

Observing the Past in Victorian Britain

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Andrew Sanders, *In the Olden Time: Victorians and the British Past* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 330 pp., \$75.00 cloth.

Edmund Richardson, *Classical Victorians: Scholars, Scoundrels and Generals in Pursuit of Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 227 pp., \$94.99 cloth.

*I*n the “Preface” to *In the Olden Time*, Andrew Sanders, Professor Emeritus at the University of Durham, informs readers that his book has been twenty years in the making. It is a labor of such sweeping scope that his account is not difficult to believe. Sanders painstakingly addresses every conceivable facet of Victorian attitudes toward British history from the Early Modern Age to the 1830s, linking literature and historical writing to the visual arts. Sanders provides detailed, perceptive interpretations of art, literature, music, and architecture, illustrating his nuanced readings with abundant and wide-ranging specimens, including extensive excerpts from canonical Victorian histories and novels. His study examines Victorians’ attitudes toward their historical past, from the early Modern Age, a time most Victorians found familiar but different from the present, to the 1820s and 1830s, when many first-generation Victorian writers and artists were impressionable children. Sanders draws meticulously from popular, contemporary materials, including histories, handbooks of London and the countryside, and books on art. His usually graceful transitions are occasionally a bit convoluted, but his conclusions are succinct and powerful.

The book appears in a lavish format, printed on heavy, glossy paper with generous two-inch margins and 116 large, beautiful full-color plates. It includes a useful List of Illustrations and a four-and-a-half page index. Although one longs for a bibliography, the endnotes are copious, thorough, and informative.

One can only wish the book's printer had taken even a tenth of the pains in copyediting the volume that Sanders took in writing it. The text, printed in China, suffers from ubiquitous typographical errors. A sampling: "the modern age had lost it [*sic*] way"; "Cromwell [*sic*] intervention on their behalf in the 1650s"; "The child's family have evidently been locked into to [*sic*] a plague-infested house." In addition, one is hard pressed to find five consecutive pages without two words printed as one. Routinely, there is no space between periods ending one sentence and capital letters beginning the next.

Sanders notes that the Victorians were prone to use the past for their own purposes, citing evidence from art and historical writing. Henry Wallis's *The Death of Chatterton* (1856) is a "new kind of history painting" that reinterprets the past for contemporary viewers. Similarly, Victorian readers looked to history for "pertinent lessons which could be readily applied to the present," and writers like Thomas Babington Macaulay and Augustus Pugin used history to shape Victorian political attitudes and religious values. For the liberal Macaulay, the lesson was one of progress, while the conservative Pugin used history to demonstrate that "the modern age had lost [its] way."

In his first chapter, Sanders explores the Victorian view of Elizabeth I and James I. The Victorians were in love with sixteenth- and seventeenth-century country houses. They treasured their remaining Elizabethan homes and in the first half of the century revived the "Tudorbethan" style for "newly designed country houses." Romantic and Victorian fiction like Sir Walter Scott's *Kenilworth* (1821), Thornfield Hall in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Queen's Crawley in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1847-48), the Hall in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1849), and Ullathorne Court in Trollope's *Barchester Towers* (1857), contributed to the style's popularity.

While Elizabethan architecture was quite popular before Pugin led a campaign to discredit it, Sanders argues that the queen herself was not. Disparaging descriptions of Queen Elizabeth in numerous early Victorian publications substantiate his claims. Her presence in the décor (painting, statuary, tapestries) of the Palace of Westminster and the Houses of Parliament was minimal, and "In general, popular opinion in the nineteenth century was wary of praising a Queen who did not conform either to modern ideas of temperate government or to contemporary perceptions of femininity."

Despite their feelings about Elizabeth I, the Victorians used the sixteenth century to assert English destiny, promote a progressive agenda, and justify the Crimean War, and that attitude is expressed forcefully in much of their art. According to Sanders, the sailor's gesture toward Spain in John Everett Millais's *The Boyhood of Raleigh* (1870) is a call to fulfill the "God-given" English "destiny" of "promot[ing] the virtues of universal progress." The Victorians also wholeheartedly embraced the period's greatest dramatist, "invent[ing] 'Shakespeare's England.'" Investigations into Shakespeare's "lost life" and lavishly illustrated editions of his works were immensely popular. Shakespearean characters and scenes were favorites of the Pre-Raphaelites, though their depictions seldom refer to the theatre or make any attempt to show characters in Shakespearean costume. Sanders explains how the English "cult of Shakespeare" came to be centered in Stratford, detailing the destruction in 1759 of the house in which Shakespeare died, the formation of the Shakespeare's Birthplace Committee in 1847, and the celebrations of Shakespeare's tercentennial in Stratford and in London in 1864. Public purchases of structures associated with Shakespeare began to "[turn] the tables" on critics of the Elizabethan style and Elizabeth herself, and by mid-century the half-timbered Tudor style became associated with the notion of "Merry England," a "happy world where squire, yeoman and peasant had once collaboratively co-existed." Curiously, however, Sanders does not discuss Thomas Bowdler's *The Family Shakespeare*, of which eleven editions had appeared by 1850.

In his discussion of the seventeenth century, Sanders devotes considerable attention to the Victorians' fascination with and appeals to religious literature and practice. Devotional poetry, particularly the work of George Herbert, served as inspiration for books by John Keble, William Maskell, Isaac Walton, and Robert Aris Wilmott, and art by William Dyce. Publications using seventeenth-century ornament and early eighteenth-century Old Face type illustrate Victorian interest in the seventeenth-century church. Anglicans also brought the seventeenth century directly to bear on the Victorian Church. Tractarians used the *Book of Common Prayer* (1549-1662), histories of seventeenth-century controversies, and sermons from the period for sectarian purposes of every ilk. The Victorians also admired seventeenth-century architecture, grieving the gradual decline of Inigo Jones' historically important Banqueting House at Whitehall and mourning that Jones had not been permitted to rebuild the great palace in the 1630s.

Victorians found the tensions of seventeenth-century politics relevant to their own time. Paintings by William Frederick Yeames, John Everett Millais, and W.S. Burton, novels by Frederick Marryat, Horace Smith, and Dickens, and the fictitious *Lady Willoughby's Diary* (1844), a "book that not only read like a seventeenth-century memoir but actually looked like one too," attest Victorian interest. While the Victorians may have occasionally sentimentalized the conflicts between Cavaliers and Roundheads, they took seriously the political implications of a King being deposed and beheaded, the Church of England being suppressed, and a civil war fought on English soil. The eight paintings commissioned to decorate the Peers Corridor at the new Houses of Parliament were a visual reminder to them that "the modern plural state, with all its pledges of toleration, is none the less heir to a sharply divided history."

Surprisingly, Oliver Cromwell's reputation, which suffered in the eighteenth century, recovered in the nineteenth. The groundswell of Victorian sympathy for him is amply demonstrated by commentary on paintings, histories, and novels, particularly Carlyle's lecture "On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History" (22 May 1840) and his *Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell* (1845). Despite all this sympathy, however,

Sanders says Cromwell remained a "deeply contentious figure," as attested by Parliament's refusal to fund a Cromwell statue on Westminster Hall grounds in the 1890s, the inconspicuous placement of a privately funded statue, and the sparse attendance at the work's unveiling. The Victorians had a less conflicted view of Milton, whose "glaring civil sins," considered "mortal" by eighteenth-century commentators, were "reclassified as merely venial by their Victorian successors." It was the literary Milton, not the political, that Victorians came to respect.

According to Sanders, most Victorians remembered the Restoration for its frivolous, depraved king and court, the 1665 bubonic plague, and the 1666 Great Fire. Numerous Victorian historical texts substantiate the unpopularity of Charles II and James II; paintings and novels depict the fire and the plague. Of special interest is the fate of Christopher Wren's St. Paul's Cathedral, begun in 1669 under King Charles II to replace the cathedral that burned in the Great Fire. Victorians' love for the cathedral sometimes took the form of determination to transform it into their own image, however, and between 1872 and 1891 changes and additions to the building made it more "Victorian" than "Wren."

Macaulay's Whig *History of England* powerfully influenced Victorians' view of the Restoration. According to Sanders, the *History*, completed in 1861, persuaded readers that "the year 1688 had marked the culmination of the great crisis in English life," one that "had steadily built up since the time of the Reformation and left unresolved by the radical changes effected by the Civil War." Although Macaulay believed the "nineteenth century had a progressive impetus precisely because it had inherited a tradition of progress," his *History* could also create the impression that the Settlement and Declaration of Rights of 1689 had providentially "precluded further revolutionary disruption" and should not be changed.

Sanders credits a large part of Queen Anne's popularity among Victorians to Thackeray's *The History of Henry Esmond*, (1852), a book that "offers a grander retrospect on a highly distinctive and politically disjunctive age." W.H. Davenport Adams' history, *Good Queen Anne* (1886), provided late Victorian readers "a spirited account of literature, theatre, painting,

politics and naval affairs” in Anne’s day. Sanders is less sanguine about their appreciation of the period’s architecture, faulting historians W.H. Davenport Adams, William Henry Stanhope, and James Fergusson for failing to appreciate Sir John Vanbrugh’s Blenheim Palace and the English Baroque style in general. In examining Restoration architecture, Sanders turns to Christopher Wren’s renovation of Hampton Court Palace, which inspired the red brick buildings that became ubiquitous in the nineteenth century. He makes the bold claim that the Victorians’ embrace of the Queen Anne style, a “bastard mixture” of “red brick,” “fussy gables,” and “white-painted sash windows” was a “conscious attempt to re-align civilisation away from the complacency, social deprivation, dreariness and sheer ugliness brought about by urbanisation and the industrial revolution.”

According to Sanders, despite George I’s rather colorful life in Hanover before taking the English throne, most Victorians found him rather boring. Deeming few events since the Glorious Revolution “worthy of representation,” Victorian artists “increasingly represented moods or manners rather than specific historical incidents.” Other than the 1715 Jacobite rebellion in Scotland, only the South Sea Bubble seemed to merit depiction – probably because Victorian viewers connected the fiasco with their “own precarious and often unscrupulous financial world of speculation in railway shares and broken banks.” Victorians were also slow to embrace eighteenth-century literature, as evidenced by the reception of Swift, Addison, and Pope. Swift was particularly vilified, with Thackeray denouncing Swift’s “fallen and depraved Gulliver.” On the other hand, Sanders notes, Macaulay and Thackeray thought of Addison as “some kind of Victorian manqué, a gentlemanly and humane wit whom they might have cultivated in club-land.” Victorian response to Pope was most complicated. Influenced by Romantic prejudices, many Victorian critics questioned Pope’s status as a poet at all, and Victorian anthologists evidently considered his major poems “too long, too unwieldy, or too didactic to sit easily with verse concerned with cultivated emotions or with the inspirational beauties of the natural world.” However, a few, like William Spalding and Thomas Arnold championed him; Thackeray lauded the end of *The Dunciad*; and

Leslie Stephen argued that the Romantics were wrong to devalue him. Even Pope's "filigree" poetry, such as *The Rape of the Lock*, which was published with eight illustrations by Aubrey Beardsley, gained significance among "a new generation of reader" that questioned "the received values of mid-Victorian culture." Victorians also admired eighteenth-century composer G.F. Handel, buried in Westminster Abbey and commemorated annually after 1783. His "Hallelujah Chorus" was performed at the opening of the Great Exhibition in 1851, and in 1859 some 81,319 people, including George Eliot and George Henry Lewes, attended the Handel centenary. Victorians found Handel's oratorios, especially *Messiah*, "uniquely expressive of the sorrows, joys, and triumphs of their faith." The oratorios also leant themselves to the massed choir performances so "relished" by Victorians.

Unlike their view of the seventeenth-century Civil War, Victorians thought the "lost Stuart cause," familiar to them through Scott's novels and Hogg's historical work, "was an historic rather than a living threat to the *status quo*." Victorian paintings depicted sentimental scenes from Scottish history or Scott's fiction; late in the century Stevenson's *Kidnapped* (1886), *Catriona* (1893), and *The Master of Ballantrae* (1889) romanticized the Highland cause. Victoria herself "fell in love with Scotland," and Albert purchased Balmoral Castle in 1852, building a new edifice in 1856. Victorians made peace with eighteenth-century Scottish rebellion by "first neutering [...] the 'other' and then safely and picturesquely viewing it through tartan lenses." Sanders argues that, in part because of the popularity of James Fenimore Cooper's novels of eighteenth-century America, Victorians attempted to romanticize that nation as well. For most Victorian writers, "America was all frontier, all possibility" – although the persistence of slavery "tainted the whole concept of American liberty" for many. Thackeray justified America's independence as a phenomenon "determined by natural justice and by a shared inheritance of constitutionally justified liberties." Dickens rejected all this romanticizing, treating the domestic rebels of the Gordon Riots harshly in *Barnaby Rudge* (1841). By showing the "cold-blooded, but nonetheless shocking, retribution" of the State toward the most vulnerable in society, Dickens exposed the danger of idealizing the

past and refused to regard the eighteenth century as a morally superior alternative to the present.

Sanders also explores the impact of eighteenth-century artists and writers on the Victorian era. William Hogarth's profound influence is reflected in the work of artists Hablot Knight Browne ('Phiz') and William Powell Frith. Dickens described Hogarth as the "'moralist, and censor of his age'"; Thackeray openly admired him as an "unequalled social chronicler." Opinion on Fielding, however, was mixed. Thackeray "identified with" him, but found him inappropriate for some readers. Charlotte Brontë and Dickens hesitated to approve him as "wholesome." Leslie Stephen found him very "English," but both he and George Eliot considered him "old-fashioned." Late Victorians found him unrefined. Opinions of Samuel Johnson were mixed as well. Macaulay believed Boswell's *Life of Johnson* "rendered cultural life in late eighteenth-century London singularly familiar to the nineteenth century." Thackeray depicts him in his fiction as "ungainly." Carlyle profiles him in "The Hero as a Man of Letters" as the "modest modern hero who masters both the moment and his particular destiny." For Carlyle, he is "above all a writer who struggles to realize his calling" but is "aware that his calling is to work within the framework of a divinely order [sic] universe." In Sanders' view, Carlyle re-imagined Boswell's Johnson, remolding him into a "devout, coping, ultra-capable, self-made" man, clothing him "in the fluttering mantle of a prophet" to "serve as heroic inspiration to another, post-Romantic age."

Carlyle's verbal legerdemains are typical of the Victorians' attempts to overlay their culture on the previous century's. When eighteenth-century elements proved prickly, they "adopt[ed] an air of incomprehension"; when they suspected "immorality or coarseness," they "exposed them as avidly as seventeenth-century Puritans might." Where they detected possible "cultural fault lines" – Jacobitism, urban riots, moral decay – "they loudly asserted fellow-feeling."

Sanders finds the Victorians' view of the Regency and the reigns of George IV and William IV enigmatic. Although a respectful tone was usually maintained when speaking of George IV, most early- and mid-Victorians

regarded the king as a "profligate waster of public funds." Thackeray, who championed George II as an aging hero, suggests George IV compared poorly with George Washington and was "more show than substance." Dickens satirizes him as the profoundly slothful dancing teacher, Mr. Turveydrop, in *Bleak House*.

Georgian architecture fared rather poorly with the Victorians. Sanders uses "dowager" and "fuddy-duddy" to describe Bath in Victorian eyes, citing Dickens's letters, *The Pickwick Papers*, and *Bleak House* as evidence that he "found both the city and its residents superannuated." Victorians who revered the Gothic style "tended to despise" Bath's "classical regularity," and flocked instead to Brighton, which they found more amenable. The many churches of this seaside resort became "a Victorian architectural [declaration of] independence from the Regency stucco environment." Bath's popularity began to recover in the 1870s, when Victorians reassessed the Gothic Revival and the novels of Frances Burney and Jane Austen stirred new interest in the city; however, enthusiasm for Bath never caught up with the passion for Brighton.

Curiously, while the Victorians rejected eighteenth-century architecture, they embraced the literature and art of their eighteenth-century and Romantic predecessors – as long as it was morally acceptable. Wordsworth apparently passed the morality test, and by mid-century Keats was held in esteem. Leigh Hunt was condemned as lazy and undisciplined, and with the exception of Matthew Arnold, who valued Byron, Victorians found the works of Byron and Shelley "liable to corrupt impressionable minds." Only later in the century, thanks to the efforts of the Pre-Raphaelites and Alexander Gilchrist, did Blake become admired. Jane Austen also underwent serious revaluation, praised for her "delicate accounts of human relationships"; among her admirers were David Masson, Joseph Angus, Margaret Oliphant, Macaulay, and Henry James. As Sanders argues, James' Austen, a "woman embroidering in the cool country drawing-rooms of yesteryear, was precisely the comfortable, old-fashioned, prim Jane that readers craved to admire." Widely successful illustrated editions of her works contributed to the establishment of the enduring myth of "Jane Austen's

England,” an idyllic society populated by proper gentlemen and ladies that “offered an alternative to modern life as potent as that [of] the parallel myth of ‘Merrie England.’”

Sanders makes the case that the Napoleonic Wars helped determine the Victorians’ view of heroism and national success. Victories at Trafalgar in 1805 and Waterloo in 1815 were portrayed as “great pivots” in the “national interest,” and Daniel Maclise’s two great murals of Nelson and Wellington, together with other artworks commemorating the “roles of the ordinary sailors and soldiers” in these victories, turned the country’s struggles against Napoleon into a “‘people’s war.’” Historical novels depicting the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars emphasized the impact of war on the common man. Eliot’s *Adam Bede* highlights “the degree to which military affairs are shaping private narratives.” In *Sylvia’s Lovers* (1863), set in 1796, Elizabeth Gaskell complains of the practice of impressment and ironically contrasts the inconsistency of English attitudes and actions during the war with the supposed consistency of her contemporaries. Finally, Thomas Hardy “remind[s] readers of the bloody reality of war as it shaped the lives and deaths of multitudes of common soldiers and sailors” by depicting characters in *The Trumpet-Major* (1880) as “always merely passive bystanders or, at most, incidental to events beyond their immediate control.”

In a general Coda to the book, Sanders focuses on two distinctions that mark off the Victorian age from the eras that preceded it. First, over the period, “Both power and patronage drained away from the Court, initially to a cultured aristocracy and steadily to a prosperous and educated bourgeoisie.” Sanders points to Hardy and Hubert von Herkomer, painter of *The Last Muster* (1875), as examples of “‘self-made,’ men of humble origin who rose through their own talents.” The work that brought “fame and respect” to these and other Victorian artists placed new value on the common man by “represent[ing] the sufferings and endurance of the poor” and depicting the sacrifices of ordinary people as being “at least as instrumental in attaining victory” in warfare “as the strategies of generals.” Second, with Victoria, the “‘old order’ of flamboyant, tyrannical kings and aristocrats, who could be caricatured either as class-oppressors or as indolent wastrels,” was

effectively over. In a contemporary depiction, Victoria is "the mother of the nation, supreme, but temperate, both in the state and by the hearthside," not like Mary Tudor (a "narrow-minded bigot"), nor like Elizabeth I (a "bad-tempered, painted tyrant"). Sanders claims Victoria "redefine[d] the very nature of modern royalty," and her "character and bearing" became emblematic of secure, but "colourless," Victorian society. Further, her private life helped institute "commonplace, domestic virtues as central to the self-definition of nineteenth-century Britain," and to level society, as the queen was seen to share her subjects' values.

In contrast to Sanders's emeritus labor, *Classical Victorians: Scholars, Scoundrels and Generals in Pursuit of Antiquity* is the first book by Edmund Richardson, Leverhulme Early Career Fellow in the Department of Classics and Ancient History at Durham University. The volume is the first in Cambridge University Press's new series, "Classics after Antiquity," that "aims to unsettle, provoke debate," and "stimulate a re-evaluation of assumptions about the relationship between Greek and Roman classical pasts and modern histories." The editors describe *Classical Victorians* as a "timely intervention in the broader field of classical receptions" and a constructive contribution to "debates about the institutionalization of Classics and questions of authority and entitlement."

Printed in the United Kingdom, the book has been scrupulously copyedited. Three appendices effectively substantiate Richardson's claim that excellence in Classics did not reliably bring social or economic advancement, twenty-six well-chosen black-and-white illustrations enhance the text, and the book's excellent apparatus includes extensive footnotes, a superb bibliography, and a short index. Readers accustomed to orthodox syntax may be a bit surprised by the author's habit of ending with prepositions and his liberal reliance on dashes, but Richardson more than compensates with his powerful use of memorable metaphors: body snatching, Caesar's ghost regarding a Victorian bust of himself, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza in dialogue, Victor Frankenstein at the mercy of his monster, and the broken line of Gnostic time, to name a few.

Richardson opens *Classical Victorians* with an anecdote from James Bailey's the *Diary of a Resurrectionist* (1896), comparing Victorian appropriation of the classical past to body snatching. According to Richardson, "no corpses were seized upon so ruthlessly or so completely, in Victorian Britain, as were the ancient Greeks and Romans." Despite its "enduring hopes" to put the past to work, however, Richardson argues that "Victorian Britain stumbled through a doubtful, painful and insecure relationship with the ancient world." In his view, Victorians learned that "Authority over the dead is not to be relied upon," and many "felt deeply betrayed" when their "ideologies of classicism, however honorable, broke hearts and ruined lives." Richardson vows to "revise the standard account of the development of the discipline of classics" in the Victorian era by renewed "attention to figures on the edges of the story."

Choosing his evidence judiciously, Richardson begins with an account of the career of Theodore Buckley, an impoverished boy who taught himself Latin and Greek. Buckley was discovered at the British Museum by George Burgess, a "classical scholar of no mean distinction." The well-connected Burgess raised funds and opened doors for Buckley, including the doors of Oxford. In Victorian England the "person capable of deciphering [the past] was – like Buckley – said to be able to gain the respect of the loftiest statesman, transcend barriers of wealth and class, and ultimately acquire rich preferment." The classics were "fundamental to the idea of elite British identity," and anyone lacking a "wholesome classical education" was vulnerable to moral decline. Oscar Browning (O.B.), lifetime teacher at Eton and Cambridge, and Benjamin Jowett, Master of Balliol College, Oxford, exemplify "ostentatiously successful classical scholars whose intricate connections to the elite, built up through their work, spanned the world." Classical education was considered the "path not only to power and position but also to profit," and in *Self-Help* (1859) Samuel Smiles offered numerous life stories "to show that those [...] who learned Latin and Greek, no matter how humble their backgrounds, could with perseverance be assured of bettering themselves." Above all, the Anglican Church, thought to reward the classical scholar and classical knowledge, purportedly elevated the Greek

Play Bishops "into the House of Lords and to the highest levels of Victorian society." In fiction, Thomas Hardy's Jude Fawley dreams of wealth and power, "blending classical knowledge and highly paid Christian virtue into one tapestry of ambition," and American author Horatio Alger fed the American Dream of advancement through education, profiting from it. The "promise that hard work and virtue would always be rewarded" gave hope to "the industrious and the virtuous" in the lower classes and helped salve potential jealousy and resentment of the upper classes.

In "The bishop's palace," Richardson contends that, despite popular belief, it took more than classical expertise to reach the top. "Academic ability was a valuable starting point [...] but that ability had to be supplemented by lifelong and diligent cultivation of the powerful, if it was to yield preferment." While the Greek Play Bishops, some from undistinguished backgrounds, "quickly built connections and powerful patrons – often by working as classical tutors in aristocratic houses," the fate of Theodore Buckley illustrates the more common outcome of scholars seeking preferment via classical knowledge. After his discovery by Burgess, "Buckley was not at Christ Church long [...] before he began to sicken of playing the able, grateful client. [...] A vein of barely concealed self-disgust runs through [his memoir,] *The Natural History of Tuft-Hunters*." Despite continuing to "astonish" with his classical skills, Buckley took to drink, then opium. He wrote for periodicals, did piece-work as a translator and editor, and died at age thirty. According to Richardson, the careers of "even Balliol's most brilliant students from a decade when Jowett was in his prime," between 1870-1879, do not bear out the belief that classical learning led to wealth and power.

In "The hungry professor," Richardson begins, as usual, with a question: If it did not place one at the pinnacle of wealth and power, did classical education at least "reward on a lesser scale?" He finds that schoolmasters and professors, the largest group "trying to make a living from their knowledge of the ancient world," were often not paid enough to live on, and schoolmasters were unwelcome in upper-class society. Entering the clergy did not improve one's chances, either; "in only four of sixty-two cases

is there clear evidence that an archdeacon was advanced on account of his (non-theological) scholarship – and none of those four archdeacons are classical scholars.” Classical learning also failed to confer the “poise” it was often advertised to bestow. In fact, “classical scholars were often depicted as barely fit to be allowed out in public.” Conversation “bursting with classical references and importance” could be construed “a sign of insecurity rather than of power; of a person straining to be accepted by society through regurgitating those classical mannerisms said to be the calling cards of the elite.” For women, classical education had “socially transformative power” for some “brilliant female scholars.” In other instances, the benefits were less clear cut.

Richardson illustrates Victorians’ reaction when classical education’s connection to virtue and success was called into question by the case of Rev. John Selby Watson, an Anglican minister and schoolmaster whose “hopes of a successful literary career faded painfully, over many years.” In 1870, he was fired from his position as Headmaster of the Stockwell Grammar School because the school believed his lofty standards, rooted in an “over-zealous commitment to the ancient world,” had caused an enrollment decline. Watson’s wife often blamed him for his failures, and in 1871 he picked up a pistol, “beat Anne to death, dragged her body into a side room, locked the door, and then went to bed.” Because “Contemporary theories on the workings of the brain linked intellectual activity and moral sensibilities,” the defense argued that “Deprived of the opportunity for intellectual activity by his loss of employment, Watson’s ability to distinguish right from wrong had [...] quickly atrophied.” Of course, it did not mention that Watson had been working intently on a Latin translation until right before the crime. Watson was found guilty, but a “kind of sanctified mist seemed to have been drawn around him [and] his sentence of death was commuted to life imprisonment.” Although there was some outcry, the “picture of the inevitably virtuous scholar survived almost untouched.” *The Times* was particularly quick to focus on Watson’s classical education, and Richardson finds it “noteworthy that the newspaper which portrayed this as the trial of a classical scholar attracted a voluminous number of letters on the matter – while the newspaper

which portrayed it as the trial of an Anglican clergyman seems to have received no letters about it whatsoever."

In "A most respectable pursuit," Richardson discusses the profit in marketing classical education to parvenus and the working class. Although the classics did not, in fact, make gentlemen of those who studied them, classical education was still used to convince many to part with considerable sums to pursue classical study. Indeed, the number of establishments, products and opportunistic salesmen promising to turn the (paying) public into gentlemen became, in the 1850s, "something of a joke." Richardson observes that, "Many of the headmasters of the great public schools were amongst the shrewdest businessmen of their time," though they had to take care about display of prosperity, for a "scholar's wealth could excite anger as easily as admiration."

Despite public faith in the moral, social, and economic benefits of classical education, nineteenth-century education policy often employed the past "to hold back change – and to preserve distinctions based on wealth and class in a fluctuating society. The ancient world came to be seen by some as the educator's surest antidote to impertinent ambition, not the ambitious man's best friend." Stephen Hawtrey, an assistant master at Eton, believed a shared classical education "would render a pupil from a wealthy background at a public school fit to govern – and [...] his 'brother,' a pupil from a working-class background at St. Mark's, fit to be governed." The classical lesson for the working man was "duty and obedience," a gracious acceptance of his "lot in life," and he often learned this lesson well. Speaking of *Five Prize Essays on Man's Duty to God, by Members of the Working Classes* (1858), Richardson marvels, "It is rare indeed to find a worker who positively pleads with the world to exploit him – but this volume of essays gathers together five of them." However, some graduates of working-class schools were not as successfully shaped, and when classical education failed to translate into economic advantage, were left bitterly disillusioned. For some, however, disappointment only reinforced the resolution to prevail. "There can be something deeply, fixedly irrational about the lure of the past, and of the hopes which are placed upon it."

Richardson's third chapter suggests that the Crimean War, fought March 1854 to February 1856, a war "full of bombast and squalor," was haunted by the ancient world. "Generals compared one another to Homeric heroes. Officers conducted excavations. Letters, diaries, and memoirs became saturated with classical parallels, displaying a conviction that in this campaign Britain was engaged both in reliving the ancient past and bringing it once again to life." Classical scholars used "creative geography to transfer events and places from the ancient world to the Crimea," inviting a "proprietary response" in British hearts and minds. Duncan McPherson, a leading army medical officer, believed "the Greeks had brought 'civilization and wealth' to the Crimea, through their pursuit of 'commerce and colonization' [and] Britain would do likewise." *The Times* gave front-page coverage to a "glowing" military banquet at the Parthenon in 1854, and the British commander-in-chief, Lord Raglan, arrived in the Crimea "in a ship named for the commander of the Trojan expedition, HMS *Agamemnon*"—the ship of choice for members of the high command. Almost every classically named ship in the British fleet, including the *Cleopatra*, *Gladiator*, the *Jason*, and the *Golden Fleece*, was sent to the Crimea. The early victory of the far-outnumbered British at Alma in 1854 "raised comparisons to the Spartans at Thermopylae."

Appropriating the past in the Crimea could be destructive. Cadres of "politicians, diplomats, officers, and travellers and archaeologists," regarded ancient artefacts in the Crimea as British property and shipped home hundreds of crates. When Ketch fell, "soldiers turned looters," turning its museum into "an empty shell, littered with smashed artefacts." McPherson was outraged, and Richardson interprets the officer's dawning awareness of the "true effects of the British presence in the region" by reference to *Hellas*, in which Shelley "highlights the fragility of any attempt to resurrect – or to re-imagine a moment from the past," saying such resurrections do not occur "without a strain."

As the "abysmal conditions" of the Crimean war were brought home by W.H. Russell's weekly reports, the "heroes" of the Crimea came in for furious condemnation and ridicule: "shockingly vain" British generals,

unable to live up to the ancient heroic models they had invoked, found their appropriation of the classical past only threw their own shortcomings "into sharper relief." A caricature of Lord Malmsbury, arrayed in a costume combining elements of Victorian military uniform and the clothing of an ancient soldier, published in the usually patriotic *Punch*, illustrates the widespread disdain. Richardson compares the Victorian generals' encounter with the classical past to Victor Frankenstein's experience of bringing his creature to life, only to have it turn on him, declaring itself his master. Opponents of the war began to appropriate the classical past themselves. When the siege of Sebastopol took place, the novelist Mrs. Yorick Smythies argued that this siege, not the battle of Alma, was the true revival of Thermopylae, and other opponents compared the siege to the ten-year siege of Troy. In *The Plague of Athens* John Phillips argued that Britain was shamefully "reliving all the horrors of antiquity." Richardson suggests that "while the classical precedent could appear on any side of the argument, it was more often to be found on both sides – especially on both sides of any controversial debate." Faced with opponents' rhetoric, supporters of the war finally took another tack, arguing from early 1855 that the ancient world was "quite simply un-British; in fact, it was a decadent disgrace, resembling contemporary Russia – something to be stamped on with heavy Anglo-Saxon Christianity."

Richardson focuses in his section "The revolutionary" on Robert Brough, a young poet and playwright with radical politics. In Brough's *Songs of the Governing Classes* (1855), "'Ancient heroism' is redefined; it is a quiet act when the helpless stand up and say, 'Enough.' The aristocrats who [...] told the world that their privileges were supported by the example of the past (the soldiers under their command shivering and starving all the while) [are] picked to pieces with outrage and contempt." Similarly, Brough's burlesque, *Medea* (1856), protests British laws that forbade married women to own property and "deprived [them] of their public identity." By depicting a heroine "rendered destitute by her husband's abandonment," the play counters works like *The Angel in the House* (1854), which uses classical allusions to authorize its vision of the perfect housewife. In "Tilting at

windmills,” Richardson develops the interplay between Don Quixote (“the upper-class voice of fantasy”) and Sancho Panza (“the lower-class voice of doubt”) as a metaphor for the relationship between those who would command the past and revolutionaries who hoped for mutiny. To be Sancho Panza is to contend that “those who ransack the past cannot do so on their own terms, and that power over a culture’s memories may be found – and should always be sought” at the “margins of society.” Finally, Richardson invokes World War I correspondence to demonstrate that the classics’ power to raise and betray British hopes outlived the Victorians. On the eve of battle in 1915, Rupert Brooke “stood on deck, waiting to become a Homeric hero”; however, the past refused to be appropriated easily, and the soldiers were told to stand down because they were going home.

Richardson opens his fourth chapter, “The children of Babel,” by chronicling Sir Edward Watkin’s “Tower of Babel” (1893-1907) and introducing the biblical Tower of Babel as a metaphor for two different approaches to the classical past rooted in two different responses to the limits of human knowledge: “There are those who seek to rebuild the Tower of Babel – to recapture a unity long lost, and set upon the world a symbol of their power; there are those who cherish Babel’s legacy – the confusion of voices, the ever-incomplete search for understanding.” Samuel Butler’s *The Authoress of the Odyssey* (1897) is Richardson’s primary example of Victorian resistance to a unified, authoritative narrative of the classical past. “In essence, Butler’s argument is simple: firstly, that the *Odyssey* was in fact the work of a young woman from Trapani, in present-day Sicily [...]. Secondly, that the geography of the *Odyssey* is based on the landscape immediately around Trapani.” According to Richardson, reviewers were confused and confounded, undecided if Butler’s book was in earnest or if it was satire, and reluctant to commit to either reading. Richardson argues that the book captures the “uncertain wonder of the relationship between the present and the past” and “turns that relationship into a Babel,” making fun of serious scholarship while acknowledging it: “the *Authoress* insists that no narrative can ever capture the past – that memory, for the children of Babel, must forever be fractured.”

To contextualize the *Authoress*, Richardson discusses three texts from the margins of Victorian classical scholarship. First there is a supposed fragment of Lucian that merely makes a bad Irish joke and hardly pretends to legitimacy. Second, *Stonehenge* (1842) by Henry Godwin, Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, "purports to be an ancient manuscript, edited and presented to the world by one Malachi Mouldy, Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries," but in fact satirizes the "methods, manners and standards of [Godwin's] own antiquarian colleagues," calling for "serious academic reform." Finally, Samuel Butler's *The Fair Haven* (1873), purportedly by John Pickard Owen, was taken by some "entirely at face value" as an "earnest and passionate work, the story of the author's battles with faith and doubt and reason." The work was revealed as a hoax in 1890, when the second edition was published with Butler's name on the title page. Richardson concludes, "These discourses make a virtue of the fraudulent – and test the boundaries of their readers' credulity with serious purpose. Voices and texts fracture and multiply, earnest and satirical, until finding one's way to the past becomes akin to finding one's way through a labyrinth."

The story of Constantine Simonides, a nineteenth-century forger of classical texts who duped "some of the most distinguished academics of the age," completes Richardson's background for *The Authoress*. Simonides' forgery of the "lost Egyptian history of Uranios" was revealed as a fake by one Professor Constantin von Tischendorf. In reprisal for this exposure, when Tischendorf found an authentic New Testament manuscript in 1844, Simonides claimed to have faked the document, casting doubt on the discovery and insinuating that Tischendorf was unscrupulous. When the controversy seemed to die down, Simonides posed as "Kallinikos the monk," offering information that seemed to corroborate Simonides' allegations. "Only the inconsistencies in Simonides' story," uncovered through an investigation by the British Consul at Suez, and "the physical evidence of the manuscript itself, which had clearly lain quiet for centuries, prevented [Simonides] from being widely believed."

Returning to *The Authoress*, Richardson digs into Butler's attitudes and motives. He notes two reasons to believe Butler might have taken his thesis

seriously. First, between 1891, when he first developed the theory, and 1897, when the book was published, Butler “returned to Sicily every year except one, committed vast amounts of the *Odyssey* to memory, drew maps and plans [...] and collected local legends with a near obsessive determination. Mock scholarship, by contrast,” says Richardson, “can be written very comfortably from an armchair in London, over the course of one summer.” Second, “while Butler’s correspondence bubbles with delight at the prospect of fooling *The Fair Haven*’s readers,” it contains no indications that he was not “in earnest” about the *Authoress*. Countering the idea that Butler is serious, however, is his deliberate cultivation of “doubt, astonishment, [and] outrage.” He jettisons the cautious, modest manner of academe, proclaiming his ideas to be “self-evident.” He resolutely relies on anecdotes, discarding approved research methods – “A local legend, reported at second hand, carries more weight here than a whole bookshelf of literary criticism.” Rather than setting a yard-stick up beside a structure to indicate its size in a photograph, in an “over-the-top performance” he stands his colleague alongside it. To make sense of this paradox, Richardson theorizes that Butler believed “appear[ing] marginalized” placed him “at just the right distance to lay siege to the methods and values of mainstream scholarship.” Butler reached this conviction, Richardson concludes, through writing *The Life and Letters of Dr Samuel Butler* (1896), a biography of his grandfather. The biography describes Dr. Butler’s pseudonymous publication of an education reform pamphlet that provoked a “savage [controversy], with venomous pamphlets flying left and right,” and thereby demonstrated that “becoming the outsider” had the potential to “[open] up a space [...] in the centre of debate.”

According to Richardson, early Victorians deployed a “multiplicity of competing ‘classical traditions’” to support their positions in contemporary debates. Only late in the century, as in Richard Jebb’s 1893 speech, *On Classical Studies*, did they begin “to speak of ‘the classical tradition,’ authoritative and singular, with boundaries to be policed.” Early talk of a singular classical tradition was often met with “suspicion and horror” because of the Protestant experience of Catholicism. “One of Catholicism’s

major tenets – and a stick with which its clergy often used to beat Protestantism – was its assertion that the unbroken tradition of the Catholic Church, stretching back to the time of Christ” gave it “sole authority in all matters theological.” Protestants countered that tradition was “pliable,” “transient,” and “human,” while the Bible was “fixed,” “eternal,” and “divine” and deemed reliance on the “authority of tradition – as if it too had been inscribed on tablets of stone [...] irredeemably misguided.”

Richardson concludes with a comparison of *The Authoress of the Odyssey* and *Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767). “Shandy himself, of course, felt nothing but scorn for anyone who hoped to create a linear narrative, an unbroken sequence, even a simple straight line.” Richardson affirms that Victorian classicism was “always a story of uncertainty” but also a “story of hope. [...] Classicism was the space between their expectations and what the past delivered to them. It was scattered with moments of longing, moments of light, moments of despair – but never moments of peace; for them, the classical was history, interrupted – and that was its misbegotten beauty.”

Four aspects of Richardson’s work prompt particular comment: his emphasis on uncertainty, his treatment of the authority of the unified classical tradition, his exposure of the classics’ failure to deliver socioeconomic advancement, and his discussion of the classics’ rhetoric of moral improvement.

First, Richardson’s emphasis on uncertainty merits attention. Butler’s view of the present’s uncertain relation to the past seems to appeal to Richardson on a personal level: Richardson says:

Butler’s task is, at least in part, to keep open the distance – the silences and contradictions – between accounts of the *Odyssey*; to preserve uncertainty; to remember, like Dante [...] that we are all the children of Babel. [...] Sometimes, perhaps, we need to be lost in the desert – not in search of the truth of Sinai, but simply lost – in a place where unexpected things can grow, creatures and tales impossible in a more comfortable environment.

Surely maintaining humble doubt in one's own understanding and remaining open to alternative interpretations are vital to anyone hoping to learn and to create, whether the result is to be a painting, a poem, a burlesque, or a book on the Victorians' view of the classics. There must be some wandering if one is to be open to inspiration and truth. One wishes, however, that Richardson might have acknowledged to a greater degree the valuable roles of faith and commitment in interpreting and learning about the past. For example, Richardson provides an intriguing account of Butler's motivations for writing the *Authoress*. According to Richardson, in the course of writing his grandfather's biography, Butler accepted the idea that mainstream academia had become too exclusive and was in need of reform, and this belief was an important motive for his writing and publishing the *Authoress*. Richardson does not explicitly point out, however, that in trusting this particular narrative of British academia, Butler discounted other readings of academic history, nor does he identify this moment of commitment to one interpretation as a moment that complements Butler's crusade to hold interpretation open. Perhaps Richardson means to imply that Butler's acceptance of this narrative of the academy was an unconscious presumption, something of the sort he ascribes to Gladstone, but this seems unlikely. If Richardson holds to the other option, that the writer of the *Authoress* consciously placed faith in one version of academic history despite his awareness of the uncertainty inherent in the present's relation to the past, ancient or recent, one only wishes that Richardson had explicitly valued this moment as equally important as the moments of openness and wandering he celebrates. Without this moment, Butler would probably never have written the *Authoress*. Moments of decision, faith, and conscious commitment, especially among those who strive to hold interpretation open, could be cherished as moments which move the interpreter, and his or her audience, closer to truth in the context of uncertainty. Instead, in *Classical Victorians* such moments are overlooked or confounded with moments of presumption that impede knowledge.

Next, Richardson makes some assumptions about how the unified classical tradition attained its dominance in the first place. Richardson notes

that early in the century a "multiplicity of competing 'classical traditions'" were deployed in contemporary debates, and that scholars began regularly to refer to "'the classical tradition', authoritative and singular" only late in the century. There is little discussion, however, of the processes by which the multiple became unified. Further, while Richardson refers to the "power of 'the (one true) tradition' to exclude," there is limited exploration of the processes by which the unified tradition gained this power. Without a detailed account of this process, Richardson points to social, political, and economic privilege as the obvious source of the tradition's authority. There is no consideration of alternative pathways to authority.

Sarah Ruden's review of Michael L. Satlow's *How the Bible Became Holy* offers a counterpoint (*Wall Street Journal*, 12 July 2014). Ruden faults Satlow for "not taking the Bible seriously, leaving the main conundrum untouched. The Bible's growth in authority was slow indeed, but there the Western world was anyway, by not-so-late antiquity, with a Bible of lofty and exquisite authority. Could it be that the texts were 'living,' in the sense that they vindicated themselves in many hard and unexpected circumstances?" Here Ruden, like Richardson, regards the text as alive, but she envisions authority emerging thus: "But over time, with both popular and hierarchical affirmation, some words were set in the category of truth, as plausibly connected to the eternal. It was this seconding of words' meaning through collective and long-term experience that mattered." Like Richardson, Ruden acknowledges the role of the powerful ("hierarchical affirmation") in establishing the authority of some texts, but she also recognizes a role for "popular" affirmation and "collective" experience. As she explains, "What's at issue isn't a writer's intention that a text be holy, or any authority's treatment of it as holy, but the broad assent that the text can win for its holiness." She continues:

Scholars like Elaine Pagels, seconding the historical critics who arose more than two centuries ago, have stressed the arbitrariness of scriptural authority. This authority is supposed to result from the facts of history, essentially political and institutional facts. We are purportedly assigned

certain beliefs – backed up by writings – that are useful to the powerful, and what appeals to us makes little difference.

Although Richardson's study deals with the authority of the classics, not the Bible, and he does devote considerable attention to the tendency of the "living" text to resist being "put to work" by either oppressors or revolutionaries, his view of authority seems to have something in common with the outlook Ruden attributes to "Scholars like Elaine Pagels." Richardson's working men and women are, in Ruden's words, "assigned certain beliefs" that invite their own exploitation. The idea that an informed, voluntary popular affirmation by those outside the academic aristocracy might contribute to the authority of "one true" classical tradition is not entertained.

Richardson's remarks in a section entitled "A Most Respectable Pursuit" are particularly timely. Victorian "Headmasters relied upon the demand for classical education [...] in order to expand the size, the prosperity and the influence of their institutions." Richardson points out, "Many people in Victorian Britain unquestionably had a vested financial interest in persuading the public that a classical education was something their sons could not do without: there was at least as much money to be made from classical textbooks and classical schools as there was from the wig-making or oat-bruising business." However, classical education often did not deliver the promised upward mobility, as the *Saturday Review* for July 1860 complains: the "supply of well-dressed young gentlemen looking for work is constantly in excess of the demand for their valuable services." The reviewer might as well be describing the U.S. job market in 2014. Today, traditional educational institutions grow wealthy, while their graduates go jobless. In "Congrats on That Diploma. You May Not Need It," Richard Vedder, director of the Center for College Affordability and Productivity, remarks, "There are simply more college graduates than jobs requiring college degrees. The problem will probably get much worse in the next decade" (see also Vedder's "Subsidized Decline"). According to the 2012-2022 projection from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Vedder reports, "None of the 10 occupations with the largest projected job growth require bachelor's

degrees, and only one (registered nurses) requires a two-year associates degree." When he outlines the fate of modern graduates – "low paying jobs, big debts and unfulfilled expectations" – Vedder could be talking about Jude Frawley, whom Richardson uses to illustrate his argument. What is to be done? Pointing to U.S. universities and the U.S. government, two modern-day analogues of Victorians with a "vested financial interest" in classical education, Vedder suggests, "what we really need to do is radically revise our dysfunctional, inefficient system of federal financing of higher education."

Richardson also powerfully reveals the nineteenth-century origin of rhetoric used to defend present-day liberal arts education. He points out, "Headmasters relied upon the [...] 'almost mystical' effects [of classical studies] to defend those institutions from impertinent (and often well-informed) detractors." To many Victorians, study of the classics, "what came to be called a 'moral and literary education' [...] was not simply an academic training, it was a master-class in how to be human." Today math and science are often assumed to be the keys to economic advancement, so administrators are more likely to put humanities departments on the chopping block than to use liberal arts to justify the institution's existence. However, when threatened from within the institution, humanities departments often make claims for the "moral" and "mystical" effects of liberal studies, echoing Richardson's Victorians. In "Humanities are at the heart of real education," English professor Gina Barreca defends liberal arts against administrators "who market [...] education as a passport to success instead of defining it as a pathway to knowledge." In her view, liberal educators strive to develop critical thinking skills, to teach students "what it is to be a true citizen and not a repeater of unexamined platitudes." As William Deresiewicz says in *Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite*, "'The humanities are what we have, in a secular society, instead of religion.' They are where 'educated people [turn] to contemplate [...] questions of meaning and purpose'" (quoted in "The Credentials Arms-Race," *Wall Street Journal*, 20 August 2014). Barreca's liberal educators also work to shape the values of their students, equipping each one to be a "compassionate and self-reliant

human being, a good parent, a caring member of the community, and somebody who can be trusted to teach the next generation something other than greed, territoriality, anger, outrage, bitterness and a blinkered vision of the unmapped parts of the world – and the mind.”

In offering guidance about the nature and role of humanity and the definition of the good life, modern liberal education vies with religion for moral authority and promises moral improvement similar to that promised by the unified “classical tradition.” While those who promote the “human” benefits of liberal arts education may today be a separate group from those who reap the financial rewards of educating students who are searching for socioeconomic advancement, Richardson’s telling work reveals the Victorian origins of the rhetoric used by both camps. Vedder speculates that perhaps “As the word spreads that college degrees do not guarantee vocational success, enrollments may fall”; however, as Richardson wisely observes, “Dreams [...] can be stubborn and long-enduring things, well able to take on all comers.”

The Citadel

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