

PREFACE

“College” is an old French word dating to the fourteenth century when it was used to denote a body of apostles gathered in one accord to serve Christ. Its derivative, “collegiality,” was the elusive hope for the Church Militant. Obviously, the term has evolved and perhaps devolved into secular use and has lost much of the prestige it once enjoyed, now that universities subsume colleges, award advanced degrees, and offer greater opportunity for research. The term “collegiality” is rarely heard anymore, and even rarer is an actual body of people who gather in one accord about anything. Nevertheless, collegiality is something I have experienced and have come to treasure from working with the insightful and generous contributors who wrote chapters for this volume. They strove to squeeze in their research and writing amid busy university schedules and without remuneration. We academics do such things as a labor of love. The pursuit of knowledge and intellectual curiosity drive us. To pursue it alongside a group of women who have shared the same vision for a project and have shared an appreciation for the labor that preempted to our own work (such as the women writers of the long nineteenth century as well as the critics, scholars, and biographers), has proven to be a bonding experience that is incredibly invigorating and rewarding. It is collegiality at its best.

This book was not my idea. In March 2015 I sent one of my Wollstonecraft manuscripts to Ryan Jenkins, who was an editor at Palgrave. Its premise challenged the myriad and disparate bibliographical portraits of Mary Wollstonecraft. Ryan thought the idea was marketable but suggested that I might broaden the treatment beyond Wollstonecraft. He asked me instead to consider a number of English women writers whose images have

also been deflected. Since I was then trying to get five books on Wollstonecraft published at that time, there was no way that I could do what he suggested by myself. So I put out a call for papers through the Victoria ListServ, that lovely electronic forum that is as useful and pleasant as a tea party. Sponsored by the University of Indiana, it allows lovers of the long nineteenth century to exchange research ideas. In short, it promotes collegiality among us Victorianists.

I received a good response, so good, that I could not accept everyone's abstract, especially all five who wanted to write on the Brontës or all four interested in George Eliot. I wanted a good mix of well-seasoned scholars as well as a few professors who were just launching their careers, and as subjects I wanted a good mix of women writers from the long nineteenth century. I could not have wished for a more collegial group of co-laborers, who were enthusiastic about the subject and produced outstanding articles, and offered them cheerfully and generously. They were even collegial during the editing process. But I am not just thankful for their contributions; I am thankful that I got to know them and got to learn from them. It is amazing to me that this book had a single thesis, but that every article had a unique twist in developing the thesis. It just shows that fourteen heads are better than one. This book is thirteen times better than it would be had I written it myself. It is as that wise Wallace Stevens proved: There are "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird."

Thus I thank Ryan for the idea and granting me a contract with Palgrave Macmillan to pursue it. I give a heart-felt thanks to the contributors of this volume: Magdalena Nerio, Sarah Faulkner, Julie Donovan, Katherine Montwieler, Helen Luu, Deborah Logan, Elizabeth Way, Anna Koustinoudi, Sarah E. Maier, Taryne Jade Taylor, Nancy Marck Cantwell, and Constance Fulmer. To them I say, "Thank you for your collegiality. Thank you for the passion you have for women's literature. Thank you for your devotion to searching for beauty and truth."

Fostering collegiality that will endure from generation to generation is one of my dearest goals as a professor, and I have been allowed to do that at Liberty University with students who helped me with the editing, especially with my introduction and chapter. Jesus gave us some good advice when He asked, "How can you say to your brother [and sister], 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye?" (Luke 6.42). We editors have the same tendency, so I was grateful that these students offered their own set of eyes and editing gifts to show me my planks. My thanks go to James Bojaciuk, Macael

Bowles, Micailyn Geyer, Christiana Johnson, Kelly Kramer, Nychele Kemper, Rebecca Pinkard, and Hannah Rainous. It is my hope that the experience will further their own careers in research, writing, and editing.

Those of us who teach English literature may not always feel blessed as we trudge through the miry clay of grading papers, but we are truly blessed to be in a profession that pays us to love and teach the writing of so many brilliant and talented men and women that made their mark on the page. Therefore, in addition to all of the people listed above who have enriched my life with their collegiality, my last declaration of gratitude goes to the brave women who battled through a sticky and precarious web of gender restrictions in order for women of my generation and those to come to enjoy the freedom that we know today, beginning with Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Mary Wollstonecraft and continuing with Edith Simcox and thereafter. It is my hope that regardless of how they have been portrayed in biographies, *Biographical Misrepresentations* stands as a monument to their pluck and tenacity.

Lynchburg, USA

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Writers

A Hall of Mirrors and the Long Nineteenth Century

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