



Welcome

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To many writers, and of no mean experience in letters, the portentous word "Preface" is ... awful. We confess that we do not ourselves approach it without some inward trepidation Prefaces have, in fact, been done to death. The old compliments have been paid, the old complaints made, the old excuses, valedictory or deprecatory, proffered hundred of times over. To render a preface obligatory to the writers or conductors of any work, is, to tell the plain truth, as arbitrary and unreasonable a proceeding as would be the treasonable attempt to compel her most gracious Majesty Queen Victoria to return thanks in a neat speech every time her health has been drunk.

"Preface." 1858. *Welcome Guest*, 1: iii-iv (iii)

If the Editors of the *Welcome Guest* found writing an original preface difficult in 1858, you can imagine that it has not been significantly easier in 2023. Nevertheless, as the *Welcome Guest* Editors go on to say, "we have been actuated all along by the desire of saying something new in our own particular Preface, by the consciousness of having something to say, and by the determination to say it" (iii).

Victorian Popular Fictions, the journal of the Victorian Popular Fiction Association, has now entered its fifth year as a peer-reviewed, online, open access publication dedicated to promoting and sharing the best scholarship on Victorian popular literature and culture. We are at a curious stage where we feel both relatively new (even for those of us who have been here since the beginning, issue 1.1 really doesn't feel so long ago), and relatively established (averaging 8-9 articles per issue, and with several special issues scheduled for the future). We are also experiencing a moment of change, as this is our first issue without our much-valued, indispensable former (and founding) Editor, Andrew King. We could not have let this issue pass without taking the opportunity to thank him for the time, effort and experience that he has

generously brought to the journal since its inception. We must also welcome Fiona Snailham as Associate Editor, and Brian Jukes as Reviews Editor, and thank them for their commitment, to this and future issues. We are grateful to the members of our Editorial Board, who have provided valuable support in many ways. And thanks, of course, to you, the reader, for your interest and attention.

We are proud that we have been able to establish ourselves as a journal during some difficult times, not least the Covid-19 pandemic, but also during an (unfortunately ongoing) period of uncertainty and instability for the arts and humanities (certainly in the United Kingdom, much of Europe and the United States). We are especially proud of, and thankful to, the many excellent and dedicated contributors, guest editors, and reviewers, who have demonstrated that Victorian popular fiction studies is, despite the challenges, a healthy, attractive and increasingly wide-ranging area of academic enquiry on an international level. We must also thank the dozens of supportive peer reviewers who have shown such goodwill over the years – this is necessarily a largely unrecognised role due to the blind peer-review process, but we would not be able to maintain the quality and rigour we do without the expertise and discernment of these valuable colleagues.

The present issue of the VPFJ is not only a testament to the collaborative work that has gone into its production, but exemplifies the strength of the field at this time. It features eleven articles covering detective fiction, speculative fiction, travel writing, autobiography, invasion fiction and more, including our now traditional opening *polemical* piece (this one by Tabitha Sparks), an exclusive edition of a previously unpublished Grant Allen chapter (edited and introduced by Scott Thompson), and three reviews (including our first review article).

The VPFJ remains committed to its open access format, showcasing the exciting work happening in Victorian Popular Fiction studies to the widest possible audience. It publishes contributions by members of the Victorian Popular Fiction Association, but also welcomes works by other researchers in the field, giving them the opportunity to read and engage with scholarship that may inform and inspire their own outputs. In short, to end with the words of the *Welcome Guest* Editors, we are “satisfied with having hitherto kept strenuously to ‘our purpose,’ determined more than ever to carry it out for the future” (iv).