

Redux

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HOW much time has passed since the publication of *VLC*'s Keywords issue five years ago? This is not a trick question. Students of nineteenth-century British literature and culture are primed to see five years as a long time (“with the length of five long summers”), and events at both national and global scales have encouraged a widespread sense that 2018 is located less in the recent past than on the far side of a divide—in the Before Times. On the other hand, the long view encouraged by a scholarly focus on a period that ended over a century ago may see little or no meaningful time as having passed between 2018 and 2023. Moreover, on a more quotidian level, the very pace of scholarship—the amount of time it typically takes to conceive, research, write, and publish work, even for those without a Casaubonian bone in their bodies—can make five years seem like no time at all (“five summers that flew by,” as Wordsworth might have put it had he been on an academic calendar).

The very tension between these competing temporalities makes the time ripe for this Keywords Redux issue. Not simply, then, to supplement the earlier Keywords but also to gain insight into the question of how much *Victorianist* time has passed in the past five years, the editors of *VLC* again issued an open call for papers that asked potential contributors to write 1,200-word mini-essays which would not be encyclopedia-style “entries” but rather would stake out a position, make an argument, promote an agenda. We also asked that contributors either address a term absent from the earlier issue or productively revisit an existing term. Collected here is the bounty of erudition and provocation that resulted from this call, the work of some four dozen scholars. Our contributors represent all academic ranks, from graduate students to full professors, and are located across the globe. The cumulative effect of these contributions is to offer a snapshot of the field at the present moment—and, in combination with and by juxtaposition to the original Keywords issue, to help define that “present.”

Continuity or break? We will let our readers decide for themselves whether and how the essays in this issue depart in focus or ambition from the 106 essays in the original Keywords—and to what extent any differences are attributable to large-scale historical events, material factors

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more specific to the academy, internal disciplinary interventions, other considerations, or chance. However, one difference we cannot help being struck by is the near-complete absence in *Redux* of formal or more broadly literary terms. Whereas *Keywords* included mini-essays on such terms as Character, Description, Form, Free Indirect Discourse, Genre, Poetry, Realism, and Seriality (and we could go on), the only candidates for such a list in the current issue are Translation and perhaps Repertoire. This discrepancy represents the most blatant evidence we see here for any abrupt, large-scale shift in the field. Of course, our sample size is limited, and it is easy to identify examples of exciting new work on nineteenth-century literary form. It would be foolish, then, to read too much into this change—but it may still be worth pondering, and watching.

One additional, intriguing difference between the two issues, not detectable by direct comparison alone, is the relationship of each to Raymond Williams's *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976). Rachel Ablow and I began the introduction to the *Keywords* issue of *VLC* by paying homage to Williams's work and emphasizing his book's Victorian center of gravity, while also explaining how our project differed from his (mainly in terms of our goals and in the form of the essays themselves). As it turned out, approximately twenty-four (depending on how one counts some cognates) of the ninety-two terms in the *Keywords* issue—almost a quarter—also appear in Williams's book (which has 131 entries in total). By contrast, only four of the terms in *Redux* match or approximate Williams's choices (for the curious: Experience, Historicity/History, Liberal, Socialist/Socialism). Again, these data may or may not be meaningful. Nonetheless, we may take this greater difference in focus to highlight, if not mark the acceleration of, trends already visible in our first *Keywords* issue. These include: a corrective attention to historically complex, contested, culturally central terms whose omission by Williams can largely be read as symptomatic of his historical moment (from Love in the earlier issue to Rape in the present one—or, in a different register, from Soul to Secular); a growing awareness of the importance of cross-cultural influence and exchange (such as Ottoman Empire and Ta'āruf); and an insistence on the relevance and explanatory power of concepts and analytical lenses not fully available to the Victorians themselves (such as Indigeneity, Planet, and Trans).¹

Keywords Redux: if the word “keyword” calls to mind Williams's book for a Victorianist readership, “redux” just as surely recalls

Anthony Trollope's *Phineas Redux* (1873). In keeping with the field's ongoing interest in looking beyond the canon, however, we turn in closing to a more obscure Victorian namesake, James Rhoades's *Dux Redux, or, A Forest Tangle* (1887). That play's opening soliloquy poses the question that haunts *Keywords Redux* even more powerfully than it did the *Keywords* issue: "Are we, in our antique garniture, / Forgotten travellers of an age outworn, / Left on the wayside by the wheels of time, / That pass and pass us?"² In the introduction to *Keywords*, we discussed our field's potential consignment to the past thanks to material conditions (such as adjunctification, declines in enrollment, and the defunding of the humanities) that threatened its very ability to reproduce itself. Those conditions have only grown bleaker, making Count Arnfeld's lament all too relatable (to borrow one of our students' keywords). However, we also noted the field's intellectual vitality, which included efforts to renovate itself in response to those pressures. On the evidence of the current issue, this vitality persists. It is even paradoxically fueled at times by an alternative reading of Arnfeld's lament as critique—fueled, that is, by a belief in the field's obsolescence.

Dux Redux itself concludes with the complete vindication of the would-be forgotten traveler's values and skills: "redux" here signifies a restoration rather than a revisiting or refashioning. We feel safe in predicting that this is not the future awaiting our own field. But neither is it the future we would choose, nor the one *Keywords Redux* seeks to summon.

NOTES

1. The editors are grateful to Ariana Nadia Nash for her help in compiling and analyzing these data.
2. James Rhoades, *Dux Redux* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, 1887), 1–2.

