Newsletter of the
MIDWEST VICTORIAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION

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CALL FOR PAPERS

The topic of the 1984 meeting, to be held at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 12-14 April, is PATRIARCHS, PROPHETS AND DEMONS: MAJOR VICTORIANS AND MAJOR VICTORIAN ISSUES REVISITED. We welcome proposals treating either persons or issues traditionally considered "major" or lesser figures or issues that are candidates for upward reassessment. Presentations should be from fifteen to twenty minutes in length--although slightly longer papers will be considered if the length is justified by the topic.

Papers or two-page abstracts should be sent, no later than 15 November, to Frederick Kirchhoff, Department of English and Linguistics, Indiana University-Purdue University at Fort Wayne, Fort Wayne, Indiana 46805.

Please pass this information along to any of your friends or colleagues who might be interested in participating in next year's program.

PRESIDENTIAL REMARKS

We can congratulate ourselves on another successful meeting of the association. Like Dow Jones, we keep reaching "all-time highs"; I understand that the attendance figures were once more higher than at any previous meeting. I must admit that I had had some misgivings about the theme of "Victorian Health and Victorian Disease," but it turned out to produce an excellent and wide-ranging series of papers. For the success of this meeting we are particularly grateful to Susan Dean, who managed all the local arrangements unassisted, and to Frederick Kirchhoff, who was responsible for coordinating the planning and the program.

I still find it rather astonishing that one region of the U.S. (admittedly a large one) can yield so many specialists in a relatively short period of another country's history and culture, but all the signs suggest that interest is still increasing.

It seems to be generally agreed now that meetings should be held in Chicago every other year, so far as this can be arranged. Our next meeting, at Ann Arbor, will be an unusually interesting one, since it will be combined with a performance of Boucicault's London Assurance, Although, like other recent meetings, this one will have a "theme," members are explicitly encouraged to send in abstracts of papers they would like to deliver, even if they have no connection with the theme.

At the Ann Arbor meeting, we will have to elect a vice president (who will eventually succeed Martha Vicinus as president), an executive secretary, and two at-large members of the Executive Committee. Anyone who wishes to volunteer his or her services or to propose a candidate is invited to contact the chairman of the Nomination Committee, Patrick Brantlinger, 338 Ballantine Hall, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana 47405, or one of the other two members of the Committee (Walter Arnstein and Florence Boos).

TREASURER'S REPORT

Balance on Hand, 1 July 1982		$ 551.00
Income		
Membership dues	$ 609.70	
Registration fees	918.00	
Interest	64.54	
Other	2.00	
Total Income		1594.24
Expenditures		
Program typesetting and printing	$ 215.17	
Other offset duplication	36.83	
Photocopying	38.64	
Long-distance telephone	43.27	
Postage	83.70	
Name tags	13.50	
Luncheon	723.89	
Cash Bar	94.20	
Coffee	65.42	
Travel allowance for speaker	150.00	
Total Expenditures		1464.62
Balance on Hand, 30 June 1983		$ 680.62*

*Includes $687.27 bank balance and $6.65 owed IPFW

ABSTRACTS FROM THE 1983 CONFERENCE

Session One: Physicians and Patients

Victorian Medicine and its Blight on Creativity: The Case of Olive Schreiner

The loss of literary creativity is not ordinarily regarded as a medical problem. Critics tend to look for a psychological blockage, emotional ambivalence, or limited talent to explain declining literary output; it rarely is seen as a matter of body chemistry.

This certainly was the judgment of all who knew of Olive Schreiner, South African-born, late-Victorian author and feminist whose first published novel, The Story of an African Farm, was a late-nineteenth-century best seller. Yet, inexplicably, for three critical years after it was published, from 1884 through 1886, when Schreiner was at the peak of her literary powers, she was unable to finish a subsequent novel, already started in South Africa and well on its way to completion, promised to her publisher by the end of the year. After she died, those who read her troubled letters, published posthumously by her estranged husband, agreed with his assessment that it was due to her neurotic nature. Subsequent biographers, while recognizing that she suffered terribly from chronic asthma, all have analyzed her problem as obviously psychological in origin.

A fresh look at her medical history suggests that pharmaceutical factors, not psychological ones, may have caused her lack of productivity. An examination of the drugs she took to ease her asthma indicates that they may have affected her ability to write. A study of her letters, written to Havelock Ellis during this period, indicates that, during this critical time, she was taking massive doses of quinine; nux vomica (with the active ingredient of strychnine); chloral, i.e., hydrate of chloral; potassium bromide; Powell's Balm of Almsted (active ingredient: laudanum); chlorodine (containing morphia, chloroform, Indian hemp, and prussic acid); and morphine by injection. The side effects of these drugs produced an induced drugged state for this period. As a result of a drug therapy program intended to ease the asthma, Schreiner suffered physical disorders and mental disorientation that befuddled her thinking, lowered her mental acuity and ability to concentrate, and caused such mental depression that she destroyed much of what she had earlier written. Victorian medicine, inadvertently but indisputably, robbed Olive Schreiner--and the world--of the fruits of her creative genius.

Yaffa Draznin
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University of Southern California

The National Association for the Promotion of Social Science: Its Contribution to Victorian Health

The National Association for the Promotion of Social Science (NAPSS) was founded by George W. Hastings and Henry, Lord Brougham in 1857 for the purpose of "uniting together all those interested in social reform." Each year the

Association met in a different city where papers were read on a variety of subjects and concerns. The philosophical underpinning for the Association was meliorism, which meant that the organization operated from the conviction that progress was not only possible, but inevitable. Just as the laws of the universe had been discovered over the centuries, so the natural laws governing human relationships could, and would, be learned.

In my paper, I tell something of the evolution of the NAPSS from its beginning until its demise twenty-nine years later. I also review the literature on the organization written by those who were coeval with the Association and by later historians. For the most part, the verdict of scholars has not been favorable to the Association.

My primary focus in the paper is on the Health Department of the organization. The biggest concern of this department was to make the English public aware of health problems and how they might be alleviated. The fact that local and national newspapers gave great attention to the annual congresses of the Association meant that public awareness was indeed improved. It did not hurt that such luminaries as Florence Nightingale, Edwin Chadwick, Robert Angus Smith, and the Earl of Shaftesbury made regular appearances at the conferences for many years.

Some of the issues which were raised in the Health Department included industrial pollution of air ("acid rain") and rivers, hospital construction and management, medical record keeping, and enforcement of sanitary codes. Many of the papers from this department may still be read, with profit, in the society's Transactions. Yet, except for John Eyler, and one or two others, little effort has been made to utilize the information and ideas contained in these essays.

One of the goals of the NAPSS, especially the Health Department, was to increase government intervention into solving social problems. The health section, frequently with the support of the British Medical Association, applied pressure to government officials to introduce legislation that would rationalize the way in which public health matters were administered. Perhaps the outstanding success of the Association was its influence on the 1875 Public Health Act. It seems to me that it is reasonable to conclude that the NAPSS made a substantial contribution toward accelerating progress in what Victorians knew as the "sanitary science."

Ronald K. Huch
Department of History
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Session Two: Childbirth in Fiction and Personal Record

Childbirth as Disease: Lying-In in the Nineteenth-Century Novel

One of the propositions offered by feminist readings of medical history is that the male impulse to professionalize obstetrical medicine in nineteenth-century England and America transformed pregnancy from a natural human occurrence into a debilitating disease with childbirth as its crisis. Paradoxically,

traditional obstetrical histories have gloried in this proposition, perceiving the man of medicine with his powerful instruments as one of the avatars of modern science. Popular nineteenth-century handbooks on maternal health, however, tried to quell the anxieties of expectant mothers by urging common sense and a basic trust in nature. In some contrast, there were very few depictions of childbirth in Victorian fiction; indeed the hushed withdrawal of most novelists from the lying-in room tended to reinforce the view of childbirth as a sacred mystery best left to the medical high priest and his priestesses. This attitude poeticized the major health crisis of most women's lives, reinforcing the culture's impulse to avoid its full, often tragic, implications.

But childbirth in the novels of Dickens--the most popular and prolific fictional commentator on the topic--is more complex. First, his depictions are so knowing as to imply first-hand observation as well as an astonishing grasp of "feminine" domestic reality. Second, Dickens rarely joins in any praise of the advance of the medical profession, though his childbirth scenes always note the presence of doctors and nurses. Finally, though Dickens's general sensitivity to pain and injustice is remarkably acute (he moved against tradition in obtaining chloroform for his wife as early as 1847), he tended to accept the threat of childbirth as inevitable, albeit pathetic. Indeed, his basic focus in fiction was essentially negative in terms of concern for the mother's health. His lying-in scenes tend to ignore or make light of the pain of the mother, or they succumb to the sentimental rhetoric of such other portrayers of birth as Thackeray. Unlike Thackeray's, however, Dickens's eye is always on the welfare of the child as the essential medical issue in birthgiving.

This paper scrutinizes Dickens's treatment of childbirth and contrasts his view not only with that of other Victorian novelists, but also with novelists of the twentieth century--suggesting that it is only with the fictions of such female writers as Katherine Mansfield, Doris Lessing, Margaret Drabble, and Faye Weldon that we are at last in touch with women's versions of childbirth--which enable us to recognize its terror, its power for bonding among women, and its critical importance in human experience.

Mary Burgan
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Chronicles of Confinement:
Reactions to Childbirth in British Women's Diaries

This paper employs manuscript diaries written by aristocratic and middle-class women and supporting statistical and social material to elucidate the medically legitimate anxieties women felt before and after childbirth; the ways in which women used their diaries to cope with their fears; and women's resistance to the enforced idleness which confinement implied. Victorian women utilized their diaries to record the symptoms of their pregnancy and the details of childbirth, both of which follow a pattern. Both practices helped establish and maintain bonding among women, since the diaries were commonly read by friends and family.

The diaries graphically detail the large role disease engendered by childbirth played in the lives of women. Because the fears surrounding childbirth

were experienced by family members, the diarists used their writing to hide their sufferings from others. Victorian women also kept their diaries as a future reference for details of paturition and disease and employed their writings to modify or reinforce certain aspects of their behavior. Since women were expected to care for the sick, keeping a diary could aid a woman in performing her part in the network of nursing women.

The contents and format of the diaries indicate the control disease and childbirth exerted over women's lives. But because composing a diary helped women cope with idleness, we have misjudged women's social contributions and their fear of the idleness which confinement created. The examination of manuscript diaries allows us to assess women's reactions to the central ritual of motherhood--childbirth--and to reconsider our conception of women's role in the last century.

Cynthia Huff
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Session Three: Theoretical Conceptions of Disease

"Decadence" and Wilde's Theory of Decay

Although Oscar Wilde gained the reputation of representing, in Arthur Symons' words, "all that is meant by the modern use of the word Decadence," his writings should be seen in his own terms as models of health, not degeneracy. A theory of growth and decay, outlined in an early essay The Rise of Historical Criticism, shows the influence of Herbert Spencer in emphasizing the "instability of pure constitutions." His general theory, "common to all organic bodies," was used first to explain the rise and fall of political systems, but later gave shape to Wilde's ideas of personal growth and decay.

Wilde believed that the healthy, unconfined personality grew by imaginatively taking on other personalities, thus becoming more heterogeneous or "highly organized." On the other hand, the domination of the ego by a single element was both a sign and a cause of regression. The conscience was one of the more commonly seen of these dominating single elements. In Dorian Gray the painting, representing to Dorian his own conscience, signals the moral simplification of his personality. In effect he rejects all other identities than that of the sinner. In The Soul of Man Under Socialism Wilde examines the possibilities for complex individuation and the dangers of psychic simplification within various social systems.

Wilde's concept of health, based as it is on the negative capability of refusing to search for pure truths and instead adapting oneself to relativism and epistemological uncertainty, runs counter to the Carlylean concept which equates health with earnestness or sincerity, but is consistent with the ideas of health and disease found in the works of other writers of the later decades of the nineteenth century.

Bruce Haley
Department of English
University of Utah

The Metaphysics of Putrefaction: Victorian Scientists and the Natural Theology of Health and Disease

The central motif in the literature of Victorian pathology is putrefaction, the process in which nitrogenous organic materials decompose into foul-smelling, and sometimes toxic, organic intermediates. An enormous range of disease, including such socially significant maladies as cholera and tuberculosis, were viewed by Victorian pathologists as manifestations of the putrefaction of various of the body's tissues. The great sanitary campaign led by Chadwick was against the putrefaction of organic refuse in cities; the goal of Lister's antiseptic treatment was to prevent the putrefaction of wounds. The putrefaction motif was even applied by such novelists as Dickens and Kingsley as a metaphor for pathological social and psychological processes. This paper will consider briefly some of the sources of the Victorian fascination with putrefaction and examine the attempts of some Victorian natural theologians to reconcile putrefaction with the concept of benevolent creation.

Among the sources of the putrefaction motif are the vitalist orientation of early nineteenth-century British physiology and the wonderful plausibility, vividness, and explanatory power of Justus von Liebig's "contact theory," which from 1840 to 1880 was the mechanism most British scientists used to explain putrefaction.

British physiologists focused their attention on the causes of vitality and viewed decomposition as a manifestation of the absence of vitality. This meant that putrefaction was a process fundamentally antithetical to life. It was a process to be prevented rather than one component of the biochemical system that sustained life.

Liebig, whose works on organic chemistry were popular in mid-Victorian Britain, provided a molecular mechanism for putrefaction that complemented the physiologists' orientation. Liebig portrayed putrefaction as a process in which large organic molecules, bereft of the vital force necessary to hold them together, broke up in response to some mechanical or chemical impetus. The breaking-up of one such molecule could be transferred to other organic molecules in contact with it. These in turn would decompose, spreading the infection further. The mechanism was used by British sanitarians and pathologists not only to explain the decomposition of refuse organic material outside the body, but also to account for the decomposition of the body's own tissues during the course of disease. Disease thus became something more terrifying than simply a conflict between life and an outside force; it became a process of subversion in which the body's own tissues became the enemies of life.

Several Victorian natural theologians accepted the challenge of reconciling such a dismal vision with the conception of a benevolent creation. I focus on four: the chemist James F. W. Johnston, the clergyman and novelist Charles Kingsley, and sanitarians Thomas Hawksley M.D. and Alfred Carpenter. None of these men challenged the belief that putrefaction was the archetypical pathological process. Instead, in various ways, they attempted to show that putrefaction was not a central part of the creation. God had created a healthy world; putrefaction occurred only when the biochemical gears of nature's economy (the metaphor is Johnston's) had become unsynchronized by the activities of short-sighted humans.

The work of these apologists appears significant for two reasons. First, in their work very modern questions about the long-term environmental stability of civilization are raised in the context of the natural theology of healty.

Second, their work raises the problem of how far Victorian medical and sanitary technology was directed by metaphysical criteria. Carpenter, who managed the sewage treatment plant and Croydon, justified his management in terms of natural theology. His treatment and that of many other sanitarians was founded on the assertion that decomposition was not a necessary part of nature's economy.

Christopher Hamlin
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Session Four: Rhetorics of Health and Disease

Women and Vivisection

Historians of the antivivsection movement like R. D. French and James Turner have noted the involvement of women with this issue, "amongst the very highest for movements without overtly feminist objectives," to quote French. Women were prepared to give time, money and, on occasion, even their lives to this cause. By 1900 it was associated with militant feminism and popular working class sentiment. However, the identification with women was occasioned less by political circumstance than by underlying relationships between pornography and current medical practice. Women saw in vivisected animals the surrogates of themselves and, in consequence, a series of fictional tropes are created which have the power to shape and determine social attitudes.

Coral Lansbury
Department of English
Rutgers University

Beyond the Healthy Body: Thomas Hughes and Christian Manliness

Thomas Hughes's praise of physical health and bodily strength in Tom Brown's School Days, his other two novels, and his non-fiction has not worn well. Especially his little sermon on fighting in Tom Brown's School Days has often been held against him by hostile critics who dismiss him as a shallow advocate of brute force. He certainly was not that, however, for fighting meant much more to Hughes than fisticuffs, taking in the relentless struggle against all forms of evil; and even in Tom Brown's School Days he granted that there are occasions when the honorable course is not to fight. Moreover, physical prowess by itself was not enough for Hughes. Always uncomfortable when called a "muscular Christian," he distinguished with considerable wit and eloquence--most notably in Tom Brown at Oxford--between what such a being ought to be and the mere "muscleman" he often is in actuality.

In Hughes's work the concept of manliness was much more important than the concept of muscular Christianity with which it has often been confused.

Though his definition of manliness was implicit in his novels, which he wrote during the 1850's and early 1860's, he did not fully articulate it until The Manliness of Christ (1879), where he maintained that manliness is not necessarily connected with physical strength or athletic skill. Including as it does such ingredients as "tenderness and thoughtfulness for others," manliness is distinctively human, whereas physical courage is really "an animal quality." Of "athleticism" Hughes said that it is "a good thing if kept in its place" but that, unlike manliness, it can be turned to vicious purposes: "a great athlete may be a brute and a coward, while the truly manly man can be neither." In his account of the life, the ministry, and the ordeals of Jesus, Hughes extended his definition of manliness to embrace readiness to bear pain and death in a noble cause, allegiance to truth, and subordination of the will to a sense of duty, ultimately duty to God.

Thomas Hughes was not among those Victorians who, in Bruce Haley's phrase, "equated health and manliness," nor did his version of the "manly ideal" take a narrow view of either term. Though physical health was very important to Hughes, manliness as he conceived it went well beyond the cultivation of the body. It was, in fact, a spiritual quality.

George J. Worth
Department of English
University of Kansas

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Leigh Hunt Bicentennial

The year 1984 marks the bicentennial of the birth of Leigh Hunt (1784-1859), English man-of-letters. Because the University of Iowa's collection of books and manuscripts by Hunt is outstanding, the event will be celebrated in Iowa City with a symposium on the life and times of Leigh Hunt. The meeting will take place on Friday, April 13, 1984, and will include talks by Richard D. Altick, Charles E. Robinson, David H. Stam, Rosemary T. Van Arsdel, and Carl Woodring. For further information, contact Robert A. McCown, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, Iowa 52242, 319/353-4854.

Dickens Society Annual Award

A prize of $250 will be awarded by the Dickens Society at its annual meeting in December for the best, first article-length publication on Dickens (i.e., more than five printed pages in length), appearing between June 1982 and June 1983. (Article-length chapters on Dickens from books--either wholly devoted to Dickens or concerned with a wider subject--may be submitted.) The award is intended to encourage young scholars, but those who have published previously on subjects other than Dickens are also eligible. Entries (three copies or offprints) should be sent as soon as possible but no later than 31 August 1983 to Sylvia Manning, Secretary-Treasurer, The Dickens Society, Department of English, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California 90089-0354.