

Welcome to the (in the bleak mid-)Winter issue of the *BAVS Newsletter*, filled with news, book reviews, recent publications, reports, and CFPs.

Thanks to everyone who attended the BAVS Conference in Birmingham in September. It was by all accounts an unmitigated success, and a wonderful opportunity to catch up with old friends and make new ones. If you weren't able to attend (or would like to re-live it!) a flavour of this fantastically wide-ranging conference can be gathered from the two reports in this issue, which include a charming illustration by Billie Gavurin inspired by Professors Strange and Hamlett's keynote on Victorian pet culture.

The [BAVS Newsletter Archive](#) has now launched. It contains the contents lists and PDFs for all of our issues going back to 2009. This webpage makes past (and future) *Newsletter* content more accessible and searchable – do take a look!

This issue of the *Newsletter* includes the first of our new 'Foundational Text' review series that re-visits a significant contribution to Victorian studies published between 1950 and the present, with Irmtraud Huber reflecting on Robert Langbaum's 1957 monograph on the dramatic monologue. If you'd like to contribute to this series, please do send your pitch to the *Newsletter* team.

Wishing you all a joyful and restful holiday period,  
*Clare Stainthorp & Sarah Wride*  
[bavsnews@gmail.com](mailto:bavsnews@gmail.com)



### **BAVS Executive**

#### **President**

Patricia Pulham

#### **Past Presidents**

Dinah Birch  
Hilary Fraser

#### **Secretary**

Alice Crossley

#### **Treasurer**

Jonathan Memel

#### **Deputy Treasurer**

Emma Butcher

#### **Membership Secretary**

Claudia Capancioni

#### **Assistant Membership Secretary & C19 Matters Co-ordinator**

Briony Wickes

#### **Funding Officer**

Amelia Yeates

#### **Newsletter Editor**

Clare Stainthorp

#### **Newsletter Editorial Assistant**

Sarah Wride

#### **Digital & Social Media Officer**

Heather Hinds

#### **Public Engagement Officer**

Claire Wood

#### **Professionalisation & Careers Officer**

Sarah Parker

#### **European Representative**

Dany Van Dam

#### **North American Representative**

Adrian Wisnicki

#### **Australasian Representative**

Alexandra Lewis

#### **Postdoctoral Representatives**

Alicia Barnes  
Melissa Gustin  
Harriet Thompson

#### **Postgraduate Representatives**

Hollie Geary-Jones  
Carys Hudson

#### **Book Prize Co-ordinator**

Rohan McWilliam

#### **Curator & Archives Liaisons**

Alexandra Foulds  
Rebecca Mellor

#### **COVE Liaison**

Bev Rilett

#### **BARS Liaison**

Anthony Mandal

#### **Committee Members**

Charlotte Boyce  
Carolyn Burdett  
Ann Heilmann  
Kate Nichols  
Heidi Leidke  
Vicky Mills  
Reiko Suzuki

### **CONTENTS**

BAVS NEWS	2
REVIEWS	5
RECENT PUBLICATIONS	16
BAVS FUNDING REPORTS	22
CALLS FOR SUBMISSIONS	28

# BAVS News

## BAVS Executive Committee

We are delighted to have Prof. Patricia Pulham as the new President of BAVS (as announced at the conference in September). In addition, we welcome several new members of the BAVS Executive Committee, some of whom are taking on newly created roles. Our new members' roles are as follows:

**PGR Reps:**

Hollie Geary-Jones  
Carys Hudson

**COVE Liaison:**

Bev Rilett

**Postdoc Reps:**

Alicia Barnes  
Harriet Thompson

**Committee members:**

Heidi Leidke  
Vicky Mills  
Reiko Suzuki

**Curator & Archives Liaisons:**

Alexandra Foulds  
Rebecca Mellor

**Digital & Social Media Officer:**

Heather Hinds

---

## BAVS Online Writing Retreats 2023

We would like to gauge interest among BAVS members in online writing retreats. If you would be keen in attending something like this, please let us know your thoughts and preferences using [the form linked here](#).

---

## BAVS Executive Committee seeks Schools & Education Liaison

The BAVS Executive Committee is seeking a School & Education Liaison. If you would like to be considered for this role (outlined below) below, please send the Secretary, Alice Crossley [acrossley@lincoln.ac.uk](mailto:acrossley@lincoln.ac.uk), an email with a Statement of Interest (300 words maximum) indicating your suitability for and interest in the position and how you propose to contribute.

**Schools & Education Liaison:** To promote greater engagement in Humanities subjects at School level. This post is especially suitable for School teachers with knowledge of secondary Humanities provision in the UK, who is interested in developing links between BAVS and the study of our disciplines at school level. BAVS Executive positions are usually held for a 3-year term. For further information about the responsibilities of members of the executive committee please see: <https://bavs.ac.uk/news/bavs-executive-committee-roles/>

---

## Flightless Conference 2024 (NAVSA, BAVS & AVSA): Call for Hub Hosts

NAVSA, BAVS and AVSA are participating in a global collective event for Victorianists in 2024. The "Flightless conference" will be a series of events and shared materials with a fixed cost (c. \$100), comprising multiple Zoom events scheduled across the calendar year, papers shared and available for asynchronous annotation through the COVE platform, and the opportunity to attend an in-person conference at a designated Hub (there will be multiple hubs across various countries: attendance at a hub conference will have an additional but reduced conference fee, less than the annual association conference fee). A conference website will provide a shared "portal" to schedules at hubs and Zoom events.

**BAVS is inviting Expressions of Interest in hosting a BAVS hub (an in-person conference or event) in the last 2 weeks of September 2024, related to the overall flightless Victorianist conference theme "Event".**

characterisation of Jesus from a focus on atonement to triumphant resurrection, exemplified in Kingsley's kingly Christ. Via Eliot's *Adam Bede*, Chapter 4 shows how the idea of a human, masculine Jesus pushed Victorian authors (and readers) to focus less on his sacrifice and more on his reconciliatory role as intermediary between God and humanity. In the final chapter, Hughes compares Ward and Linton's novels, in which Jesus appears as a prophetic teacher who is ultimately discredited as incompatible with modern, Victorian society.

*Jesus in the Victorian Novel* is a slim book that covers a wide range of material, and offers a convincing argument: the discovery of the historical Jesus made him a powerfully evocative realist novel character, even representative of the genre itself. 'Who was Jesus?' became as much a question about the identity of the reader, who was invited to read in the character a 'solution to individual and social longings for coherence' (p. 173). As such, the book will be a valuable read for scholars of the novel as well as of nineteenth-century theology and religion.

Kristof Smeyers (University of Antwerp)

---

***Material Ambitions: Self-Help and Victorian Literature*, by Rebecca Richardson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2021), 255pp., £34.95 (paperback), ISBN 9781421441979**

'Practical industry', Samuel Smiles wrote in his Victorian bestseller *Self-Help*, 'wisely and vigorously applied, always produces its due effects. [...] All may not rise equally, yet each, on the whole, very much according to his deserts. "Though all cannot live on the piazza," as the Tuscan proverb has it, "every one may feel the sun."' (Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), (London: John Murray, 1876), p. 267). A reader of Victorian fiction today might not recognise such ideas of 'just deserts' as being a particular hallmark of the nineteenth-century novel, which rarely gave space to depictions of success by degrees. Rather we are more used to the image of victory via competition, of winners and losers, heroes and villains, the individual's triumph over adversity, not the gradual but uneven improvement of a cohort's lot due to a shared sense of 'how to get on'. Pointing to this quotation as a rare moment in Smiles's 1859 guidebook to success where he awkwardly 'addresses the question of how success is allotted among his self-helpers' (p. 25), Rebecca Richardson identifies the difficulty Smiles and other nineteenth-century writers had in trying to belie the violence implicit in the relationship between the individual and his 'competitors', or between the individual and the conditions of his environment. This becomes a

central theme throughout *Material Ambitions* as Richardson helps us, the reader, to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which Victorian literature grappled with the inherent antagonisms contained within ambition and its associated drives.

*Material Ambitions* begins from the premise that the self-help genre has been understudied and historically peripheral to our understanding of the Victorian period, despite its huge importance to contemporary Victorian discourse. Richardson's aim is to 'recentre' Smiles and others, such as the literary critic George Lillie Craik, to demonstrate their significance to 'cultural debate about the value and limits of ambition' (p. 2). She does this by focusing her study of self-help narratives across genres, including the novel, the self-help book, and biography. Throughout this sophisticated analysis of aspiration and ambition as a preoccupation of much nineteenth-century fiction and non-fiction Richardson elucidates the profound valorisation of individualism in a range of texts including: Smiles's *Self-Help* (1859); Harriet Martineau's *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832), *Autobiography* (1877) and *Life in the Sick-Room* (1844); Dinah Craik's *John Halifax, Gentleman* (1856); a wide range of William Makepeace Thackeray's publications from *Barry Lyndon* (1844) to *Vanity Fair* (1847-8); Anthony Trollope's *Autobiography* (1883) and *The Three Clerks* (1857); and Miles Franklin's *My Brilliant Career* (1901) and *My Career Goes Bung* (1946).

Existing scholarship on nineteenth-century representations of the individual tends to focus on the novel, argues Richardson. And so, this study sets out to expand upon recent work by Nicholas Dames, Beth Blum, and others by bringing the novel into a larger dialogue with biography, autobiography, and self-help texts. A chapter on Trollope, for example, explores the 'competitive logic' (p. 147) that structures his fiction and the regimented work ethic he employed in order to pursue two careers, as detailed in his *Autobiography*.

*Material Conditions* also develops current research by the likes of Daniel Stout and Emily Steinlight on the relationship between the individual and 'the aggregate, whether the aggregate is understood to be the nation, the corporation, or the population' (p. 8). In the final chapter of the book, Richardson examines Miles Franklin's fiction and the part it played in establishing Australian white nationalism via a narrative centred upon an ambitious New Woman settler.

Another theme explored by Richardson is the ways in which ability—a presumption of many nineteenth-century texts devoted to ambition—is defined against depictions of disability. In this strand of argument Richardson builds on the work of David T. Mitchell, Sharon L. Snyder, Martha Stoddard

Holmes, and Karen Bourrier to examine the sometimes-debilitating effects of monomania, work ethic, and ideals of perfectionism. In her discussion of Dinah Craik's *John Halifax, Gentleman*—'the classic novel of self-help' (Robin Gilmour, *The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981), p. 86) although it precedes Smiles's publication by three years—Richardson demonstrates how Craik 'questions the paths for and value of ambition' (p. 93) in her representations of ability and disability.

In a short coda *Material Ambitions* makes an ambitious leap to the present: to Donald Trump's presidency of the United States, to the COVID-19 pandemic, and to the global climate crises. In doing so Richardson leaves the reader with the provocative suggestion that Victorian literature provides a 'space' (p. 207) to reconsider the ramifications of a worldview fixated on attainment of ever-increasing goals, on a planet with finite and diminishing resources.

*Helena Goodwyn (Northumbria University)*

---

***Charles Dickens: But for You, Dear Stranger*, by Annette Federico (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), xv+165 pp., £18.99 (hardback), ISBN 9780192847348**

***Dickens and Travel: The Start of Modern Travel Writing*, by Lucinda Hawksley (Barnsley, South Yorkshire and Haverton, PA: Pen and Sword History, 2022), x+270 pp., £22.00 (hardback), ISBN 9781526735638**

The inspiration for OUP's 'My Reading' series, to which Annette Federico's *Charles Dickens: But for You, Dear Stranger* contributes, was the desire to explore what the Series Editors describe as the 'taut and resonant space' between reader and text (p. viii). The approach is ambitious and refreshingly different. There is fertile ground here for seeding ideas about the relationship between reader and book, about the complex interweaving of the reader's experience of life with the lives that unfold on the printed page, about the process of communication from writer to reader, and about the transformative potential of the act of reading.

The brief for contributors is challenging—their task is to write 'not conventionally but personally' about their responses to their chosen books (p. vii). This challenge puts them on a high wire above the pitfalls of tedious self-indulgence and reductive discussion of superficial 'relevance'. Federico walks this high wire with aplomb, producing perceptive and interwoven narratives—

one focusing on her personal background and development and the other on her readings of the novels she selects. As she writes in her Preface, 'A chronology of my life as a reader of Dickens is embedded in this book, running parallel to my life as a daughter, a spouse, a teacher, a scholar' (p. xi).

Federico chooses four novels, devoting a chapter to each and encapsulating in the chapter title a key theme that emerges from her reading: for *Oliver Twist* (1838), 'Where is Love?' (a song from Lionel Bart's *Oliver!* (1968), which she saw before she read the novel); for *David Copperfield* (1850), 'Blessed Little Room' (David's description of the room where he escaped from childhood oppression into the worlds of his favourite books); for *Little Dorrit* (1857), 'The Shadow Fell Like Light' (quoting from Book 2, Ch. 29, in which Clennam is reunited with Amy in the shadow of the Marshalsea wall); and for *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), 'But for You, Dear Stranger' (from the seamstress's words of gratitude to Carton as they await the guillotine—also used, expressively, as the subtitle of the book).

With these and other themes, Federico weaves an intricate web from her personal history (her relationship with her parents, childhood memories, marriage, etc.), contemporary events (e.g., Trump, COVID-19), her experiences of teaching, her responses to the novels, and some fine textual interpretation. The result is an illuminating perspective on the selected texts—a perspective that incidentally sheds light on how Dickens achieves his intimate and powerful impact.

Federico is a keenly perceptive reader, often highlighting fleeting occurrences in Dickens's narratives. In *Oliver Twist*, for one instant Bumble softens towards the tearful Oliver as he takes him to Mr Sowerberry. For that moment, suggests Federico, '[t]he two of them almost seem like a strict father and a sensitive son' (p. 23). This acute observation, one of many, exemplifies a process that emerges frequently in the book: the incident is precisely described in the novel, but its significance is interpreted through the life experience of the reader. The novelist prompts, the reader elaborates. As Federico later notes, 'Reading is a process of continual modification as we read, a movement back and forth between the inner reading world and the outside real one' (p. 52).

Apart from a minor misunderstanding of the Artful Dodger's use of the word 'covey' (p. 11), I found little to quibble about. Federico is a skilful stylist and, writing with fluency and clarity, has produced a scholarly work that is also intensely personal. This is a convincing demonstration of how we use the novel to illuminate our own experiences and the world around us, and of how our own experiences in turn illuminate the novel.