



Welcome to Issue 1.2 (Autumn 2019)

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We are very pleased to welcome readers to this, the second, issue of the *VPFJ*.

We have to admit that the second issue of a journal is always a dangerous moment. First, will it exist at all – will the journal survive beyond its birth? Then, will it maintain standards? What kind of publication pattern will the second issue suggest both in terms of format and rhythm of publication? What networks that went into its creation does it publicise? What is its tone and purpose: does it change the “character” of the journal or modify the manifesto the journal originally broadcast?

That this issue is different in format from the first will be clear. This is because we always intended the even numbered issues of the *VPFJ* to be special numbers dedicated to a theme, approach or topic. When Minna Vuohelainen offered to guest-edit our first special number, we were delighted. Minna is much valued colleague in Victorian popular fiction whose pioneering and rigorous work on Richard Marsh we all know. The topic she suggested was mapping, but less an attempt to map metaphorically the whole area of Victorian popular fiction than to think through cases of where mapping and maps in various senses are intrinsic to or helpful in understanding popular fiction. This was to be a response to the “spatial turn” in Humanities that we have heard so much about in recent years.

The response to Minna’s call for proposals was overwhelming, generating many more than we could accommodate in one issue. Even after careful selection, this special number has a very high number of contributions (16, including the four reviews) and is accordingly rich and diverse, with contributions from India, Italy, Singapore, the UK and the USA. They offer insights and explorations of Australian, imperial, country- and London-centred, Russian, realist, detective and fantastic fiction as well as a consideration of a series of interviews familiar to many students of Victorian popular fiction, Helen C. Black’s *Notable Women Authors of the Day* (1893), as a space of hospitality which asks us not just to judge texts and writers on the basis of some notion of “quality” but to relate to them as social exchanges.

While the number follows the programme for an even numbered issue in general terms, we decided the final format in consultation with Minna. It comprises, first, what we intend to be a distinctive feature of this journal, an opening, long and polemical piece that intervenes in what we do and how we do it as students of Victorian popular fiction. Minna's exploration of Clerkenwell in fiction and sociological texts fulfils this brief here with a powerful argument for the centrality of "spatial literary studies." She asks us to be alert to its possibilities through a detailed discussion of how space has been used in literary and cultural studies before she homes in on the area London known as Clerkenwell, an area redolent of literary association. It is also an area that undergone huge re-invention recently with a huge new railway station, Farringdon, planned to be one of the busiest in the UK (when it eventually opens, perhaps in 2021). The area east of Farringdon Station (originally opened in 1863 as the terminus of the very first underground line) was once a red-light district – it is "that labyrinth of narrow and dirty streets which lies in the immediate vicinity of the north-western angle of Smithfield-market" where G.W.M. Reynolds's *Mysteries of London* (1844-48) begins, though few visitors or workers could guess its seedy past today. Who would realise that by going down Cowcross Street to the south east of Farringdon station and turning left pretty sharply up Turnmill Street one will have crossed the River Fleet into which Eliza was hurled through the trapdoor in the opening chapters of Reynolds's labyrinthine saga? The river is now invisible, running completely underground until it empties into the Thames. Although Minna mentions Reynolds, she focusses on the dark visions of Clerkenwell offered by Dickens and Gissing. Her essay as a whole helps us to consider the intersections of literature, place and the spaces where they collide, separate, police, affect, traffic and transform that the later essays in the number chart.

The VPFA, as we hope is already well known, is very welcoming to new and early-career scholars, and the *VPFJ* is too. In this issue we decided to offer space to several by asking them to generate shorter but still substantial pieces of around 6,000 words, while keeping to the 8,000-word target for the more experienced. We are very happy with the results, and we trust our readers will be too. We have not corralled them into separate sections or marked them out: readers who care to distinguish them will only notice the difference through the length, not, we are very pleased to say, the quality. Instead, the order is determined by the possibilities the pieces offer to dialogue with one another: proximity in the space of the number implies to us the greater potential for a more intimate conversation.

This use of textual space - a kind of transactional proxemics based on interests rather than on hierarchy in the academy - we feel quite strongly about. It enacts one of our core aims, which is to break down hierarchy in the interest of earnest enquiry about what stories can be told, who tells them, how, when, and, of course in this issue, where.