

Introduction

This eighth volume of *VIDES*, the journal of the MSt in Literature and Arts (MLA), commemorates Dr Cathy Oakes, a gifted and inspiring teacher who devised the MLA and directed it from its inception in 2011, and whose module ‘The Role of Wit, Conceit and Curious Devices in Tudor and Jacobean Art and Architecture’ introduced so many students to the diversity and joy of interdisciplinary study. The compilers of this edition of *VIDES* were the last cohort of students to be taught and supervised by Cathy, and to benefit from her unfailing commitment and encouragement. As was said in one of the many tributes that followed her sudden and untimely death in August 2019, she ‘believed utterly in the value of liberal adult education and gave herself wholeheartedly to it’.

The MLA offers graduate students the opportunity to study British cultural history from the mid fifteenth to the early twentieth century in an interdisciplinary programme that encompasses history, literature, the history of art and architecture, and the history of ideas. The course aims to explore the past through the lens of human creativity, and to inform our understanding of that creativity by studying the context within which it emerged. The image on the cover of this volume of *VIDES* encapsulates that aim, with specific reference to the module that Cathy taught: it is an emblem taken from the sixteenth-century Oxburgh hangings, a series of tapestries reputedly embroidered by Mary, Queen of Scots and Bess, Countess of Shrewsbury, during Mary’s imprisonment in England. This intricate artefact is a rich example of how material objects can illuminate wider historical and cultural events.

The production of *VIDES* by the students in the second year of the MLA has always been an integral part of the course. Each of the twenty-two articles in this volume focuses on two different artefacts that speak to a single theme. The authors have examined, explored, and interrogated their chosen objects to determine what they reveal about a particular aspect of the culture from which they originated. The articles are arranged in chronological order, and while each one draws out thematic links between the artefacts with which it is concerned, the collection as a whole discloses further striking and illuminating connections across the centuries, as this introduction seeks to demonstrate.

Several articles explore British attitudes towards a foreign ‘other’. By examining the critical response to John Frederick Lewis’s *The Hhareem*, which he argues was influenced by William Makepeace Thackeray’s earlier comic portrayal of the artist himself, Guy Philipps exposes nineteenth-century Western Orientalist fantasies and ideas of social decorum. The blurring of fantasy and reality is also a theme of Mona Opubor’s comparison of the eponymous gemstone in Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone* and a bronze statue of a Portuguese soldier taken by British troops from Benin in 1897. Opubor discusses how, what was in truth the looting of artefacts, played a part in the creation of the Victorian national identity by being represented

as part of a colonial civilising mission. Another imperial narrative is challenged by Eibhlín Inglesby in her comparison of two representations of the Great Irish Famine. Setting Daniel Macdonald's portrait of a starving Irish family against a descriptive journal kept by two Oxford students, Inglesby probes the British attitude to Ireland by assessing the relative emotive impact of each artefact. Tensions across the Irish Sea are also addressed by Gerard Krasnopolski in his discussion of the first, deliberately exclusive, performance of W. B. Yeats's *At the Hawk's Well* immediately prior to the Easter Rising in 1916 and Alvin Langdon Coburn's photograph of the dancer Michio Ito in a later performance of his role in the piece. Krasnopolski explores the way in which Yeats's vision, simultaneously internationalist and elitist, challenged British imperialism and sought to articulate Irish identity.

Other contributions reveal the scale of Victorian ambition beyond the colonial stage. In 1872, *HMS Challenger* was stripped of her status as a warship and refitted for the purposes of exploration. Nicholas Pritchard reads Henry Nottidge Moseley's *Notes by a Naturalist on the "Challenger"* as an attempt to romanticise an imperial endeavour by constructing a medieval quest narrative out of a scientific expedition to fathom the depth of the oceans. Late Victorian scientific innovation is also a topic of Rosalind Janssen's article, concerned with the experiments of Sir Francis Galton. Janssen's comparison of a dog whistle invented by Galton in 1876 and two later photographs of the man himself demonstrates both the genius and the horror of Galton's work as a eugenicist. Another Victorian giant, Isambard Kingdom Brunel, is the subject of Siân James's contribution: examining Robert Howlett's iconic 1857 photograph of Brunel standing in front of a Brown, Lenox chain cable, James asks whether Brunel was elevated or shackled by his creations.

The theme of Britain's image-making in the world is pursued in Hannah Ruddle's piece on the economic importance of the cotton trade in Victorian Britain and the tensions that arose from the deployment of cotton as a political lever in the battle between Confederate and Unionist sympathisers on both sides of the Atlantic. Domestic attitudes to trade and imports are also addressed by Emma Vickers in her work on the growing popularity of chocolate in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Vickers examines the change in the public perception of chocolate, from xenophobic apprehension, to medicinal cure, to sophisticated consumable and status good, and finally to eventual democratisation.

Echoes of Vickers's piece can be heard in two articles addressing the impact of changing technology on modes of public entertainment in the eighteenth century. Simon Lamoou discusses the introduction of sensation and the Gothic to theatrical performance, which popular satirists saw as leading to cultural decline. Anxiety about cultural decline is also a theme of Louise Lamb's article on the Jubilee masquerade balls of 1749, in which she analyses fears of moral corruption consequent on eccentricity, lavish costuming, cultural eclecticism and gender non-conformity in a large public space open to all. Links between public

entertainment and public morality are also a theme of Jocelyn Donachie's comparison of a nineteenth-century bandstand and drinking fountain. Donachie highlights the perceived moral value of design to an ever-expanding urban population. Alison Hegarty's article, which investigates the funding for the Foundling Hospital in its early years, also touches on issues of entertainment and public morality. Hegarty describes the move from charitable giving, by means of aristocratic patronage of artists such as Handel and Hogarth, to public funding, which proved both controversial and less financially successful.

A theme of Hegarty's contribution, which notes how it was aristocratic women who first signed Thomas Coram's petition for the founding of his Hospital, is echoed in Deborah Richards's article on female epistolary activity in the early modern period. Richards describes ways in which women able to write with their own hand were empowered to achieve a means of articulation and self-representation, capable of being used for political as well as personal ends. Another form of contemporary female agency is touched on in Maria Neary's study of female recusancy and rebellion during the Elizabethan period; she argues that it can reasonably be assumed that it was the wives and female relations of the leaders of the Northern Rebellion of 1569 who instigated the revolt. Neary also notes the apparent paradox that recusant women's confinement to the domestic sphere gave them more freedom than men to engage in subversive activity. That observation affords an unexpectedly contrasting connection to Cecily Jenkinson's contribution, dealing with early nineteenth-century satires on the institution of marriage. Arguing that Jane Austen should be regarded as a satirist comparable to James Gillray, Jenkinson observes that Austen's adoption of a domestic setting for her fiction restricted the type and degree of satire that she could use.

Equally unexpected connections emerge from a comparison of the articles by Jessica Greaves and Gavin Fiddler. Greaves considers ideas of masculinity in the 1850s, drawing attention to a tension between outward authority and inward anxiety; noting 'the significant role that both "high art" and material culture play in understanding social history', she highlights one of the foundational principles of the MLA. Fiddler also addresses male anxiety, this time at the end of the nineteenth century, but in the very different context of female vampirism, whose appeal to readers and viewers alike he suggests presaged the reordering of gender relations that was to mark the century to come. The fact that this volume ranges from early sixteenth-century pew ends in a church in Northamptonshire to late Victorian lesbian vampires serves admirably to illustrate the diversity that is another foundational principle of the MLA.

The pew ends feature in Pen Keyte's article, in which she begins what is intended to be a detailed study of the Parish church of St Mary the Virgin in Fawsley. Keyte suggests that the previously undiscussed iconography of these carvings can be read as a critical commentary on contemporary religious and political events, thereby creating a connection back to Maria Neary's analysis of the iconography of the slightly later portrait of the recusant Lady Constable. Religion is similarly the focus of Joelle David's contribution,

which covers virtually the entire period of the MLA in drawing parallels between the symbolic representation of the transcendent in Martin Luther's *Confession Concerning the Lord's Supper* and mid-Victorian fantasy fiction. Kate Vervain's article is also concerned with a formidable divine, John Donne, but her comparison of two objects through which Donne sought at the very end of his life to shape his posthumous reputation presents a striking contrast to the breadth of David's timespan. Finally, religious controversy is also at the heart of Paul Shaw's discussion of Charles Dickens's celebrated attack on John Everett Millais's *Christ in the House of His Parents*. Shaw demonstrates the extent to which Dickens's hostility was rooted in his perception of Millais's work as displaying Anglo-Catholic Tractarianist tendencies. And Shaw's article, dealing as it does with the critical reception of a painting first exhibited in 1850, connects back to Guy Philipps's, the first of the twenty-two pieces discussed here. We very much hope that readers will see further links and connections between those pieces, and in so doing will further the aims of the MLA and thereby honour the treasured memory of Cathy Oakes.