Besides the obvious intrinsic interest of its contents, the value of an anthology depends on its ability to serve a course of study. The bounty of the present anthology makes it a more than adequate choice for any number of tracks within Victorian studies. Its accounts of history, philosophical and political trends, and material culture construct a comprehensive vision of nineteenth-century Britain and its engagement with the wider world. So the question that instructor and student alike face in opening the text is this: Can so comprehensive a vision liberate us as readers from the totalizing narratives that have so often plagued accounts of the period, or does an emphasis on the depth and texture of this vision threaten to distract us from intellectual structures that go unchallenged? Any answers we arrive at depend not just on the selection and arrangement of materials in the anthology but, even more pertinently, on the critical apparatus through which they are presented.

The text is divided into two parts with "extensive additional material" available on a companion website (vi). In content and organization, the second part--Authors, by far the larger of the two--more closely resembles other current anthologies of Victorian literature, but the variety of writers and texts presented here offers a richer and more varied picture of Victorian realities than has often been available up to now. Like previous anthologies, the second part of this one arranges works chronologically by the date of their author's birth, and--when including two or more works by one author--by the date of each work's first publication. While taking some account of trends and developments throughout "the long nineteenth century (1789-1914)," the selection of readings focuses much more closely on the years of Queen Victoria's reign (1837-1901). Beginning with a few short poems by Walter Savage Landor and Charlotte Eliot and an extract from John Keble's epoch-making sermon on "National Apostasy," the section ends with classic poems of the late Victorian Decadence by Lionel Johnson and Ernest Dowson, followed by a few poems from the less familiar Charlotte Mew.

As its scope suggests, the anthology is an extensive resource. Fully respecting the received canon of Victorian high literature, it includes in their entirety The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam and In Memoriam A. H. H. It also offers selections from Matthew Arnold, the Brontës, the Brownings, and the Pre-Raphaelites that are almost exactly what we would expect to find in any anthology of Victorian literature. In addition, its commitment to broadening the horizons of Victorian studies as a discipline becomes readily apparent in its many selections from women writers and its extracts from popular and working class literature. Even the lesser, or at least less influential, writers of the more diffuse and various late nineteenth century are accorded their traditional representation as satellites of the mid-Victorian sages. Scholars of the fin de siècle will welcome a few lyrics by Amy Levy, whose writing is not always anthologized. Scholars of the aforementioned Dowson, whose writing is routinely anthologized, may regret that he is represented by the same few greatest hits on which his literary reputation is based. In short, the text can accommodate a tweedy course in the Victorian Greats as readily as a special topics seminar driven by the recent rediscovery and re-evaluation of minority voices, but besides being inclusive, its selection of authors and works is sometimes obvious.

In contrast to the second section of the book, Part One: Contexts arranges readings thematically, and the introduction to Religion and Science begins with an example that throws possibly as much light on the zeitgeist of the nineteenth century as on the limitations of this anthology. Reproducing an illustration from a geology textbook published in 1853 and written by a Mrs. John Wright, the editors commend her courage in controversially arguing that the scale of geologic time contradicts the biblical creation narrative. Nevertheless, the editors bemoan the author's "difficult" and perhaps disingenuous attempts to "negotiate" and even "reconcile" with rhetoric the conflicting claims of religion and science as--respectively--traditional and revolutionary ways of knowing (115). In this geology textbook as the editors present it, vital questions about religious authority are segregated into apologetic subsections of the argument and away from the theoretical apparatus of diagram and glossary, where the real work of scientific analysis is done. Both Wright's book and the present anthology, then, strive to explain their subjects--geology and Victorian literature, respectively--as thoroughly as possible without seriously threatening our traditional ideas about those subjects. For all its genuine contributions to scientific literacy, therefore, Mrs. Wright's project is judged by the editors to be intellectually suspect. Likewise, the present anthology sets before us a vision of Victorian literature that remains much the same, at least structurally, as it has for generations: a system ordered by the conceptual gravity of a few major voices (such as Dickens, Darwin, Tennyson, Ruskin, and Macaulay) which in turn drive the movement of an indefinite number of lesser voices in conduct books, penny dreadfuls, broadside ballads, and Decadent lyrics.
Yet while this anthology does not radically reform the structure of Victorian literature as traditionally defined, its first part sharpens and magnifies our vision of that structure. To this end, a "fully-integrated" website (iv) is said to offer sources that are not, for whatever reason, included in the printed text. In furnishing "visual and aural materials" (xlvii) like early films and sound recordings, the editors aim to remind us that Victorian culture was not, after all, only expressed in print.

A website of this kind, however, is a decidedly mixed blessing. In the best of circumstances, switching back and forth between an electronic device and a thousand-page anthology is inconvenient, and for the many students who still lack their own laptops, i-pads, or full access to digitally-enhanced classrooms, the web component of the text will be confined to use outside of class time. But in any case, the "fully-integrated" website is fully disappointing. It consists, in its entirety, of a downloadable .pdf document formatted exactly like the pages of the paper textbook. The architecture for a genuine hypertext exists but appears to have been abandoned. Links keyed to chapters in the text lead to blank pages. The only evidence of the audio and video recordings described in the introduction appears on one page of the .pdf document listing several external web addresses that must themselves be copied and pasted into a browser's address bar because they are not formatted as hyperlinks. In other words, the website merely houses a text supplement that users will, in all likelihood, end up printing out for themselves and that would have been more useful if bound into the textbook.

Offsetting these defects of the website, the anthology's most valuable contributions to the Victorian studies classroom lie in its first 180 pages, including a general introduction and--as already noted--five contexts. Each account of a context links the temporal and physical realities of life in the Victorian world to the remnants they have left in print.

To survey the moral and aesthetic attitudes of the Victorian age, the general introduction begins with the burning of the Houses of Parliament shortly before Queen Victoria assumed the throne in 1834. In summarizing the parliamentary debates and public discourse that would eventually cause the architectural hodgepodge of the destroyed buildings to be replaced by the neo-Gothic edifice known everywhere today, the editors provide an engaging entry point for thinking about Gothic design: how its elements simultaneously represent the Victorians' moral arguments for imperialist expansion, a rising tide of British nationalism, a Romantic attitude toward the pre-industrial past, and a thorough mastery of industrial fabrication on a scale never before seen. As they exist today, the Houses of Parliament testify to the achievements as well as the cultural neuroses of the Victorians, and they give the user of this text a discrete point of reference for gauging the vast and multifarious strains of Victorian discourses on art, religion, politics, history, and technology.

The first of the five ensuing articles on contexts, "The Condition of England," extends the Gothic theme by reading a famous etching:

"Contrasted Residences for the Poor" from Augustus Pugin's Contrasts (1836).

Designed by one of the architects of the new Houses of Parliament, Pugin's image compares a medieval city, with its human scale and visual appeal, to the ugliness of a nineteenth-century mill town. The same cultural impulses driving the choice of Gothic for the architectural style of the new Houses of Parliament informs Pugin's highly Romanticized fantasy of the Middle Ages and the critique of industrialization that it helps to mount.

Like the first article on contexts, the second one--"Gender, Women, and Sexuality,"--carefully reads a print--this time an engraving based on several paintings by Henry Tanworth Wells (one of which is shown here):

Henry Tanworth Wells, Victoria Regina: Queen Victoria Receiving the News of her Accession (1887)

In depicting the teenaged Victoria learning that she is to be the next monarch of the United Kingdom, the engraving not only evokes the historical circumstances that led to her accession, but also, more importantly, it epitomizes the central fact around which this chapter revolves: for much of her reign, Victoria was the only married woman in Britain with any legal rights. Since the font of honor and legal authority in Victorian England rested in the person of a woman, the introduction notes how this situation inverted traditional ideas about chivalry--very current in the Victorian vogue for things medieval as well as touching on controversies that would eventually lead to the extension of legal equality and full suffrage to women in the twentieth century.

The third article on context, "Literature and the Arts," begins by juxtaposing quotations from Dickens's The Old Curiosity Shop to Robert Braithwaite Martineau's painting of the scene in which "Nell Trent teaches writing to young Kit Nubbles" (81). While probing here the social issues of literacy, education, and gender dynamics, the article also treats the equally vigorous aesthetic debates about the role of representation and symbol, background and foreground, and shade and lighting in Victorian art.

In the fourth article on context, "Religion and Science," which (as already noted) treats Mrs. Wright's explication of contemporary geological theory, the editors consider Darwin, evolution, and the slow shift of authority from the established church to the secular court system.

The last article on context, "Empire," takes the Victoria Terminus Station, still standing and functional in Mumbai, India, as an embodiment of the British colonial project, reaching out from the home country into a world that, for a while, would be one fifth a British possession. Like the Houses of Parliament, the Victoria Terminus represents in its Gothic architecture and network of steel tracks the triumph of the Victorians' technical prowess and the involvement of technology in their conceptions of their own moral and cultural superiority.

Besides the fascinating perspectives provided by readings of Victorian art and architecture, one of the most interesting features of this anthology is the richness of its footnotes. In (for instance) footnote 7 to the article on "Gender, Women, and Sexuality" (71), the editors explain an extract from a letter sent to Queen Victoria by Caroline Norton, who became an advocate for liberalizing the laws governing marriage and divorce after a number of failed attempts to free herself from a cruel and domineering husband. In Victorian Britain, the note explains, divorce was obtainable only by the wealthy and only by an act of Parliament following expensive and lengthy hearings first in a church court and then in a civil court. These elaborate maneuverings, we learn, were at least partly necessitated by the legal principle of "couverture"--the term itself derives from the fossilized "law French" of the Victorian court system--whereby a woman's legal rights were understood to be absorbed or "covered" by her husband's.
The footnote on the extract from Norton’s letter actually assumes a life of its own. It includes a biographical outline of Norton’s unhappy marriage, a description of the process by which divorces were sought and granted in nineteenth-century Britain, and a theoretical discussion of legal terminology bolstered by a lengthy quotation from Blackstone’s *Commentary on the Laws of England* in two dense columns of text that are longer than the extract itself. As a result, the note seems less an explanatory gloss than a parallel text running across the bottom of the page and just as interesting and informative as anything in the extract.

It could be objected that details of such general relevance to nineteenth-century discourses on gender and legal reform might have more usefully been included in a contextualizing headnote and glossary of terms at the end of the volume. As it stands, the volume index confines itself to proper nouns, and information about divorce and coverture is locatable only through a careful reading of the article on gender and its notes. Nevertheless, the length and complexity of the footnotes create a conversational approach to the archaeology of Victorian literature and history. In this respect at least, the anthology eschews a totalizing narrative of the period in favor of a richly textured engagement with the extraordinarily various remnants of Victorian print culture.

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