neurons irrespective of gender (and the research shows only slight differences and more overlaps), it values "we-space" and affective communication over the reduction of others to *It*.

How exactly this attention to affective relationships applies to Victorian popular genres and modes other than the sentimental - to crime and detective fiction, sensation fiction, the Gothic, the "scientific romance" or fiction with unreliable

narrators and unsympathetic characters – remains to be seen. Readers may be suspicious of a narrator or trained by the text to be suspicious of everything, one may delight in delays and narrative feints in an agonistic game such as Poe described (1841, esp. 166-7), but we will only read to the end if we feel engaged and part of a communicative act either with a text or a community that we believe values that text.

That for well over a century the literary industry has relied for its sales on building and sustaining engaging relationships is well established. Publishers know no text can appeal to everyone equally and completely and that readers will choose to ignore some elements to maximise their pleasure: to ensure that we accept disagreements is why we are encouraged to form relationships both socially and textually. But who do we form a textual relationship with? Perhaps the narrator, perhaps a character (Sherlock Holmes is the obvious example here), but more likely with an idea of the author, as we saw in the case of Mary Barnes and Susan Warner, and indeed by the apparently default categorisation of the field that I discussed at the beginning of this piece. Over the course of the nineteenth century, publishers came to realise that authorship mattered because, unlike a brand of soap or boot blacking, it constituted a personal promise. That promise could be related to a genre (as when we read a "Miss Braddon" or "By the Author of 'Lady Audley's Secret'") but it could also mean a promise of something not obviously confined to one genre: a late "Ouida", for example, promised to educate and probably shock us whether in social satire, short stories, newspaper or periodical articles. While the density of this approach varied over time and market sector, by 1900, the industry as a whole was fully in charge of what Richard Salmon (1997) called the "signs of intimacy." Authors were offering apparently authentic and intimate relationships to their readers in which autobiography and fiction melded, just as we are tempted to valorise their texts through the lives of the hardworking, quasi-orphan Warner and the even more industrious Catholic single-mother Southworth.[13]

The pleasure we feel from, the relationships we form with, and many of the ways we study Victorian popular fictions are, then, symptomatic of a historically determined socio-industrial complex that still resonates with us in the early twenty-first century, our biological processes harnessed, modified, educated by that complex. But I do believe that our textual relationships go beyond that as well. While we may be enabled to experience them by the peculiar collision of today's academic and the Victorian publishing industries, just as indeed students of the canonical are, we are not confined by it. We can still learn ethical and epistemological interrogation through our relationships with Victorian popular fictions, and it is this utopian potential that remains vital today. In the current higher education marketplace where people face every day being reduced to impersonal economic machines and to relative numbers, and nationalist populism wants to atomise and thereby control us, one of the values of the study of Victorian popular

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[13] For a more developed form of this argument which covers the nineteenth through to the twenty-first centuries, see King 2019 (especially the section on "relationship marketing," 420-23).

fictions is surely our powerfully affective engagement with them, our willingness to "feel these words as mama does." We should not be embarrassed by that, but rather celebrate it for its ethical, if always imperfect and questioning, moral perfectionism that we have inherited. It is not the only way forward. I have suggested several other avenues, all of which I would welcome being taken forward, but it is our affective relations with texts that lend us a peculiar energy that more calculatedly careerist scholars would perhaps repudiate.

It is our task in the *Victorian Popular Fictions Journal* to remind our readers that there are other choices, other lives and, above all, relationships through which we can learn.

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