

VICTORIANS LIVE

Herbert Sussman, Editor

Victorians Live examines the afterlife of the Victorians, the ways that Victorian literature and culture remain alive, continue to live in our own day.

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“‘MODERN LIFE’ – WITH A VENGEANCE”: WILLIAM POWELL FRITH AT THE GUILDHALL ART GALLERY

By Timothy Barringer

Charles Baudelaire’s essay of 1863, “The Painter of Modern Life,” has attained totemic status in the study of nineteenth-century art. Under Baudelaire’s influence Walter Benjamin declared Paris to be the “Capital of the Nineteenth Century,” while the essay’s potency in art historical discourse was redoubled with the publication in 1985 of T. J. Clark’s magisterial *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers*. According to what is now an unassailable orthodoxy, the shifting sociological and psychic condition of modernity was born of Parisian social and economic formations, with the *flâneur* as its unlikely hero. Tracking moves once anathema to the establishment, but now themselves established as the sole authentic paradigm for modern painting, Clark provides a persuasive account of Manet (rather than the illustrator Constantin Guys, discussed by Baudelaire) as the artist able to transmogrify these novel cultural conditions into the radically new artistic style that we know as modernism. Yet despite the brilliance of Clark’s account, it is time to question whether the totalizing and exclusive focus on particular aspects of French avant-garde practice is adequate as an assessment of the registration of modernity in the visual arts *tout court*.

Manet was by no means the first self-conscious “painter of modern life” under the conditions of industrial modernity, nor the first to register the dislocations and complexities of an urban environment or of social relations torn apart, distorted, and reconfigured by the wild fluctuations of the market and the mysterious operations of capital. Turning to an earlier period, an argument could surely be made for William Hogarth as the pioneer of

this role, whose “modern moral” conversation pieces explored the absurdities and tragedies of Britain’s emergence as the first capitalist nation. However, a recent exhibition at the Guildhall Art Gallery and the accompanying publication, edited by Mark Bills and Vivien Knight, have revealed the social panoramas of the Victorian painter William Powell Frith – self-consciously a follower of Hogarth – as complex and distinctive representations of the modern urban crowd of the 1850s (Bills 2006). Clearly analogous to the novels of his friend Charles Dickens, Frith’s multi-figure panoramic oil paintings, arranged frieze-like across wide canvases, constitute a new art form, democratic in scope, popular in spirit, and radical in its implications, if arguably conservative in explicit ideology (Trotter 2006). It was a medium brought forth by the new socio-economic formations and class relations of the railway age, the settlement of capitalism in Britain after 1848, and it stands mid-way between the panoramic entertainments of the late eighteenth century and the cinematic experiments of the early twentieth (Purbrick 1–3; Barringer 13–14). Unavoidably direct in their address to a contemporary audience, when taken seriously Frith’s extravaganzas have an incendiary effect in the field, destabilizing art historical assumptions and unmasking curatorial prejudices.

Frith produced only three of these works – *Life at the Seaside (Ramsgate Sands)* (1856, Royal Collection); *Derby Day* (1858, Tate), and *The Railway Station* (1862, Royal Holloway, University of London) – and only *The Railway Station* can claim to represent an urban location. The paintings, however, represent the London crowd in flux (catching a train; watching a race; or enjoying a day by the seaside), a swarming mass of social, gendered, and ethnic types. In *The Artist as Ethnographer* Mary Cowling demonstrated the extent to which Frith, like Henry Mayhew and other social investigators of the era, was influenced by physiognomic theories that developed as a part of the British imperial project. Slippages between class and race abound. In *Life at the Seaside* the gaze and the averted gaze, aided by various optical devices – spectacles, field glasses, a telescope – become central themes, scrutinising the body (perhaps even, scandalously, the naked body of male bathers). This is the inverse of Manet’s revelation in *Music in the Tuileries Gardens* (1862, London, National Gallery) – where the illegibility of smeared paint invokes the unseeability and unknowability of the crowd. Yet Frith’s thematising of the questioning gaze is no less modern. For all its precision, Frith’s painterly lens presents ambivalent revelations. The presence of a troupe of Ethiopian Serenaders in *Life at the Seaside*, for example, confirms that all is not what it seems, for if these are the same performers interviewed by Henry Mayhew (as seems likely) their number included both white actors in blackface and at least one African musician (Arscott 1987, 1995).

Most of Frith’s major works reached a mass audience through circulation as line-engravings, and the artist was acutely conscious of this wider audience. *Derby Day*, for example, became widely known through a superb engraving by Auguste Blanchard [Figure 8]. Technologies intervene at every stage in Frith’s work. It is significant that, while we have been taught to think that Frith’s high-gloss, fraudtly worked surfaces are the antithesis of modern artistic practice, he was among the first major artists to embrace the new technology of photography in the construction of interpretations of modern society. It was not a mere technical sleight of hand, but a brilliant matching of medium and message by which Frith used the camera to fix the details of the holiday crowds on the Epsom downs, yet still to bear the imprint of their having flux – just as the camera recorded the potentially revolutionary crowds that in 1848 attended the last great Chartist meeting in Kennington, a revolution deterred in part by a heavy shower of rain.



Figure 8. Auguste Blanchard, *Derby Day*, 1863. Engraving after William Powell Frith. Courtesy of Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

In a final crowd painting, Frith turned his eye on his own peers in the *Private View of the Royal Academy, 1881* (1883, private collection). It is a *tour-de-force* exploring vision and the assessment of value, an *hommage* to the connoisseurial eye and a satire on the narcissism of the aesthete. A massive group portrait rather than a vision of the anonymous crowd, it is a *Night Watch* of the Victorian artistic oligarchy (compare Begemann). The Olympian physiognomies of Gladstone and Millais stand alongside softer features, gently satirised, such as Oscar Wilde and Lilly Langtry.

There was no doubting the immediate appeal of Frith's works in his heyday. On six occasions, the Royal Academy was forced to protect his paintings from the eager public by positioning an iron rail before them. But Frith has had a rough time of it in the critical sweepstakes. He has returned to a certain prominence since the 1970s largely through the energies of Jeremy Maas, himself an art dealer, who relished the painter's commercial instincts. Maas, hurt, notes that Frith's Aesthetic contemporaries erred in considering him "a particularly virulent specimen of Victorian philistinism" (110). This approach has recently been reiterated in another lightweight tribute to Frith by the dealer, Christopher Wood.

If we set his art aside for a moment, Frith's biography does appear to provide a textbook case of the hypocrisy, chauvinism, and commercialism of which critics of feminist and other persuasions in the 1970s and 80s (those selfless decades!) loved to accuse the Victorians. As appears both from his three self-serving autobiographical volumes, and from the few other details that survived the efforts of his children to clean up the record, Frith pursued a hard bargain with his dealers; moreover, around 1854 he began an affair with his children's nursemaid Mary Alford, who bore seven of his children and was installed as a kept woman in Bayswater, near the home where the artist lived in bourgeois pomp with his wife Isabelle and their numerous children. His evening constitutional would take him from one life to another, a pattern maintained until in 1881, after Isabelle's death, he married Mary, though his children by her were not acknowledged in his will.

Frith celebrated his "official" household in unashamedly sentimental genre paintings such as *Many Happy Returns of the Day* (1856, Mercer Art Gallery, Harrogate Museums and Arts) in which he presides as patriarch, raising a glass of sherry in a toast with his aged father while a swirling mass of satin-clad women surround a table bedecked with delicacies. Looking more closely, however, we might explore the ambivalences implicit in the dark shadows that impinge upon the pristine whiteness of the scene; or the way that the grouping of the gold-framed paintings on the wall echoes the stilted deployment of the figures trapped round the festive table.

Frith's role as the jovial villain of Victorian art history is perhaps owed most of all to his participation as an unwilling witness in the Ruskin vs. Whistler trial of 1878. He received a subpoena and, enlisted on behalf of Ruskin (though the critic cordially detested Frith's work), he was goaded into describing the American's paintings as "not serious works of art" (Merrill 177).

The first modern retrospective to be devoted to Frith's work was held in 2006 at the Guildhall Art Gallery in the City of London and in Harrogate – near the artist's birthplace in Ripon, Yorkshire. Tellingly, the exhibition was cold-shouldered by the major institutions historically vested with the legacy of Victorian art. Despite the evergreen popularity of Frith's *Derby Day* in the permanent collection, there was never any chance of a Frith exhibition at the Tate, which, with Nicholas Serota as supremo, has systematically failed to live up to its responsibility to Victorian art, consigning most of the permanent collection to storage

and mounting only a handful of significant exhibitions. The Royal Academy is even more allergic to the study and celebration of its former members in a more dynamic era – perhaps because the Academicians of today include so many obscure painters still peddling washed-up imitations of Impressionism. Frith is too visceral, too vulgar, too shamelessly fascinated with identity, with gender, with the social meanings inscribed upon the human body; despite his explicit espousal of “Victorian values” he is – what else can we call it? – too modern for the belated avatars of Roger Fry who still control the levers of power in Britain’s sclerotic art world. Perhaps that wealthy vulgarian and enthusiastic chronicler of the body, human, bovine, and marine, Damien Hirst – who exhibits now, as Frith did, at the RA’s Summer Exhibition – will one day recognize his true precursor?

The Guildhall’s Frith exhibition was begun under the auspices of the Museum of London, by the former Curator of Paintings, Prints, and Drawings, Mark Bills. However, the Museum abandoned the exhibition following a typically Blairite shift of policy away from purportedly “elitist” fine art exhibitions by that institution. (Is this the same Frith accused of peddling “a piece of vulgar Cockney business unworthy of being represented even in an illustrated paper”?) Frith is paradoxically deemed too lowbrow to be art (by the Tate and RA) and but too posh to belong among the people’s social history of Cool Britannia. Fortunately the Guildhall Art Gallery stepped in.

The resulting exhibition was both triumph and tragedy. A large number of works had been carefully assembled, some of them specially cleaned, there was imaginative use of contextual material, and the thematic organization of the rooms was sensible and effective. On view was a spectacular display of Victorian opulence: a cornucopia of crinolines and silk toppers; Dickensian vignettes of street sweepers and languid vistas from the middle-class parlors of Bayswater. Alas, the physical spaces into which they were squashed at the Guildhall were disastrously inappropriate. The three great panoramas were overwhelmed through their juxtaposition with the immovable turgid bulk of John Singleton Copley’s *Siege of Gibraltar* (1783–91), which resides in the Guildhall’s central gallery. Moreover, the exhibition’s text panels oscillated uneasily between spicy biographical information (Frith as eminent Victorian; Frith as tabloid love-cheat; Frith as self-help story) and social history (the development of the railway station; the life of crossing sweepers) and only too infrequently discussed the works of art themselves.

The publication accompanying the show, *William Powell Frith: Painting the Victorian Age*, includes many solidly informative essays but only one – by Caroline Arscott (consistently Frith’s most persuasive modern interpreter) – that offers a compelling interpretation of a single work by Frith, rather than a general account. The color reproductions are good – Frith always painted with an eye to reproduction in print form – but (doubtless as a result of the misguided policy of the publishers, against the curators’ wishes) with the absence of detailed catalogue entries for each work, or a checklist of work in the exhibition, the publication’s long-term usefulness is significantly undermined. It is to be hoped that this book will – as with the 1981 exhibition of George Elgar Hicks, or on a grander scale, the Tate’s *Pre-Raphaelites* show of 1984, *Leighton* at the RA in 1996 or *Alma-Tadema* at the Walker Art Gallery in 1997 – reignite scholarly interest in an artist whose work invites and demands extended readings. Frith needs more work.

Among critical approaches suitable to Frith’s mesmerizing canvases, the most compelling overall was – surprisingly enough – provided by one of the greatest of British modernist painters, Walter Richard Sickert. Most recently fêted on the grounds that he might have been

Jack the Ripper, Sickert was a friend and peer of Degas, who himself has some claim both to be called an Impressionist and to rank as Britain's most perceptive painter of modern life. In a brilliant paean to *Derby Day* – and a scorching attack on its enemies – in the *Burlington Magazine* in 1922, Sickert captured the curious experience of viewing Frith's work: "Surprises lurk in the *Derby Day* like Easter Eggs. Turn for a moment from the familiar foreground figures, the languid swell with the (alas!) extinct green veil on his still, thank God, current topper, from the little acrobat, from the footman and the lobsters, from the ruined little gent, from the flurried bobby, and look at the left centre of the middle distance, at the profile of the lady under a green parasol, superb and enigmatic in her barouche, who is addressed by the *beau brun* on foot, the veritable *homme fatal*" (278). Perhaps this dark-haired dandy was a pioneering exponent of *flâneurie*, albeit *avant la lettre* and in the unlikely surrounding of the Surrey racecourse. Sickert's text is a sparkling example of what one might term a Dickensian ekphrasis, interrupted with nostalgic moments of reminiscence – seeming to confirm that Frith's works are merely amalgams of observed material, missing both the radical formal and stylistic dislocations of Manet's modernism and the overarching narrative and thematic grandeur of Dickens's realism. Sickert, however, shifts his critical method in the middle of a sentence, leading us away from social exegesis into an idiom emphasizing Frith's formal inventiveness: "and note how they are both silhouetted against a blaze of light. What a passage of learned chiaroscuro in colour! What a reputation a 'Modern' would have made with that passage alone! What a bobbery at the Tate!"

No one is expecting Frith's work to appear at the Museum of Modern Art in the near future, nor to see his *Derby Day* move down river, and thus up market in terms of bobbery, from Tate Britain to Tate Modern. Despite Sickert's endorsement, Frith does not mix well with Modernism. The gimmicky *Re-presenting Britain 1500–2000* displays, at Tate Britain in 2000, briefly juxtaposed this painting with Wyndham Lewis's Vorticist work *The Crowd* (1915), on the grounds – presumably – that both represent crowds. Rarely has a wall in a public museum looked so ridiculous. Frith is no Modernist, and there is nothing to be gained by pretending that he is. His work belongs to a different idiom, but one that – I would like to claim – is inherently a product, and an urgent critique, of the culture of high-capitalist modernity of the mid-nineteenth century. Closer reading of Frith and his ilk, and closer and more imaginative looking at the bizarre, alien panoply of Victorian social panoramas in all media, would offer an alternative model for understanding nineteenth-century art's registration of what (a decade before Baudelaire's essay) Frith himself called "'modern life' – with a vengeance."

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BIRTH OF THE BESTSELLER

By Herbert Sussman

With nineteenth-century studies turning to the history of the book, to considering what the Victorians actually chose to read, the collaborative set of special exhibitions and talks organized in New York City (29–31 March 2007) by the Bibliographical Society of America under the rubric "Birth of the Bestseller: The 19th-Century Book in Britain, France, and Beyond" was especially timely. The event brought together the worlds of the academy and the museum, of scholars and book collectors. The Grolier Club showed "Illustrating the Good Life: The Pissarros' Eragny Press, 1894–1914." The Morgan Library and Museum had an exhibition entitled simply "Victorian Bestsellers." That the Victorians continue to live in our time through the form of the popular book born in the nineteenth century is best summarized in the title of the fine exhibition at the Fales Library of New York University, "Nothing New: The Persistence of the Bestseller."

By employing the criterion of what sold best, by showing not only the canonical, the novels of Dickens and Thackeray, but also detective fiction, yellowbacks, treatises on domestic management and self-help, these shows brought out vividly what is so often lost in Victorian studies, the grand and multitudinous materiality of the nineteenth-century book, the weight and heft, the variety in the embodiment of texts, the visual attraction of covers and textual illustrations, the varied reading publics and ways of reading. These exhibitions of the book itself, all too rare, brought Victorian writing into the realm of the visual.

Of particular interest at the Fales and the Morgan were rare sets of the original parts of Victorian novels in unbound paper. These manifest a visual variety and attractiveness in their covers hinting seductively at the contents, as in the parts of Dickens's *Pickwick Papers* and *Martin Chuzzlewit* in blue-green paper. There was Trollope's *The Way We Live Now* in

black type on green paper with the cover illustration of a weeping Father Time sitting on the globe of the earth and *The Last Chronicle of Barset* with a cover in a faux ecclesiastical type. The parts of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* provided cosmopolitan reach. The cover by Phiz to the once popular *Charles O'Malley: The Irish Dragoon*, by Harry Lorrequer (Charles Lever) (1840–41) at the Fales (Figure 9) demonstrates the visual plenitude of publication in parts. The crowded emblematic scene in black cross-hatching on pink paper shows the Irish dragoon now in rags surrounded by the remnants of his trade – the helmet, bugle, and saber – with a drummer boy as grotesque dwarf. But serial publication in print has proven less effective in our time. In one example of discontinuity, the Fales Library displayed the small paperback serialized volumes of *The Green Mile* by the king of American bestselling writers, Stephen King, evidence of a failed attempt to channel Dickens in our electronic age.

If the Victorians read novels in parts, they also read in sets of three. At the Morgan, a section, arranged quite attractively as a bookshelf, presented a range of three-deckers through the century. These sets indicated not only the continuity of the publishing form, but also the material and the visual transformation over the period, from the plain boards of Scott's *Quentin Durward* (1823), to boards of embossed gilt on blue for Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1860–61), to the art nouveau designs on yellow ground for Trollope's *Ayala's Angel* (1881).

Recognizing the birth of the bestseller with the novels and poetry of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, both the Fales and the Morgan offered a section displaying pre-Victorian works. At the Fales this was called "Sir Walter Scott & Lord Byron," at the Morgan simply "Predecessors." These displays of early bestsellers quite appropriately included Anne Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819) as chapbooks; a first edition of Scott's *The Lay of the Last Minstrel, A Poem* (1805) and *Waverly, or 'Tis Sixty Years Since* (1814); as well as Byron's *Don Juan* (1819–24) and a small pirated American edition of *The Giouar* (1813) to show the transatlantic range of the bestseller.

The organization by genre at both the Morgan and the Fales demonstrated most vividly the persistence of the forms of the bestseller generated in the nineteenth century. The historical novel still lives in our time. At the Fales, the section on "The Historical Romance" included Scott's *Ivanhoe* in an expensive quarto first edition of 1805; Charles Reade's *The Cloister and the Hearth: A Tale of the Middle Ages* (1861); Bulwer-Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834); and from America Edwin Caskoden's *When Knighthood Was in Flower* (1898). As a current example, the Fales showed the typescript of E. L. Doctorow's *Ragtime*.

Like the monsters that never die, the Gothic too lives on from the nineteenth century. Seeing what the Fales calls "Gothic Fiction & the Supernatural" through the grid of the bestseller allows us to recognize what are now canonical fictions, such as *Jane Eyre* (1847), as peaks or islands within the sea of popular genre fiction. A small edition of Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) in white paper with red lettering shows this tale as originally published as a "shilling shocker" for the Christmas market. The hugely successful *She* by Rider-Haggard appeared in its serial publication in 1886–87 in America.

Also seeming never to die is detective fiction. As in the example of the historical romance, the multitude of non-canonical examples suggests that what are now canonical works, such as Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852–53), Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868), and the Sherlock Holmes stories, emerged from a sea of forgotten nineteenth-century bestsellers. Again, seeing texts in their varied nineteenth-century material forms indicates how the popularity of a bestselling genre depends on the new portability of books for the railway journey and the



Figure 9. Phiz, cover for serial parts of Harry Lorrequer (Charles Lever), *Charles O'Malley The Irish Dragoon* (Dublin: William Curry and Company, 1840–41). Courtesy of The Fales Library & Special Collections, New York University.

lurid visual attractiveness of the covers, the same elements that appeal to academics picking up the newest Robert Parker at the airport book store to while away time on the plane ride to the next conference. At the Fales the detective fiction ranged from Eugène François Vidocq's *Memoirs of Vidocq, Principal Agent of the French Police, until 1827* (1829) in four small easily carried volumes; to *Recollections of a Detective Police-Officer* (1856) written under the pseudonym of "Waters," a collection of periodical stories collected in one volume with plain boards; to what the exhibition calls the "most popular mystery story of the nineteenth century," Fergus W. Hume's *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* (1887) with boards showing the hurtling hansom cab itself in a mysterious black on a ground of light green.

The most visually exciting and most alluring books were the "penny dreadfuls" and the yellowbacks. The Morgan showed a splendid "penny dreadful," Percy B. St. John's *The Blue Dwarf: A Tale of Love, Mystery, and Crime* (1870) with the book open to a color fold-out page of the eponymous villain in his cloak of blue malevolently looking over a crowd of tavern habitués including a red-coated highwayman. The visual standout of the exhibitions, however, was the yellowbacks. Again, the exhibitions demonstrate how illuminating it is simply to see actual Victorian publications, for I learned that yellowbacks are not yellow at all, or at least not all yellow. The yellowbacks' covers are glazed pictorial boards with illustrations in vivid nineteenth-century hues of red, yellow, and green with narrow borders that virtually bled to the edge. This lurid style lives on in the covers of the mysteries and romance novels at Barnes and Noble today.

The extensive display at the Morgan focusing on work of the artist Alfred Crowquill did much to demythologize the reputation of the yellowback for sensationalism, in spite of the late-Victorian resonance of the color yellow with decadence. These visually attractive, portable books reprinted Victorian favorites such as *Sketches by Boz* and *The Three Musketeers* and innocuous travel volumes such as *Fish and Fishing in the Lone Glens of Scotland*. There were also such bestselling sensation novels as Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* or Ouida's *Under Two Flags* as well as now unfamiliar mysteries such as Dick Donovan's *From Information Received*, whose multi-colored cover shows a nurse sleeping by the bedside of an unconscious man while through the parted curtain a hand pours what one takes to be poison into a bedside tumbler. There is *The O'Donoghue* by Charles Lever, showing a man being pushed out of a window by what seems a very angry figure dressed in crimson. On the cover of Ouida's *Held In Bondage, Or, Granville De Vigne: A Tale Of The Day* (Figure 10), a title that would do well now in the streets outside these New York museums, we see limned in light green-black tints a vaguely Latin woman in a low-cut dress threatening with a dagger a man in a sombrero, a scene redolent of exotic foreign sexuality.

Approaching Victorian poetry through the grid of the bestseller reminds us that like the other popular Victorian genres, poetry depended in its time on visual attraction and on availability in a variety of formats. But poetry is one genre of the Victorian bestseller whose popularity does not live into our own time. Nineteenth-century sales figures do not correspond with current critical esteem. Martin Tupper's *Proverbial Philosophy* (1854) illustrated by John Tenniel went through fifty editions by 1880. Longfellow's *The Voices of the Night: Ballads and Other Poems* (1858) illustrated by John Gilbert, outsold the English poets. As the displays demonstrate, like the novel, Victorian poetry appeared in a twinned visual and verbal form with handsome covers and with illustrations. The book of poetry was not merely the container for the verse, but an object valued in its material form, to be a permanent part of the household, as were the Tupper and Longfellow volumes. The book of poetry as aesthetic

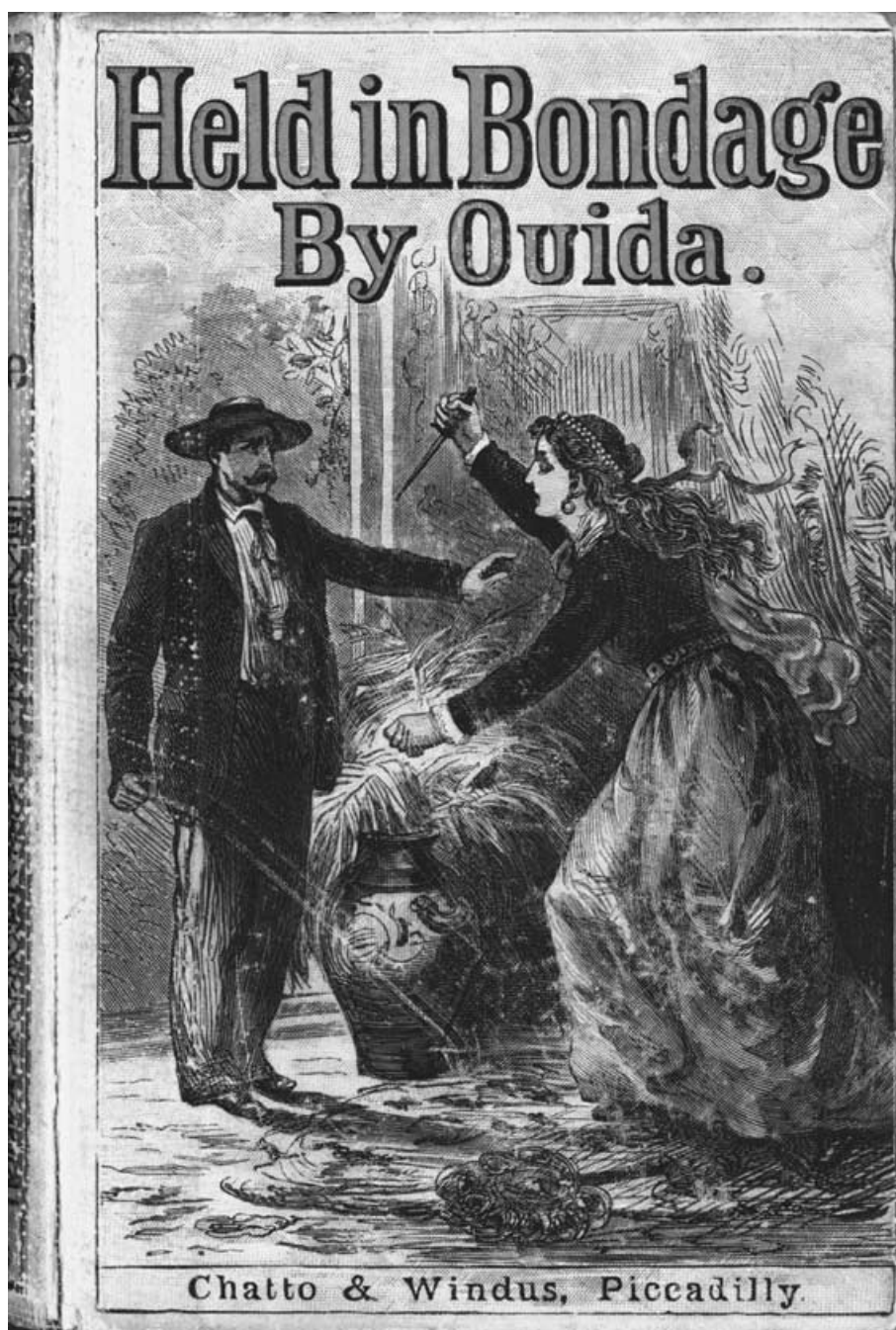


Figure 10. Cover for Ouida, *Held in Bondage, Or, Granville de Vigne: A Tale of the Day* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1894). Courtesy of The Fales Library & Special Collections, New York University.

object was not merely the preserve of the high art presses of the final decades of the century, but defined the bestselling poetry volumes of the entire period.

Focusing on what sold best brought to the exhibitions examples of two enormously popular genres of our own time, the cookbook and the self-help book. The Morgan's copy of Isabella Mary Beeton's *Book of Household Management*, a work published in 1861 that sold 640,000 copies to the end of the century, was especially delightful. The 1898 edition was opened to a color plate of fruit bowls arranged with a Renaissance plenitude facing a page of "jelly of two colours," that would do Martha Stewart proud, a sloping pinkish-red cylinder of jelly surmounted by a crenellated upper structure of a pale green jelly. Also displayed was Samuel Smiles's *Self-help* (1859), widely read in its own time, the mother or father of all the self-help books that crowd the shelves of Barnes and Noble today.

If museum displays show for the contemporary Victorianist the variousness of modes of publication, the extent of the non-canonical, and continuities with current popular forms, the Morgan included one set of exhibits that indicates, in contrast, the interests collecting taste of the late nineteenth and of the early twentieth century. J. P. Morgan was fond of collecting the manuscripts of major Victorian novelists. On display were the handwritten sheets of *Ivanhoe* and *The Last Days of Pompeii*. Such collecting of the work of the hand rather than the printing press provides a way for the book collector to acquire an object with aura, the work before it is set in the realm of mechanical reproduction. Within the Morgan exhibit, these first drafts by Scott and Bulwer-Lytton become the literary analogues of the sketches and drawings of Leonardo and Raphael.

Within the aim of presenting the full range of what the Victorians read, of displaying the expansiveness of the Victorian print universe, the Bibliographical Society of America is to be particularly commended for bringing into this cooperative multi-museum event, the bestseller of Victorian bestsellers, the Bible. Following a session of scholarly papers at its building on Manhattan's West Side, the Museum of Biblical Art, drawing on the extensive collection of the American Bible Society housed there, showed a fascinating collection of what has come to be known as the Doré Bible, Old and New Testament texts illustrated by Gustave Doré. As with other nineteenth-century bestsellers, the Bibles existed in a range of formats. Of special interest was the English version issued over the years 1866–71 in a large format, the heavy boards ornamented in silver and jewels. This magnificent book in its rich visual presence and solid materiality, its own sense of near eternity as an object, spoke to its function within the domestic sphere, the book as the presence of the divine in the household and hearth. And the Doré illustrations – "The Creation of Light," "The Drowning of the Egyptians" – shaped the religious and the visual imagination of the time.

Finally, what struck me about this admirable cooperative enterprise was how out of the ordinary it was to look at books rather than texts, to see the book as thing, to feel the materiality of Victorian literature, to sense the power of these objects of mechanical reproduction. To generalize, such a showing of books registers how disembodied Victorian literary study can be when words are cut off from their embodiment in books. A Penguin edition may note when a novel was first read in serial form, then in rented three-volume editions. But students, and their teachers, very rarely see the paper serial parts, not to speak of the material presence of a three-decker. We note the Biblical language embedded in Ruskin, but only with difficulty feel the numinous presence of the family Bible in the home of the Ruskins and most other Victorians. Except for a few specialists and book collectors, we tend to relegate the visual aspect of Victorian books to the periphery, and to dismiss its study as connoisseurship.

Let me conclude with a pedagogical question. If these exhibitions organized on the principle of showing what the Victorians read can so successfully manifest the energy and vitality, the abundance and exuberance, the visual spectacle of the Victorian print universe, how can we transmit that quality of Victorian culture, the book not as text but as object, to our students, not to speak of ourselves? For Victorian books do not live in our time as they did in their own. How can we rescue the material life of nineteenth-century books from their disembodied afterlife, especially for a generation habituated to reading words on a screen?

A few tentative suggestions. Exhibitions of actual Victorian books are all too rare; these volumes are seldom on permanent or even temporary display. University librarians might well be pleased at signs of interest in books themselves, might be happy to rescue rare materials from dusty storage so that students can see and handle actual nineteenth-century books and periodicals. We can bring into the classroom for show-and-tell our own treasured Victorian volumes. And we might encourage, even assign students to bring to class from the library, from second-hand bookstores, even from their grandmother's attic any book published in the nineteenth century, any nineteenth-century volume from novels to poetry to cookbooks. Such laying on of hands would provide a physical contact with the material literary world of the Victorians.

The New School