

## INTRODUCTION

The twelve articles that comprise this year's *Annual* were drawn from papers delivered at the sixteenth conference of the Australasian Victorian Studies Association held at La Trobe University, Melbourne, in February 1995. The papers present a range of topics mapped onto the theme of Victorian Bodies; a theme which has elicited interpretations of the body as both a material, discursive or mythical presence (or absence), and as a wider metaphor for collections of texts, or for those "bodies" which govern the institutionalisation of literature itself. In an age seemingly characterised by repression of explicit reference to the body, these papers examine the ways in which the Victorian body is negotiated through poetry, fiction, oral sources, historical, medical and legal discourse. In addition, the body emerges from this collection as a site charged with social, sexual and political implications.

These themes are explored through different configurations of the body as virgin, gendered, diseased, colonised or mythologised. Of the two papers which have focused on the virgin body, Susan Martin has examined the virgin's relation to the working out in literature of female subjectivity in a colonial context. Michael Lund relates the virgins in Elizabeth Gaskell's work to constructions of social authority and to "the author's questioning of traditional modes of publication." Monica Correa Fryckstedt also considers nineteenth-century publishing practices, and the institution of the Lending Library as a shaping force for popular fiction of the 1860s. Guy Davidson and Deborah Hunn engage with the fluidity of sexual and gender boundaries, and the subverting of mainstream social practice by the degenerate and transgressive male/female figure.

Three of the papers focus on the preoccupation with female illness in the Victorian period. Shirley Tyler examines the relationship between illness, sexuality and economic oppression in the novels of Mary Braddon. Kelly Stephens questions recent critical and biographical material which associates the output of several nineteenth-century female poets with Anorexia Nervosa. Suellen Murray draws on oral history and medical discourse to illustrate the paradox of representations of menstruation as both a state of "being unwell" and an essential part of healthy womanhood.

Issues of colonisation, both real and figurative, are discussed by Chandani Lokugé in her paper, which draws on biographical and autobiographical sources to survey the changing representations of the Indian female body under the influence of western culture. Julie Carr's inquiry into the literature generated by the myth of the white woman of Gippsland engages with the colonial question in an Australian context. Also concentrating on the female body, Rose Lovell-Smith examines descriptions of the hair of literary heroines as a metaphor for sexuality and difference. Using the fiction of Bram Stoker as an entry point into the shadowy

realms of the scientific occult, David Glover's paper, which opens this collection, examines the Victorians' fascination with Egyptology, and the anxieties raised in the Victorian mind by the burgeoning of scientific knowledge.

Conference Convenor, Sue Thomas, would like to express her thanks to all those who contributed to the success of the conference. This year's guest speakers were Cora Kaplan (Women's Studies, Rutgers University), who spoke on "'The curse of hopeless deformity': Disability, Gender and 'the new sense of race,' 1840-1865"; Peter Bailey (History, University of Manitoba), "Naughty but Nice: The Invention of the Musical and the Rhetoric of the Girl, 1890-1914"; and Robert Morris (Economic and Social History, University of Edinburgh), "Men, Women and Property: Evidence from English Wills in the 1830s."

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