

## REVIEW ESSAYS

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Current Thinking: On Transatlantic Victorianism

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Revolutionizing Elizabeth Barrett Browning: A Review of *The Complete Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*

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## CURRENT THINKING: ON TRANSATLANTIC VICTORIANISM

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*By John M. Picker*

A FEW YEARS AGO, OUT of scholarly as well as pedagogical interest, I happened to be looking through two recent anthologies on the nebulous-sounding subject of “transatlantic literature.” I was teaching a new course on transatlanticism and was particularly curious to discover how these texts represented the period that is the focus of this journal and the one to which at least a few of its readers are attached. In both cases, I was struck by the degree to which “the Victorian” – the era, people, frame of mind, even the word itself – was either subsumed within Romanticism or absent. In *Transatlantic Romanticism: An Anthology of British, American, and Canadian Literature, 1767–1867*, edited by Lance Newman, Joel Pace, and Chris Koenig-Woodyard, the subtitle alone incorporated half of the Victorian era, even while the contents omitted virtually all of the Victorians we would expect to represent that half. That anthology as well as the other, Susan Manning and Andrew Taylor’s *Transatlantic Literary Studies: A Reader*, included glossaries of salient terms for transatlantic inquiry, and while “Enlightenment,” “Peterloo,” “Romantics,” and “sublime” appeared there, “Victorian,” not to mention “Great Exhibition,” “natural selection,” and “utilitarianism,” did not.

This experience left me wondering, on the one hand, why so minimal a presence for Victorianism, the answers to which question would be partly speculative and constitute the subject of another article altogether, and on the other, what forms a Victorian transatlanticism would take. This brings me to the four books under review in this essay. While only one of them identifies, via its title, as wholly and solely a Victorian study, all four contribute to a greater understanding of what the directions and concerns of transatlantic Victorianist studies might be. To say that I came away from these books newly informed about relations among Britain, North America, and the Caribbean, principally in the nineteenth century but earlier and later as well, would be an understatement. For all of their differences in focus and approach, it is notable that each book examines to greater and lesser extents Victorian conceptions of race and ethnicity. Indeed, they make clear, to those for whom it was not already, the absolute centrality of racial ideology as a shaping force in the Victorian world.

I will discuss these books in approximate order of temporal reach, though I will focus on the sections in each that are most relevant to Victorianists. To begin, then, Vanessa D. Dickerson’s *Dark Victorians* concerns itself with “how African Americans and British

Victorians approached, engaged, and thought about one another” from 1830 to 1914 (4). Recognizing what she calls “black America’s romance with Victorian Britain,” Dickerson reads the Victorian period, to use Edward Said’s term, contrapuntally, with attention to “discursive and cultural cadences, kinships, and correspondences” that define relationships between white Britons and African Americans (4, 10). In a pair of chapters on travelers and another pair on Thomas Carlyle and W. E. B. Du Bois, Dickerson develops answers to the motivating questions with which she opens: “How did Britain and its Victorian ideas help or hinder black negotiation of prejudice and racism in America? How did the presence and agitations of blacks in the US affect the British Victorians? How did England square its support of African Americans with its imperialism? In what sense are blacks belated Victorians?” (7).

Dickerson makes the subject of her first two chapters travel across the ocean, which is, of course, transatlantic in the most literal sense, and a familiar keynote in transatlantic studies. As there was something of an explosion – if that is the right word – in Atlantic steamship crossings after Cunard got the contract for his line in 1839, this is one way in which the Victorian era spurs transatlantic exchange at its most fundamental level. Dickerson’s first chapter provides both a helpful discussion of the various humanitarian, geographic, and economic forces that made it possible for Britain to end slavery in the realm by 1838 and a more extensive discussion of British voyagers who ventured to America. The focus here is on those whose Stateside experiences are well-known, including Harriet Martineau, Fanny Kemble, Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, Frances and Anthony Trollope, and Rudyard Kipling. Dickerson argues that while English visitors to the States devoted much energy to critiques and exposés of the evil of Southern slavery, they could not transcend their own (as she demonstrates, often vicious) prejudice against the racialized body. Thackeray, for one, put it bluntly: “Sambo is not my man & brother” (34). As something of a tonic to such condescension, Dickerson turns to literary analysis at the close of the chapter with a reading of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s “Runaway Slave at Pilgrim’s Point,” first published in *The Liberty Bell* in Boston in 1848, as a uniquely poignant sounding of slavery’s toll. In counterpoint to the opening chapter, the second centers on Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, Ida B. Wells, and other African Americans who, typically underwritten by patrons or donations, journeyed to Europe, “often despite strong domestic disapproval” (49). These experiences were nothing short of liberating: “England’s freedom was real, America’s a farce” (61). Dickerson argues that an African American could indeed be a “traveler,” a word otherwise signifying for Victorians white and bourgeois, and that such travel, for all the complications resulting from the demands of relentless anti-slavery lecture circuit and racial performance, nevertheless was of critical importance both for effecting emancipation on an international level and for the individual traveler’s intellectual, social, and professional development. Douglass, for example, used his speaking tours in England to shame the United States into reform, and returned home to establish *The North Star* with British support: “European travel helped politicize” him (72).

From here, Dickerson shifts to more figurative kinds of interaction: literary, aesthetic, and philosophical. In the final contrapuntal chapters that set Carlyle alongside Du Bois, we get, in Carlyle’s racist authoritarianism as expressed in his “Occasional Discourse on the Negro [later, “Nigger”] Question,” Dickerson’s most explicit example of the “dark Victorian” of her book’s title: “an enemy to be routed at every single turn by freedom-seeking blacks abroad” (89). Though William Wells Brown perceptively saw in Carlyle a strain of antipathetic

alienation and Douglass believed him to be outdated, Du Bois nonetheless found in him something of a stylistic role model and a fellow champion of the Gospel of Work (Du Bois seems to have been unfamiliar with “On the Nigger Question”). Du Bois has been criticized by Orlando Patterson, Cornel West, Hazel Carby, and others as an “Afro-Saxon” and reactionary Victorian; Dickerson does not entirely deny such charges, but she seeks somewhat to redeem Du Bois’s Victorianism. Her intriguing if unlikely pairing of *Sartor Resartus* and *The Souls of Black Folk* works to show how these are “cultural quests that probe compellingly the zeitgeist as well as the national and racial psyche of their people” (95). Dickerson’s extensive close reading of the epigraphs to *Black Folk*, in which white, mainly Victorian poetry from the likes of Barrett Browning and Swinburne, is paired with black spirituals in musical notation, makes for a fitting conclusion to the chapter. Dickerson convincingly suggests that “Du Bois’s physical and spatial treatment of the lines of the European poems and the strains of the African American music reveals something of the nature of Du Bois’s own culturally reversible consciousness” and that “for every Anglo-American poetic call there is also a corresponding African American response” (115, 123).

To these perceptive claims we might add that Dickerson, in turn, takes Du Bois’s epigraphic pairings as something of a structural model for the organization of her book. At the outset, she acknowledges her debts to Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic*: “just beyond . . . the Black Atlantic, there lies a Victorian Black Atlantic that signifies how profoundly, if at times subtly and imperceptively, Victorian ideas shaped and were shaped by those diasporic blacks” in the United States (9). Her mapping of a “Victorian Black Atlantic” is openly indebted to others as well: books and essays by Patrick Brantlinger, Peter Fryer, Deborah Thomas, Victoria Glendenning, and Audrey Fisch, to name several. Certainly, Dickerson provides a concise synthesis of previous work, but the real strength of the book is its move to explicate in elegant prose what it calls “linkages” between two populations separated by vast spatial and socioeconomic gaps. This in turn gives an admirable, almost old-fashionedly humanistic – we could even say Victorian – dimension to the book’s sense of purpose. I might note that another recent transatlantic study, Julia Lee’s *The American Slave Narrative and the Victorian Novel*, would serve as an ideal complement to the work of *Dark Victorians*. (In the interest of full disclosure, I taught Lee in the seminar in which she began to write the book, and thereafter informally advised her on it. I otherwise would be reviewing it alongside the books here.)

Like Dickerson, Tim Watson is interested in mapping the trajectory of African Americans during the Victorian period, but Watson’s *Caribbean Culture and British Fiction in the Atlantic World, 1780–1870* takes us further south with its subject matter and more deeply into the historical archives with its scholarship. Watson seeks to “track and analyze the shift from realism to romance and back again in writing about the West Indies in the nineteenth century” (2). His opening salvo is a reading of an image from an 1863 *Illustrated London News* of “Family Worship in a Plantation in South Carolina,” and it deconstructs the engraving to devastating effect, showing that it embodies the attempt to “imaginatively re-enslave free African Americans in the interests of a paternalistic vision of black culture” (3). While his book is part of the Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture series, Watson goes on to provide as much if not more a history of the nineteenth-century Caribbean, with an impressive immersion in colonial documents, missionary archives, local newspapers, and pamphlets to capture the quotidian details of a world in transformation. And yet, with its attention to Maria Edgeworth and George Eliot, the book takes its place alongside other

literary criticism that treats the Caribbean as a central aspect of histories of the English novel.

I here focus on the second half of his book, that is, the final two chapters, in which Watson turns his attention to the Victorian period. One of these, which recounts the career of Samuel Ringgold Ward alongside the events of the Morant Bay rebellion of 1865, is a remarkable feat of historical reconstruction. Ward was born into slavery in Maryland in 1817, made his way to New York where he helped rescue a runaway ex-slave in defiance of the Fugitive Slave Act, fled to Canada, went to Britain in 1853 (where he published his *Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro*), and settled finally in Kingston and St. David parish in eastern Jamaica in 1855. Ward is typically remembered, if at all, for being on the wrong side of history in his opposition to the Morant Bay rebellion and his support for the suppressive response of Governor Edward Eyre; he is, as Watson puts it, “too itinerant for inclusion in national histories, too deferential to the empire to be included in anticolonial and black histories, too militant to be included in imperial histories” – in other words, a misfit (152). But as Watson argues in the process of revealing far more about him than previously known (including correcting his likely year of death from 1866 to 1869), Ward’s is a more complicated case than this would suggest because his transatlantic travels prompted his shifting allegiance from that of disenfranchised African American to Anglophile imperialist. Watson demonstrates how “Ward fought his whole life for a kind of black internationalism that, paradoxically, he could articulate only within the framework of the British empire and Victorian respectability” (106). Interestingly, Ward (who at different points in his career attacked and echoed Carlyle’s authoritarianism) functions as a precursor, albeit a less successful one, to the Du Bois of *Dark Victorians* in the degree to which he negotiates the liberalism as well as conservatism of Victorian Britain to carve out a space for black internationalist ideology.

Watson’s richly archival chapter on Ward moves into one that features historicist reading of an extremely high caliber centering on the resonances of the Morant Bay rebellion in Eliot’s oft-maligned *Felix Holt*. Watson argues that the rebellion occurred when the romantic discourse of blood and breeding was slowly giving way to the scientific discourse of race and descent; this transitional state is exemplified, Watson suggests, by the arc of Eliot’s career in fiction. But it is also for Watson reflected and refracted in the questions of heredity and inheritance that, if not overwhelm, then at least seriously weigh down *Felix Holt*. Watson suggests that the Caribbean is an absent presence in the novel, in part by showing how the friend from whom Eliot solicited legal advice during its composition, Frederic Harrison, was simultaneously serving on the Jamaica Committee, which had been charged with gathering evidence that would ultimately exonerate Eyre but condemn his troops for using excessive force. Harold Transome is in turn “aligned with the slaveholding planters of the Caribbean who kept black mistresses but eventually married respectable white women of their own class,” Watson argues (180). There is much more on *Felix Holt*’s Orientalism and references to slavery (displaced from the Caribbean to Turkey). Watson is at his best conveying the hold that the rebellion had on the British imagination in the 1860s and 70s – indeed, Eliot’s better-known reference to Morant Bay in *Daniel Deronda* (1876) becomes in Watson’s compelling reading the confirmation of her interest in it a decade earlier.

Watson writes that “Romance and realism are never far apart in the transatlantic circuits that joined Britain and the Caribbean in the nineteenth century” (6). And while he grants the clear influence on him of Catherine Hall’s, Gillian Beer’s, Catherine Gallagher’s, Brent Edwards’s, and others’ work on colonialism, Darwin, Eliot, inheritance, and race, Watson

ultimately uses his impressive research to refocus our attention on the geographic margins. Rather, he insists on the central place of the marginal in the Victorian transatlantic world, the ways that the Caribbean figured as a dominant fascination and fantasy at the same time as it offered a complex colonial reality.

Kate Flint makes a similar move, though with a shift in focus and even more compendious results, in her *The Transatlantic Indian, 1776–1930*, which is, no surprise given the specialty of its author, at its core a study of the Victorian era. The preface opens with a photo of a 1930s Wedgwood mug decorated with alphabet images, including a Native American silhouette in feather headdress for “I.” “My first Indian was on a mug,” Flint informs us, but the bit of playful autobiography is her way into the serious subject of her book, “the place of the Native American in the British cultural imagination” over the long nineteenth century (xi, 1). At first glance, something might seem a bit odd about this formulation: “The *British* cultural imagination? Surely she means *American*? Did the British even think about American Indians at all?” Yet with extensive attention to the imagined Indian as disseminated in American and English literature and popular culture throughout the British Isles, as well as to what she calls “the real thing,” groups of Native Americans visiting Great Britain in the 1830s–40s and the 1880s–90s, Flint demonstrates the centrality of the Indian to Britain’s conception of its imperial role and responsibility toward native populations. Flint’s principal concerns include explicating the agendas of literary and artistic images of Indians, investigating the degree to which Indian visitors to Victorian Britain can be said to have had agency, and on a fundamental level, writing the Indian (back) into the story of global modernity.

Flint skillfully expounds upon such varied subjects as the transition from nostalgia to anger in the treatment of Indians in the works of British women writers across the nineteenth century, the representation of the Indian at the Great Exhibition, the British response to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s *Hiawatha*, and images of the Indian in British versions of the American Western novel (among many other things I learned from this book: there were British-authored Westerns). So Flint suggests, for example, that while Frances Trollope shows an assimilationist sympathy for her Indian characters (or at least her Englishmen disguised as Indians) in her conservative 1849 novel *The Old World and the New*, by the time we get to George Eliot’s *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* thirty years later, in which American treatment of indigenous peoples is linked to the British treatment of “Hindoos,” we encounter an ironic critique of colonialism. In the fascinating chapter “Is the Indian an American?” Flint zeroes in on Paul Stephenson’s statue *The Wounded American Indian* as a paradoxical showcase in the American display at the Great Exhibition: Flint asks, what does it mean to embody a nation in the sentimentalized image of its Other? Indian figures in the Exhibition, Flint contends, “both stood for Americanness and were the archetypes against which the dominant American self-imaging . . . could be readily seen as being built” (124).

Elsewhere, Flint provides an overview of Dickens’s use of Indian references, with the succinct critique that “Dickens’s writing typifies the way in which Native Americans mattered less in their own right than because they readily provided rhetorical tropes, something that subordinated them as racial subjects” (154). Against Dickens, we could set Elizabeth Gaskell’s underappreciated novella *Lois the Witch*, which Flint convincingly reads as a feminist text that “stress[es] the parallels between the English girl and the native woman” to show “the human tragedy that can ensue when prejudice against the unknown overwhelms both compassion and reason” (180–81). (Is it a coincidence that the Salem judge who sentences them both to be hanged is named “Hathorn,” the real-life ancestor

of Nathaniel? Gaskell admired his work and yet I cannot help but think that there is some level of critique buried therein.) Another chapter, playing on the double sense of “Indian” – Native American and, of course, native of India – draws provocative parallels between national and imperial borders and suggests that during the fin de siècle the American frontier provided an archetypal frontier-space for the British empire. Here, Flint references works by Kipling, Stoker, and Grant Allen, yet since it seemed so apt, I wanted to know what Flint would make of Arthur Conan Doyle’s weirdly Western-tinged *A Study in Scarlet*, a frontier novel haunted by the twin specters of imperialism and “Redskins” (75). Jefferson Hope’s “power of sustained vindictiveness, which he may have learned from the Indians,” culminates in the murders that Sherlock Holmes, in his debut, is called in to solve (105). Under the influence of *The Transatlantic Indian*, I now am inclined to read the *Scarlet* of the title as *Red*, aestheticized.

Alongside the virtuosic analysis of text and image that Flint’s earlier work on literary and visual arts would lead us to expect, there is much thoughtful attention in *The Transatlantic Indian* to “the real thing,” however problematic that conception may be. An early chapter on George Catlin and his Indian displays in 1840s Britain sets the stage for a later chapter on Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show in Europe at the close of the century. Flint’s portrait of Catlin is a more sympathetic one than he typically receives; his tour of his personal collection of artifacts, costumes, and paintings (and even a tepee), eventually supplemented with a dozen Ojibura and Iowa, of course seems awkward and gimmicky in retrospect, and it did even then, but Flint defends it as “highly necessary” to educate a naïve foreign public (54). Equally important, the Indians on display asserted a degree of agency by stirring up the sexual fantasies of Victorian women: “Indian men were seen as sexy,” so much so that “the most widely expressed concern that the presence of Catlin’s Indians stirred up in London was, ultimately, one about domestic sexual politics” (63, 73). Flint conveys patience for not only Catlin and others who have been seen as exploitative but also the missionaries, British as well as Indian, who used “Christian rhetoric” as “a way to make sense of a changing world,” and whose positions allowed them to bridge two worlds in ways others did not (225).

Dickerson, as I mentioned, describes *Dark Victorians* as bridging the “Victorian Black Atlantic.” In *The Transatlantic Indian*, Flint similarly reframes Gilroy’s conception in her pursuit of what she calls “the Red Atlantic” (25). Indeed, so much is packed into this book that it is easy to miss the degree of nuance that shapes it. Throughout her text, for example, Flint places special emphasis on differentiating between Britons’ attitudes toward on the one hand, the United States’s treatment of Indians, and on the other, Canada’s of First Nations peoples. She shows how and why this precision matters in her analyses of British media reports and the lives of many of the figures she profiles. (Canadians, take heart: Flint writes that the transatlantic “is a greatly weakened term if it is taken to apply to British-American traffic alone” [7].) Encyclopedic, innovative, and wide-ranging, *The Transatlantic Indian* takes its place as a leading critical text of transatlantic Victorianism, and more than this, among the best books on representations of Native Americans in the long nineteenth century.

Set alongside the books by Dickerson, Watson, and Flint, Meredith L. McGill’s *The Traffic in Poems: Nineteenth-Century Poetry and Transatlantic Exchange* is something of the odd one out. It is the only collection of essays in the group, and, as its title indicates, it focuses its transatlantic perspective around the organizing principle of a single century and genre. Editor McGill writes in her helpful introduction that the “explosion of interest in transatlantic literary study in the past decade” has been “generally biased toward prose” (2).

Hence her collection, which “seeks to make visible the currents of trans- and circum-Atlantic poetic exchange that must be overlooked or repressed in order for critical accounts of national literary distinctiveness to be sustained” (3). It is a common enough gripe that scholarly essay collections often struggle to cohere, but *The Traffic in Poems* does so convincingly in the manner in which so many of the contributions reinforce the centrality of women poets, women’s poetry, and women performers to transatlantic literary culture in the nineteenth century. Race, which as we have seen plays such an important role in recent conceptions of Victorian transatlanticism, has a more subdued though still active role in this collection. More visible is a welcome emphasis by several contributors on book history and material culture.

The essays most relevant to Victorianists offer surprising contextualizations of familiar poets and poems, often by demonstrating the greater significance of relatively obscure lives and works when considered transatlantically. Tricia Lootens offers a fascinating intertextual study of Felicia Hemans’s “Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers in New England” as an “exercise in national sentimentality” that is “thoroughly devoted to creating a fully domesticated, spiritualized, and monocultural myth of origin for an economically and politically ambitious nation-state” (18, 23). In Lootens’s reading of Barrett Browning’s “Runaway Slave,” which dovetails well with Dickerson’s, the poem becomes a radical revision and extension of “Pilgrim Fathers,” in which the tropes of Hemans’s verses “are ruined, reconfigured, rendered gothic” (29). Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh* is the subject of Mary Loeffelholz’s contribution, which moves beyond the well-studied terrain of Emily Dickinson’s response to the poem to consider two mostly though undeservedly forgotten American rewritings, Josiah Holland’s anti-feminist verse novel *Kathrina* and Lucy Larcom’s similarly epic-length *An Idyl of Work*, “as a synecdoche for wider transatlantic exchanges in the genre of the narrative poem” (140). Taken together, the essays by Lootens and Loeffelholz recover and reinforce Barrett Browning’s standing as a *transatlantic* Victorian.

Other pairings in *The Traffic in Poems* can be read in dialogue with each other over the subjects and scope of transatlantic Victorianism. For instance, Kate Flint contributes a chapter (later incorporated into *The Transatlantic Indian*) on the British reception of the 1855 publication of *Hiawatha*, arguing that in British readers’ response, “the Indian, like the enslaved African-American, became a figure *against which* various English commentators almost routinely and deliberately set various versions of American-ness” (64). Alongside Flint’s essay, Tavia Nyong’o’s contribution shows another dimension of the *Hiawatha* craze. Nyong’o analyzes the transatlantic performances in the 1850s of *Hiawatha* and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* by Mary Webb, a free African American from the North considered “the black Siddons.” In doing so Nyong’o parallels Dickerson in tracing the development of a Victorian Black Atlantic. On the one hand, in her “redface” performances Webb could be seen as “playing Indian,” but on the other hand, both *Hiawatha* and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, in Nyong’o’s formulation, already “perform a virtualization of authenticity, which is promised but rhetorically deferred. As such, neither text can have its authenticity restored by a racially appropriate performer: the most anybody can do is restore and extend the virtualization” (90). Webb ultimately provides an absorbing case study of a nationally and racially indeterminate figure who exploited the gap between the real and the virtual in a transatlantic space; she “established her racial solidarity by transgressing woman’s sphere and politically performing racial and crossracial identifications unmediated by either husband or marriage” (93).

Another pair of essays takes the American afterlives of canonical male English poets as its subject. These entries provide innovative approaches that make them among the liveliest



in the book. Adela Pinch's essay centers on the unauthorized publication by Thomas Bird Mosher of an 1891 American edition of George Meredith's 1862 sonnet sequence *Modern Love*. As Pinch so cleverly puts it, Meredith "responded with more forbearance to his poem being run off with by another man, than he had to his wife running off with another man" (164). In the process of his piracy, then, Mosher uncannily echoed the unhappy biography of Meredith, but to better ends. Mosher's version inaugurated American reprintings of *Modern Love* as a separate poem, which in these new forms set the stage for modern (depressing) love poetry and influenced the shape and mood of the twentieth-century American sonnet in the hands of Edna St. Vincent Millay and others. Pinch shows, that is, how a Victorian poem, through transatlantic remediation, became modern and then Victorian again. In "Robert Browning, Transported by Meter," Yopie Prins traces the American reception of "Pippa Passes" to argue that "Browning's metrical apparatus becomes increasingly evident in the reception of his poetry, mediated by new technologies that are also defined by discontinuity" (205). The approach in this essay is inspired, the results lucid and engaging. The essay's brilliance resides, for this reader, less in its insistence on the resistance of Browning's poetry to vocal articulation than in its creative research, uncovering Browning's first Stateside collected works published in a railway timetable in 1872–74, moving on to an 1889 cylinder recording of the poet made by Edison's London agent (on which "the speaking voice is broken up by the very technology that seeks to preserve it" [216]), tying this to a musical setting by Amy Beach of "The Year's at the Spring" at the turn of the century, and finally to D. W. Griffith's silent film version of "Pippa Passes" in 1909. Prins is especially perceptive about Beach's setting, which, she suggests in a close reading of the sheet music, "makes it possible to read Browning's poetry by going beyond the singing voice" (223). (Prins notes that the Victorian diva Emma Eames made the Beach song her signature encore. Her consideration of the sheet music could have had greater resonance with attention to "the singing voice" itself, as Eames's actual performance of the Beach song is preserved on a 1905 Victor recording, and its quality juxtaposes strikingly with the relative inaudibility of the Browning cylinder.)

The kinds of pairings that I have noted make an essay collection like *The Traffic in Poems* greater than the sum of its parts. The cumulative effect of reading it altogether is to marvel at its multifaceted integrity. Race certainly matters here, but so do questions of gender, form, adaptation, and even that reliable standby, bibliography. Which leads me back to McGill's introduction, and its odd defensiveness about the "old-fashioned," "too unidirectional" mode of influence studies and the "too static" condition of reception histories "to capture the disorienting temporal dynamics" of transatlantic poetic culture (2, 5). Are these well-established critical approaches really so constrictive and useless? Many, dare I say most, of the essays in *The Traffic in Poems* – not to mention aspects of all the books under review – are in whole or part studies of reception and influence, broadly and imaginatively defined, and full of unpredictable discoveries and collocations. Call them "new-fashioned" influence-studies and reception histories if you prefer. Indeed, it may be that the most impressive contribution of this collection to transatlantic studies is to demonstrate the flexibility of a newly reenergized reception history (New Receptionism?) as a structural model.

I confess to having a partiality for both of the critical traditions of influence and reception, which are, in whatever guise, ultimately not only about making connections, most intriguingly among distant, seemingly detached people, works, and ideas, but also about preserving the difference of perspective in those contact points, the bends and breaks that result from

the refraction of culture. This, it seems to me, is the direction in which transatlanticism points us. Moreover, if the Victorian period moved toward a “scientific” and differentiating understanding of race (as Dickerson, Watson, and Flint remind us), to study it as a transatlantic phenomenon illuminates the Victorians’ divisiveness in, as it were, a unifying way. That is to say, it makes sense to study the histories of ideologies of discrimination with an approach premised on appreciating as well as bridging literal and social distances.

And yet, when Flint writes that her book makes a “continual movement between the mythical and the material,” she could be characterizing much of the work considered here and perhaps even suggesting the defining feature of the multiplicity of Victorian transatlanticisms (52). (Interested readers can find my own application of this in a brief essay elsewhere on the Atlantic telegraph cable.) Material studies, historical media studies, and book history, so fundamental to the practice of Victorian studies, all offer a rich path toward transatlantic engagements – on race, verse, and other currents of thought, art, and literature that flow across the ocean.

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