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*Education in Nineteenth-Century British Literature:  
Exclusion as Innovation* by Sheila Cordner (review)

Ryan Stephenson

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family resemblance, to be sure, but they were not identical, and their differences were driven less by medical ideas than by the need to protect property” (63). Notwithstanding the historiographical discussion in chapter 1, the lack of linkage with apposite or overlapping sociomedical histories in the rest of the book may isolate an otherwise strong body of research. Throughout the middle to the later part of Hanley’s periodization (1815–72), health, poor law, and medicine were frequently different faces of the same die. Hanley claims that “health was a pivotal arena for resetting boundaries between central and local governments” (113), but this resetting was also reflected in the overlap between health, welfare (poor law), and state medicine.

That said, this is a compact book—five chapters—and Hanley has intentionally enmeshed his scholarship within the sociopolitical ramifications of legal precedent. There are clear dividends from focusing in this way. For example, framing the curious but “meaningless” distinction between sewers and drains was a part of the legal wrangles and legalese of public health legislation (115). Valuable space is thus given over to pulling apart the minutiae of legal debate and judicial decisions, such as *Masters v. Scroggs*, whereby Hanley demonstrates the centrality of “liability” and derived personal “benefit” to sanitary works in the nineteenth century (48).

Scholars of public health will need to engage with *Healthy Boundaries*. Its deliberations, though tightly focused, have repercussions beyond public health. Defining boundaries between the private and public spheres and overcoming the sociolegal challenges of redistributive taxation remain at the core of modern dilemmas across the political spectrum.

KIM PRICE

University of Liverpool



### *Education in Nineteenth-Century British Literature: Exclusion as Innovation*

by Sheila Cordner; pp. 160. New York:

Routledge, 2016. \$167.97 cloth.

SCHOLARS WHO study the history of Victorian education often note the importance of three key years: 1833, when the British government began funding church schools that provided basic education to the working classes; 1862, when the Committee of Council on Education passed the Revised Code, which ensured reading, writing, and arithmetic as the core components of mass education and set a new funding model based on student results; and 1870, when the passing of Forster’s Education Act reaffirmed the British government’s commitment to popular education by creating a greater opportunity for working-class children to attend state-funded schools. In many ways,

the events of these years constitute a revolution in education, the end point of which was a populace with near-universal literacy, a burgeoning market for reading material, and a highly developed national school system. Sheila Cordner's recent book, *Education in Nineteenth-Century British Literature: Exclusion as Innovation*, investigates another, quieter revolution in nineteenth-century education, however, one based on questioning and sometimes refuting the value of the machinery of learning established by those in positions of power within the education system since the beginning of the century. Examining the work of Jane Austen, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Thomas Hardy, George Gissing, and Virginia Woolf, Cordner identifies in their work the presence of what she calls "educational outliers" (1) who "critique institutional learning" by envisioning "going outside of institutions" (1) to meet their intellectual needs. Her research finds in all of these fictional outliers representations of "unteaching": that is, the creation of deliberate breaks with the methods and habits encouraged by official schooling (1). Cordner argues that, while Austen and Barrett Browning use the style of their writing to enable attuned readers to let go of their learned attachment to conventional models of reading, Hardy and Gissing present readers with characters who choose, under the strains imposed by the inequities of the education system, to destroy what they have previously been taught in favour of an intellectual education that will actually benefit them (2). Throughout, Cordner documents the imagined innovations and inventions of those still left behind, merely because of gender or class, by the nineteenth-century push toward universal education.

Cordner's major focus is on authors whose explicit critiques are aimed at "elite secondary and university education" (2), a focus that makes the book a welcome addition to the study of nineteenth-century education. Elementary education in the period is already well-covered ground, a fact made evident by the sometimes repetitive quality of Cordner's introduction, which refers predictably to *Hard Times* (1854) and Matthew Arnold in its survey of nineteenth-century "education machinery" (7). The value of the book becomes obvious, however, when Cordner traces the mechanical practices of elementary pedagogy—principally rote learning and cramming—to "Oxbridge," the imagined amalgamation of Oxford and Cambridge that came to stand for a unique and elite university education (2). Cordner's analysis of her chosen authors therefore places their fiction, poetry, and prose in the shadow of Oxbridge, studying the innovations necessary for those forced to remain in this shadow.

The chapter on Austen, for instance, analyzes the pedagogical methods from which characters draw success in the novels (with an emphasis on *Emma* [1815] and *Mansfield Park* [1814]), but it does so after establishing Austen's own connection to Oxbridge through her brothers and the satirical periodical *The Loiterer*, which they published from 1789–90 while at Oxford. The chief value of this chapter is in Cordner's identification throughout

Austen's fiction of "scrambling" (23), a "self-directed process of learning resulting in the development of one's own judgment" (23), in contrast to the mechanical process of cramming and rote learning satirized in *The Loiterer*. What Cordner finds through the contrast between the stereotyped Oxbridge pedagogies and the seemingly more haphazard methods of Austen's heroines is that her novels put a high value on the development of "judgment" (41), a quality often lacking in those who do not have the benefit of learning outside of elite schools. These benefits are revisited in Cordner's analysis of radical education in *Aurora Leigh* (1856), in which Aurora's "headlong" (45) reading practices, like Fanny Price's scrambling in *Mansfield Park*, serve her better than the dominant, Oxbridge-approved models of reading and learning her cousin Romney suffers through, despite his obvious privilege. While the analysis of this chapter—the shortest of the volume—is sound and its claims well-supported, its statements about women's education and working-class education will be familiar to any reader of previous scholarship on the topic by Kate Flint, Jennifer Phegley, or Jonathan Rose, sources she cites in the chapter's notes. The element of real interest here is not the marginalized individuals striving for learning but Cordner's work on "headlong reading," a model of experiential reading that she distills from Barrett Browning's verse (50).

Cordner's chapter on Thomas Hardy examines attempts at education made by characters kept outside of elite institutions. As the chapter notes, Hardy's studies of autodidacticism in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873), *Jude the Obscure* (1895), and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1892) occur in the late-century context of expanded elementary education and the advent of the Working Men's College and university extension courses for women and members of the working class. Cordner's analysis here makes a persuasive case for her claim that "much educational reform served to reinforce class distinctions instead of allowing students to climb the social ladder" (59). As in her chapters on Austen and Barrett Browning, Cordner shows here that the pedagogical methods of the elite institutions to which Hardy's characters aspire are not desirable in themselves; in many ways, the methods of learning practised by the autodidact outsiders are more profound and efficacious than those of the elite insiders. In her remaining chapters, however, Cordner shows how these categories are exploded and at times disregarded around the turn of the century in the writing of George Gissing and Virginia Woolf. Cordner's examination of Gissing's ideas on education from the perspective of *Thyrza* (1887) is refreshing, given that so much of the scholarship on Gissing's educational views focuses on *New Grub Street* (1891), *The Odd Women* (1893), and other more widely read novels, and her extension of these debates into the next century through Woolf's unpublished experiment *The Pargiters* is a useful and important conclusion because it shows so clearly that, despite their literary work and proposed innovations, nineteenth-century authors could do little to solve the problems inherent in institutional education.

Ultimately, Corder's research excels in showing the critical perspective on education and educational reform offered by nineteenth-century authors and the potential for innovations that existed despite the restrictive systems put in place by educational institutions. While the context for the arguments of each chapter is sometimes thin—exploring the debate on these pedagogical ideas in educational texts and journalism might enhance or alter our understanding of their role and meaning in the literary ones—the literary analysis itself supports Corder's claims and makes the book a valuable contribution to the study of nineteenth-century education, reform, and the responses of marginalized individuals to institutions that would exclude them.

RYAN STEPHENSON

*Douglas College*

