

# NINETEENTH CENTURY GENDER STUDIES

ISSUE 16.2 (Summer 2020)

---

## **Conclusion: What does it take to say “Me” in Victorian Studies? Experiential Analysis in the Age of #MeToo**

By Marlene Tromp, Boise State University

Rather than seeing the soul as the reactivated remnants of an ideology, one would see it as the present correlative of a certain technology of power over the body. It would be wrong to say that the soul is an illusion, or an ideological effect. On the contrary, it exists, it has reality, it is produced permanently around, on, within the body, by the functioning of power that is exercised on those who are punished—and, in a more general way, on those that one supervises, trains and corrects.... I would like to write the history of [the] prison, with all the political investments of the body that it gathers together in its closed architecture. *Why? Simply because I am interested in the past? No, if one means by that writing a history of the past in terms of the present. Yes, if one means writing the history of the present.*<1>

Michel Foucault *Discipline and Punish* (29-31, emphasis added)

<1>Me too. I know this is an unconventional way to begin an academic essay—perhaps especially after a long epigraph by Foucault. The words, I will admit, are very difficult to write. However, if we are to write a meaningful history of the past and of the pressing present moment, both of which are required from us as Victorianists considering the #MeToo movement, then we must grapple with the physical and mental “supervis[ion], train[ing], and correct[ion]” to which Foucault refers. We must try to sketch the “soul” we have created for our field with the management of bodies, speech, and minds. This means addressing the difficulties that we often have in writing statements such as my first two words in this essay and the resistance our field as a whole has to receiving them.

<2>Professional norms have structured my essay—something to which I’ll speak below. Rather than opening with what would likely be a more engaging, illustrative story (something I might do at a conference and which you can choose to do, if you disrupt the essay’s order and skip to the section “Speaking Out” below), I begin by theorizing this problem. I consider “experiential” speech acts, the space of literary criticism in our moment, and literary criticism of the nineteenth century in particular. I will argue that—if one takes Michel Foucault’s ideas seriously, as well as those of critics like Judith Butler who have been in dialogue with him about the soul, the self, and speech<2>—we may open up a #MeToo, COVID-conscious, anti-racist space to say such

words in a scholarly piece and to create a very different trajectory for the work in our field, without diminishing our keen critical interrogation. This is the very thing for which the Editors of this volume call and that the essays herein illustrate in a variety of different ways.

<3>At the present moment, however, this work presents special challenges. Put simply, offering self-referential words like “me too” can feel impossible in scholarly publications, except in reference to others (in our field, especially historical or fictional others). This, of course, entirely evacuates the “me” from “#MeToo”—a phrase meant to situate the speaking/writing person as a part of a collective experience, leveraging that collective to seek action for the benefit of both individuals and groups. Academics, however, have been professionally disciplined to remain silent on this score in our scholarly work, even if we share privately, in the classroom, or in non-academic writing.

### **Ejecting Experience**

<4>This practice forms not just a part of the fabric of the political technology of the body, but, of course, as Foucault points out across the body of his work, of our culture and our minds. In spite of the dialogic interrelationship between individuals and their work, which we often tacitly acknowledge (or on which we speculate), we have learned to treat our own experience as unspeakable in the landscape of our scholarship. While there has been some brilliant work discussing first-person experience,<3> it often remains marginal as scholarly work in our field and in others. Even in the social sciences, where analysis of human experience is fundamental, Pamela Davies has described experiential analysis as “go[ing] against the grain of academic writing” (750).

<5>For Victorianists, inhabiting our professional genres has typically been a tailoring process of disciplining the personal—through undergraduate and then graduate work, conference presentations, publication norms, and through the greatest material rewards of our profession, like tenure. And, indeed, there have been some powerful motivations for standing on this ground. We expect rigor. We teach our students that, in today’s scholarly moment, we don’t just want to know how a poem or novel makes them “feel,” responses that would make our work seem less diligent and demanding. We stress, instead, that our work is an intellectual enterprise grounded in serious analysis against the backdrop of deep theoretical engagement, often presuming that these must be mutually exclusive enterprises. Nor is it just our students from whom we expect this bifurcation; we do not tolerate much experiential reflection from our colleagues. We may even associate experiential analysis with a sophomoric approach to literary criticism. When it does appear in our work, our personal experience or identity typically remains contained in a limited frame (“as a white woman who...”) or subtle footnote. Stepping outside of those limits can marginalize our scholarship or make it difficult to publish.

<6>Timothy Peltason, in making a case for aesthetic assessment in literary studies, described the reference to individual experience as “contentiously unfashionable” (985): “Everybody knows ... that they can't talk anymore about subjects, individuals, or experiences ... without participating in a guilty and discredited enterprise” (986). As Peltason notes, however, this wasn't always the case. While a search in our field finds discussions of experience most prevalent in the 1970s and mostly in reference to Victorian poets, it has also been tolerated and sometimes even celebrated in fields of study framed around identity, which were born at that time and in the decades following—women's studies, gender studies, Black studies, Latinx studies, Asian studies, ethnic studies, queer studies, trans studies (it would be difficult to produce an exhaustive list), though this has primarily been true when those fields were emergent.

<7>Joan W. Scott's blistering 1993 critique summed up much of what drove us away from such practices, cautioning against an essentialist use of “evidence of experience, whether conceived through a metaphor of visibility or in any other way that takes meaning as transparent, [as such evidence] reproduces rather than contests given ideological systems” (400). She argued that such gestures “weaken[ed] the critical thrust of histories of difference” (399), not only making the argument irrelevant, but undermining the goal of restorative analyses. We have absorbed this kind of warning so fully and rendered it so absolute that we have come to see most discussions of experience as intolerable; we are suspicious of any gestures towards it.

<8>Ejecting experience from our work, however, prevents us from deploying the powerful tools our theories and deep understanding of historical contexts as Victorianists lend us to examine the present we inhabit, something for which Scott never called.<4> The perceived danger (and shame?<5>) that has been associated with the most unidirectional interpretations of Scott's critique, however, drives us relentlessly back into our periods of study, consistently obscuring our own personhood and subjectivity, in spite of the way that our keen analysis might offer insights into this contentious and often painful political moment. It prevents us from making the kind of powerful direct commentary on experience that might improve our lives and those of others by addressing the working conditions in academia and in the world around us.

<9>In order to do such work meaningfully, we must craft intellectual architecture around the scholarly analysis of experience. At this time, little of this exists, and the most robust engagement is often published in other fields. In documentation studies, Tim Gorichanaz seeks to theorize analysis of experience, insisting that “some phenomena ... can come to light only in the first person,” while noting that “most theorization has been done from a third-person perspective ... ignoring the human experience” (191). He issues a challenge to consider and engage in this work, so we can meaningfully open up areas of inquiry that remain beyond our reach without such a tool, ultimately arguing that such engagement is “supplementary, rather than antagonistic, to third-person perspectives” (206). The essays in this issue also meaningfully engage that conversation and apply counterpressure to our traditional framework through their

analysis. Sara Hackenberg's essay takes up her experience as a part of her analysis. Shuhita Bhattacharjee's essay about the linguistic predicament in which one cannot speak is a revelatory site for investigation on this front, and Kimberly Cox's call for reciprocity, as opposed to verbal consent, can be read as a provocation as well. All three can be interpreted as serious calls to consider in the operational structure of our own field, not just as readings of particular texts.

### **A New Order of Things**

<10>Here, I propose that we take seriously Foucault's call to search for "a discourse [that] would play the role of an analytic which would at the same time give [thinkers] a foundation in a theory of the subject and perhaps enable them to *articulate themselves* in that third and intermediary term in which both the *experience of the body and that of the culture would be rooted*" (*The Order of Things* 320-21, emphasis added). Just as Doreen Thierauf in this issue calls for a "permanent change in our critical reading practices" as a result of #MeToo, we might call for a similar change in our critical writing practices. Foucault indicates that we can engage in "the analysis of actual experience" as a part of discourse analysis. I quote him here at length:

Actual experience is, in fact, both the space in which all empirical contents are given experience and the original form that makes them possible in general and designates their primary roots; it does indeed provide a means of communication between the space of the body and the time of culture, between the determinations of nature and the weight of history, but only on the condition that the body, and through it, nature, should first be posited in the experience of an irreducible spatiality, and that culture, the carrier of history, should be experienced first of all in the immediacy of its sedimented significations.... This analysis seeks to articulate the possible objectivity of a knowledge of nature *upon the original experience of which the body provides an outline*; and to articulate the possible history of a culture upon the *semantic density which is both hidden and revealed in actual experience*. (*The Order of Things* 321, emphasis added)

<11>What Foucault proposes is that a full interrogation of the discourses that, in the case of #MeToo, make sexual harassment and assault possible/probable—a move that could be equally applied to the discourses that make racial violence, homophobic or transphobic violence possible/probable—alongside the space of the body, requires an understanding of that "semantic density which is both hidden and revealed in actual experience." This doesn't mean, of course, that we abandon the warnings of Scott and simply offer our experience as self-evident ("transparent" in her words) to displace other evidence or render those experiences and identities as marginal by virtue of the project. We must not, however, continue to marginalize or exclude "experience" if we mean to produce work in our field that applies the full power of our intellectual and critical framework to the scope of culture. Experience, as the essays in this volume demonstrate so clearly, is a part of that complex landscape. In Miranda Wojciechowski's terms in this issue, we can "rethink assumptions about the aestheticized separation of how we read texts critically and how we read social situations in the world."

## High Stakes Risks

<12>I pause here, before turning again, to my own first-person account, to note that it took long Foucauldian quotations to stand between me and the two words that open this essay to feel that a discussion of them in tandem was “safe.” Indeed, I was reluctant to render the quotations from Foucault’s work with my own reading, feeling that, if they didn’t stand in their entirety, it would—in an essay like this one—diminish the value of the conclusions I drew. This is precisely because the intellectual rigor or scholarly credibility of a piece can be called into question when one’s experience becomes too visibly present in an academic essay, unless it is merely to stage one’s place in a complex and contested cultural landscape.

<13>Such risks, as we all know, are not small—professionally or personally. Abigail Gosselin has argued that sharing first-person accounts can “deprive speakers of the credibility they are due, distorting broader systems of credibility within a community, perpetuating disparities in shared hermeneutical resources, and maintaining restrictions on expressive styles” (47). She laments that this is a harm not just to the individual, but to the field, “because, in affirming strict lines around how knowledge is produced, this view limits our epistemic capacity for the wrong reasons” (46). The intellectual losses to our field and to us personally are real, but the willingness to violate those norms requires audacity.

<14>Indeed, I am surprised at how much courage it took to write those opening words, particularly given the fact that I am now a university president, and one might see me as beyond the reach of the vulnerabilities that students, staff, or junior faculty experience. Yet, even in the face of what I might describe as my ordinary joy and conviction in writing, I went back and forth—removing the words and all the architecture surrounding them, adding them back in, and removing them again, finally settling on letting them remain, so long as they appeared in the wake of grappling theoretically with the broader question.

<15>The personal risks feel weighty to me. My words, as a leader and public figure, are even more audible and visible than when I was a full professor at a major research institution and president of the North American Victorian Studies Association. I fear that my visibility will allow my words to be deployed to harm a campus community I have dedicated my energy and care to supporting. Similarly, a junior scholar could fear that writing such words could stall or even ultimately end her career, or make her seem dangerous (in the same way that a complaint or charge against a colleague might, even if that charge were true). But there are also other reasons to hesitate and for my hesitation in particular.

<16>We are well disciplined, and such discipline has, for many of us, created success in a highly competitive field with codes of behavior and scholarly production, few of which we ever render visible. Pamela Davies remarks on the difficulty, even when one is determined, to violate these

norms, precisely because we are “unpractised in writing in the first person.” It is considered “irrelevant, disruptive, and unacceptable. ... [W]e train ourselves and our students to think and write” without reference to the personal (747).

<17>Twenty years ago, it felt radical explicitly to connect Victorian gendered violence and contemporary gendered violence (analyzing the cases of Lorena Bobbitt and O. J. Simpson) as I did in my first book. Even when we have taken great care, we might face charges of anachronism, of diminishing the differences between historical moments and our own, or failing to recruit the same analytic tools for both the nineteenth century and today. In this issue, Douglas Murray’s article speaks persuasively to strategic presentism, another way of considering the traversing of time, and one we might consider as a possible critical roadmap for bridging time and space, and Rebecca Richardson’s piece on adaptations and the ways in which they open up “gray space” navigates the relationship between the past and present and offers up another viable means of traversing this distance.

<18>In the late 1990s, readers commented on it as my book went through the peer review process—some identifying my reference to the current moment as a strength,<6> but most expressing discomfort. One senior colleague chided me, noting that I was too “close to the subject” of sexual violence and needed to select material to which I had no personal connection and about which I could be more detached. In one moment, he “supervised, trained, and corrected” my scholarly production. He advised me to choose texts that remained entirely lodged in the nineteenth century, as well as to diminish my presence as a person with experiences and analysis of those experiences. The boldest that I felt I could be in the year 2000 in identifying my own personal stake—to step out from behind the curtain of the machinery of a 314-page book doing the same work—was to include a brief epigraph, “For those who are working to end violence against women,” a gesture towards the people alongside whom I worked at the shelter for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.

<19>A final risk, and this is no small thing, especially given both the external and internal pressures academics increasingly face in higher education: the emotional toll it takes to utter those two opening words remains staggering. It still gives me a hollow ache in my gut to reflect on the events of my schooling and its troubling echoes that have plagued me, like many others, throughout my career.

<20>Sadly, I feel the same ache when I read the brilliant and illuminating work in this volume or the incredible dissertations of my graduate students who choose to write on gendered violence—work my own seminars and scholarly writing, of course, invite them to take up. I have to take breaks to recuperate. I find myself weeping my way through a cathartic movie or reaching for a second bag of chips and some chocolate as a palliative measure. Perhaps only a senior scholar, secure in a full professorship, former holder of endowed chairships, and with several books

already on her vita, could write such words as those in this paragraph or employ the opening words in this essay for a journal article.

<21>Our rejection of experience in our scholarship has had the opposite effect of what Joan Scott sought: a critical analysis that prevented the further marginalization or silencing of identities or experiences. Our present practice has fostered violences of many varieties in our field and in our higher education and has left us on the sidelines of important cultural conversations, which I'll discuss more below.

<22>I identify each of these elements—the disciplinary and personal resistance to the analysis of personal experience, the too-ready dismissal of work that deploys it, and the personal cost of engaging it—because we must reckon with them all as a part of our engagement with the #MeToo movement. In spite of all of the risks, if anyone should be able to open an essay with those words, it should be someone like me, and therefore, I feel that I must.

### **Speaking Out**

<23>As a student, I was “sexually harassed” before this legal phrase entered the mainstream lexicon (along with the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas Senate hearings in 1991<7>). A professor, whose wisdom and life of the mind I earnestly admired, propositioned me in highly vulgar terms when I had to visit his office. When I rejected his advances in shock and dismay and literally ran, he chased me. Coming very close to me as I stumbled down the stairs, he put his mouth next to my ear, and threatened, sotto voce, to ruin my not-yet-begun, much-dreamt-of career. I sat in an exterior window well of the library and wept until it was dark, afraid of what I might lose because I refused to sleep with him—afraid even to be seen when I bore the marks of my distress, which might, somehow, “give me away.”

<24>I was filled with shame and an unspecified fear that I would lose more, a more I couldn't properly identify. He later wrote in marginal comments on one of my papers that it sounded like I wanted to get raped. Over the course of my career, I have been ogled, assaulted, minimized, reduced to my hair, my eyes, my lips, my legs—not, as we know, because I am beautiful—but because such acts deploy cultural power and position the individuals in well-coded relations. This complex network of ideologies and beliefs engages other historical and parallel violences, punishments, and corrections that discipline us over the course of our careers and personal lives; even small acts, as anyone knows who studies the sociopsychology of these moments, pack heavyweight punches.

<25>Many years later, when I was in a leadership position, I had to have a meeting with a senior scholar to deliver unhappy news about his promotion. As he was departing, he blocked me in a small alcove and told me he had dreams about me floating naked above his body and asked if I

would like to learn more. In the moment that his academic authority seemed diminished, he attempted to assert his sexualized, gendered authority over me. When I walked back to my desk, the administrative assistant who worked in my area approached me with shaking hands, visible distress etched into her face, because she had seen and heard what transpired. “I can’t believe he just did that,” she said. Of course, she and I were both disciplined—and not just by that colleague, but by a much denser and more complex apparatus, one that is rarely subjected to our analysis in the pages of our own scholarly work. I could describe dozens more incidents like this one, several that are more violent. Most of these stories in our ranks, however, simply remain untold and, as a result, our field doesn’t grapple with them.

<26>That well-disciplined silence fosters in our field and in the hallways of academia an erasure of such violence, and it figures in its perpetuation. We must work differently. This is what #MeToo calls upon us to do.

<27>In November of 2019, I chaired a panel at the North American Victorian Studies Association Conference entitled, “Narrativizing Victorian Violence in the #MeToo Era.” It included work by my wonderful colleagues Dagni Bredesen and Sara Hackenberg, as well as a piece of my own. Our goal in this panel was multi-layered. We wanted to speak to the relevance of the #MeToo movement to our scholarly work and our academic leadership roles, as the Editors and authors in this volume do, and the ways in which it was reflected in our real lives. Specifically, we wanted to explore the ways that our chosen subject of scholarly work, which often included violence against women both representationally in fiction as well as in the Victorian material world, might be challenged or informed by critical thinking about #MeToo, but also the way our own lives had been as women leaders. Finally, given that reflection, we wanted to disrupt the way a typical scholarly panel operated, by inviting the audience to share leadership in an open dialogue with us and one another.

<28>It was one of the most moving panels I’ve ever attended. It didn’t feel self-indulgent or solipsistic. The speakers on the panel and in the audience made sharp and insightful analyses. The limits I, myself, placed on the panel prevent me from sharing more about those insights here. For all the concerns I name above, I asked people to consider what was spoken as confidential—including me. “Please don’t share any of this on Twitter or Insta either,” I requested. This, however, meant that our dialogue and all of its insights remained behind the door of that room (but also, I note with hope, in the minds and hearts of those who attended).

<29>This volume not only brings a conversation like ours was out into the open, but onto the pages of a scholarly journal, a permanent record of our engagement with these issues. It opens up the prospect of that 2019 panel on a larger stage and suggests that scholars might intellectually gather to ask critical questions about what it means to study nineteenth-century violence even while we inhabit a culture that has not sufficiently addressed such violence, conscious of the



special challenges that women, as well as queer and trans people and BIPOC individuals, continue to face. It explores the urgent questions of how Victorian studies can be a voice in the justice movements of our current moment.

<30>As someone who has spent most of my career writing on various kinds of violence (including my current project, which is on grisly murders in the nineteenth century and today), I recognize that we must be very conscious, in our discussions of violence and even the violence of our own experience, to the attendant dangers of reproducing violence in our scholarship and the ways that it can become a “titillating pornotrope” which “ensures [that] the violated body [remains] continually exposed,” as Anna Feuerstein notes in this issue. Analyzing that experience with our critical tools is one way to help ensure that our scholarship does not reproduce violence. Moreover, we must also be conscious that we often neglect some kinds of violence in favor of others. White feminists have been justly critiqued for their elision of violence against women of color in this work. There are many questions we must ask about how we map such violence and what the vectors are that we should consider intersectionally.

### **A Call to Victorianists**

<31>Given the importance of this work, a non-academic might be tempted to ask why we don’t direct all of our critical energy to the moment itself. Why become (or train) Victorianists? Why we should study literature and, specifically, literature of the nineteenth century for this work, when one could write exclusively about the present or contemporary culture? Not only can studying our literary and cultural history help us understand what Foucault has called the “semantic density” that allows us to create a “history of the present,” he reads the nineteenth century as a signal moment in human history, as well as literary history. As he explains it, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, at a time when language was burying itself within its own density as an object and allowing itself to be traversed, through and through, by knowledge, it was also reconstituting itself elsewhere, in an independent form, difficult of access, folded back upon the enigma of its own origin and existing wholly in reference to the pure act of writing. Literature is the contestation of philology (of which it is nevertheless the twin figure): it leads language back from grammar to the naked power of speech, and there it encounters the untamed, imperious being of words. (*The Order of Things* 300)

If we can lean into this “untamed, imperious being of words,” we can trace the evolution of discourses that create potent networks fostering violence and inequality and, as a result, understand our own moment far better than without such a practice. This is one clarion call for the work of Victorianists and their value in the academy and in the world today.

<32>By understanding what Bhattacharjee calls the “linguistic predicaments” in Marsh’s work, in other words, we can better understand the linguistic predicaments of our own moment, precisely because of the density of these phenomena. In addition, interrogating the tensions and

elisions in our own moment, as Murray and Richardson note, can make us better readers of the nineteenth century. We might argue that, at a micro-historical level, what Ellen Stockstill and Jessica Mele contend about the authority of our students' voices in creating a transformative learning environment also calls upon us to recognize the ways in which the dominance of our more disciplined voices have continued to shape and reproduce scholarship in our field—for ourselves and the students we train. The impact we could have on the #MeToo conversation is profoundly evidenced in this volume.

<33>Finally, we must also consider what Foucault's case means for the humanities as a critical component of both higher education and social discourse. Without the humanities, this semantic density could remain largely unplumbed and unanalyzed. We, as humanists, can begin to articulate that value anew to a world outside of our fields. Our failure to do so—something the social and natural sciences have taken up as a serious charge—has allowed the public to believe that the humanities are “impractical” or irrelevant.

<34>We have been consigned to a kind of polite leisure, irrelevant to complex social situations like #MeToo or the Black Lives Matter movement, as if we were Aurora Leigh's pretty footstool. Our analysis, however, can help us investigate the complexity of the moment through this dense narrative history, as Feuerstein's essay in this issue explicitly does with regard to Black women's bodies and violence. Moreover, when people speak about themselves in their everyday lives, they typically render their experience as a narrative. There are few better situated than we, as scholars who study narrative professionally, to analyze these responsively and responsibly. In her work on personal experience, Davies notes something from a social scientist's perspective that most literary critics would consider a truism, “Narratives can be a positive source of insight” (747).

<35>In defying the prohibition on “actual experience” in academic writing, we can not only shift the terms of our scholarship and the profession, we can help our colleagues and the broader world outside of academe understand how our work as humanists is powerfully relevant to the moment we are navigating now. Our case for the humanities, in other words, can be elevated by our willingness to help those outside of our field understand the powerful relevance of a Victorianist's work to our current moment and to real human experience situated in that moment—something research shows that we already believe about ourselves (Holm, Jarrick, and Scott 45).

<36>For the humanities to remain vital, we must consider how at least some of us can speak differently to the world around us. We are losing tenure lines and seeing declining enrollments and majors. “Republican governors have proposed cuts to humanities departments at state universities to rebalance funding towards more obviously ‘practical’ subjects” (Tworek). As early as 1978, we observe a cultural phenomenon in which even a Congressional report refers to

“the popular belief that humanities and the arts are fluff, unrelated to the serious affairs of life” (960),—a belief that the *Humanities World Report of 2015* indicates remains common today (Holm, Jarrick, and Scott).<sup><8></sup> As the authors of the report describe it: “humanities scholars [are] removed from the world, only too content to live in their ivory towers and unable to relate to real-world problems, [but this does] not conform with how humanists perceive their role and value.” Holm, Jarrick, and Scott see this problem as a consequence of a “lack of bridge-building rather than an unwillingness to engage” (63). The humanities could truly benefit from helping people see that our capacity to speak to the nineteenth century offers vital and relevant insights into the moment we inhabit now—even when we don’t explicitly make the turn to 2020. If we mean to meaningfully engage with #MeToo, we must not be discouraged, however, from speaking as our expertise permits.

<sup><37></sup>I confess (Foucault would have a word or two to say about this as well) that I remain uneasy about and am not very skilled at the experiential analysis for which I am calling and from which I believe our field could genuinely benefit. Such work clearly presents a host of new challenges that some of us have just begun to tackle, but I am confident, having had the honor of working with my colleagues now for decades, that we can surmount those challenges and do this work in a meaningful way. The essays in this issue help provide that roadmap. Surely, striving for greater justice—to ourselves, one another, and the world around us—is a powerful motive to reconsider opening our field up and taking the bold step of both becoming better writers in this mode and better and less dismissive readers of it.

## Notes

(1)I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. David Agruss, with whom I had many conversations about this piece, and who pointed me to this passage particularly.

(2)Of course, Butler takes up Foucault's notion of "the soul as the prison of the body" in *Gender Trouble*. An important point to make about this book is the way in which, despite its difficulty, it was used by activists to advocate for gender justice. This fact surprises many students, but it demonstrates the desire in the world outside of academia for our leadership. We can drive our scholarship to become a more vibrant part of the cultural dialogue, something I will address at greater length below.

(3)Here, I particularly want to note Elaine Freedgood's brilliant "On Not Fighting Lung Cancer," which she posted on academia.edu alongside all of her other work, a move that, in itself, presents a challenge to us to consider these boundaries. I also want to note what the Editors of this issue pointed out to me—a new series of recent publications, like Rachel Feder's hybrid criticism *Harvester of Hearts: Motherhood Under the Sign of Frankenstein*, Rebecca Mead's *My Life in Middlemarch*, Nell Stevens's *The Victorian and the Romantic*, Annette R. Federico's edited volume *My Victorian Novel: Critical Essays in the Personal Voice*. This turn, it seems, has begun, but there is much work left to do. Black Womanist work has been the most consistent in engaging the first-person. We have much to learn from these scholars.

(4)She does offer a means of exploring experience, however: "Making visible the experience of a different group exposes the existence of repressive mechanisms, but not their inner workings or logics; we know that difference exists, but we don't understand it as relationally constituted. For that we need to attend to the historical processes that, through discourse, position subjects and produce their experiences. It is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience. Experience in this definition then becomes not the origin of our explanation, not the authoritative (because seen or felt) evidence that grounds what is known, but rather that which we seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced. To think about experience in this way is to historicize it as well as to historicize the identities it produces" (Scott 401). Ultimately, she says, "The study of experience ... must call into question its originary status in historical explanation. This will happen when historians take as their project not the reproduction and transmission of knowledge said to be arrived at through experience, but the analysis of the production of that knowledge itself" (Scott 412).

(5)One could make a case that our process of peer review and critique has a role to play here as well. Most people choose to disclose a #MeToo experience to trusted and caring listeners, but academia (while it may have many of those trusted and caring listeners) has been built upon the rigorous interrogation and critique of one another's ideas, which could feel disavowing to those writers. Moreover, the academy may not seem a welcoming audience, particularly if that's one

place in which the abuse occurred. Finally, as the Editors note in the introduction, #BelieveWomen postdates #MeToo, though feminists have a history of attention to these issues (“I believe Anita” was a popular button in the early 1990s).

(6)I will be forever grateful to Tamar Heller, a feminist scholar I had never met and one of the first readers of the book for my press, who encouraged me to continue the work of thinking about the relationship between the Victorian and the contemporary moment and who noted the value of the historical bilocation that allowed for a richer analysis.

(7)This case, a study in race, sex, and gender, has often been pivotal to my thinking and to thinking through and with the nineteenth century. I have written on Anita Hill and the relationship of her case to my own study of sensation fiction for *Victorian Literature and Culture*'s “Keywords” issue.

(8)See also Austin Yack, who describes the legislative tenor towards the humanities as one that is functionally “ineffic[ient], or omi[tte]d,” even in the progressive California State Legislature. Sustained critiques can also be found at places like the James G. Martin Center for Academic Renewal, a conservative institute focused on higher education. Jenna A. Robinson condemns fields like ours for their emptiness and advises students to stay away from the humanities with essay titles like “Saving Students from Fluff.” It might be easy to dismiss such criticisms if they didn't sometimes find their way into legislation or exclusively STEM-focused fervor.

## Works Cited

Davies, Pamela. "'Me', 'Me', 'Me': The Use of the First Person in Academic Writing and Some Reflections on Subjective Analyses of Personal Experiences." *Sociology*, vol. 46, no. 4, pp. 744-752.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan, Vintage Books, 1979.

---. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. Vintage Books, 1994.

Freedgood, Elaine. "On Not Fighting Lung Cancer." *Academia.edu*, [www.academia.edu/43161056/On\\_Not\\_Fighting\\_Lung\\_Cancer\\_1.\\_Wings](http://www.academia.edu/43161056/On_Not_Fighting_Lung_Cancer_1._Wings). Accessed 6 July 2020.

Gorichanaz, Tim. "A first-person theory of documentation." *Journal of Documentation*, vol. 75, no. 1, 2019, pp. 190-212.

Gosselin, Abigail. "Philosophizing from Experience: First-Person Accounts and Epistemic Justice." *Journal of Social Philosophy*, vol. 50, no. 1, 2019, pp. 45-68.

H Holm, Poul, Arne Jarrick, and Dominic Scott. *Humanities World Report 2015*. Palgrave MacMillan, 2015.

Peltason, Timothy. "The Way We Read and Write Now: The Rhetoric of Experience in Victorian Literature and Contemporary Criticism." *ELH*, vol. 66, no. 4, 1999, pp. 985-1014.

Robinson, Jenna A. "Saving Students from Fluff." *James G. Martin Center for Academic Renewal*. 20 April 2009, [www.jamesgmartin.center/2009/04/saving-students-from-fluff/](http://www.jamesgmartin.center/2009/04/saving-students-from-fluff/). Accessed 6 July 2020.

Scott, Joan W. "The Evidence of Experience." *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, edited by Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin, Routledge, 1993, pp. 397-415.

Tromp, Marlene. "Sensation Fiction." *Victorian Literature and Culture*. vol. 46. no. 3-4, 2018, pp. 858-861.

---. *The Private Rod: Marital Violence, Sensation, and the Law in Victorian Britain*. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2000.

Tworek, Heidi. "The Real Reason the Humanities Are 'in Crisis'." *The Atlantic*. 18 Dec. 2013, [www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2013/12/the-real-reason-the-humanities-are-in-crisis/282441/](http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2013/12/the-real-reason-the-humanities-are-in-crisis/282441/). Accessed 6 July 2020.

“White House Conference on the Humanities.” Joint Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Select Education of the Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives and the Subcommittee on Education, Arts, and Humanities of the Committee on Human Resources, United States Senate, Ninety-fifth Congress, First and Second Sessions on H.J. Res. 639. (January 1, 1978): U.S. Government Printing Office.

Yack, Austin. “What U.S. Politicians Say About the Humanities: White Paper on the Humanities in Political Discourse, 2009-2015.” 4Humanities.org, 1 March 2016. PDF: [4humanities.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/yack-white-paper.pdf](https://4humanities.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/yack-white-paper.pdf). HTML: [4humanities.org/austin-yack-what-u-s-politicians-say-about-the-humanities-2016/](https://4humanities.org/austin-yack-what-u-s-politicians-say-about-the-humanities-2016/). Accessed 6 July 2020.