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Introduction for Roundtable no. 2

Helen Kingstone and Trev Broughton

The 'Born in 1819' project examines the cohort of Britons who were exact contemporaries of Queen Victoria, to ask what they shared and how they differed, to what extent they were conscious of their contemporaneity and whether we might see them as part of a generation: the first Victorians. This is the second of two Roundtables. The first (in JVC 24.3) focused on individuals from that cohort: George Eliot, John Ruskin, Charles Kingsley, Arthur Hugh Clough, Ernest Jones, Montagu Burrows and Julia Byrne. In this second Roundtable, we turn our focus to groups, to questions of generational identification, and hence to issues of perspective and methodology.

Roundtable 1 focused on two questions. The first asked how individuals born in 1819 conceptualized generation: to what extent, and with what limits, they located themselves among generational contemporaries and how these imaginings played out in their writings and careers. As a number of our contributors noted, a subject such as George Eliot, John Ruskin, Charles Kingsley or Montagu Burrows could inhabit a dense web of connections with close contemporaries while theorizing generation in much more historically or anthropologically expansive terms. A second cluster of contributions focused on how the life-courses and preoccupations of members of our cohort – including Arthur Hugh Clough, Ernest Jones, Montagu Burrows and Julia Byrne – appeared in hindsight to be in contrasting counterpoint to the generational patterns implied by existing historiography and disciplinary paradigms. The difference turns in part on how far we take self-consciousness to be a salient factor in 'generationalization': a factor pursued further in this collection. Here we show how the 1819 cohort might have seen themselves in lateral groupings other than the 30-year strata envisioned by Karl Mannheim, and how their lack of visible generational unity might have led us to ignore or sideline important parallels between members of the cohort.

The perspectives adopted by the six essays in this part range from close-ups to synoptic cohort-based approaches. The latter essays combine digital and quantitative methods to survey a broader group than might otherwise be possible. James Chandler on *England in 1819* (1998) and Malcolm Chase on *1820* (2013) have shown the insights that can be gained from focusing the gaze on a single year, an idea Gail Marshall is developing in her

forthcoming book on 1859.¹ The ‘Born in 1819’ project combines this ‘punctual historicism’ with the longer span of this generation’s lifetimes: this group was born in the inauspicious ‘Year of Peterloo’, but our essays on their lives consider 1819 and onwards.² These essays thus incorporate the oft-forgotten factor of age into their analyses, and the project’s key concept of contemporaneity brings it to the fore.³

Today ideas of the ‘generational’ and the ‘contemporary’ have in common that they exist on two intersecting axes: they encompass both diachronic differences and synchronic identifications. But how these differences and commonalities are understood may vary widely. For example, ‘Oedipal’ parent-child generational antagonism was perhaps less relevant in nineteenth-century multi-child families where sibling ages spanned most of a generation, or in working-class families where children needed to begin earning at a young age, let alone in households that brought together assorted relatives, servants, lodgers and others under one roof. In terms of synchronic generational identities, we need to recognize class and gender divergences among what Karl Mannheim calls ‘generational units’.⁴ Among our 1819 cohort, for example, consciousness of coevalness with contemporaries is stronger among middle- and upper-class men, who shared the formative experiences of university education with other men, than among women who were categorically excluded from those institutions. Women may access a sense of lateral community through friendships with their brothers’ friends or brothers’ friends’ sisters, but the sense of a precise age cohort might well in this context be fuzzier. This is one of the many ways in which, as Barbara Caine has noted, the meanings of generation may divaricate according to gender as well as class, a finding which plays out in multiple ways across the collection.⁵

Trev Broughton’s piece opens this second Roundtable by drawing our attention to the multitude of competing priorities and practicalities that might have stood in the way of generational identification for this cohort. She observes that ‘even when individuals were

¹ James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago, Ill. ; London: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Malcolm Chase, *1820: Disorder and Stability in the United Kingdom* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013). Details of Gail’s book?

² For the term ‘punctual historicism’, see Tom Mole, *What the Victorians Made of Romanticism: Material Artifacts, Cultural Practices, and Reception History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), p. 23.

³ We are not alone in identifying this cohort’s bicentenary as a fruitful moment to reflect on the significance of contemporaneity: *Victorians Journal* is also preparing a special issue on ‘significant figures and events in the long-nineteenth-century book-ended by 1819 and 1919’. Deborah Logan, ‘*Victorians Journal* CFP’, VICTORIA mailing list, 6 Feb 2019.

⁴ Karl Mannheim, ‘The Problem of Generations’, in *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. by Paul Kecskemeti (London and New York: Routledge, 1952), pp. 276–322 (p. 304).

⁵ Barbara Caine, ‘When did the Victorian Period end? Questions of Gender and Generation’, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 11 2 (2006), 317–325, <https://doi.org/10.3366/jvc.2006.11.2.317>.

aware of their own ages, other metrics of seniority – place within the family, number of years of apprenticeship served, length of time since conversion or baptism or migration – may have trumped chronological age as a salient identity.’ She nonetheless argues that ‘between the beginning and end of Victoria’s life, [...] there was a gradual embedding of age- and generational- identification into the micropractices and cultural lexicons of her subjects.’ Everyday reminders of key dates in the Queen’s life, whether in almanacs, diaries or jubilee celebrations, ‘may have disseminated cohort-consciousness among citizens roughly coeval to the Queen.’

While most of the chapters in this Roundtable examine their subjects longitudinally, across their lifetimes, Gail Marshall’s piece focuses on a single year: 1859, when our cohort reached the age of 40. In particular, she compares the very different but strikingly intertwined 40th years of Queen Victoria and George Eliot. As she emphasizes, the two women were on very different life trajectories in 1859: Victoria became a grandmother (while mother to nine, including the youngest still a toddler) and frustrated at politics’ interference in this family life, whereas ‘Mr and Mrs Lewes’, consciously without children, were focused on work and navigating the revelation of Eliot’s identity after the publication of *Adam Bede*. However, Marshall traces surprising points of intersection between these two contemporaneous lives. Eliot permeates the royal consciousness as Victoria reads her novel to Albert, while Eliot would have been conscious of Victoria’s negotiations over the identity of the next Prime Minister. Most significantly, through the unmasking of Eliot’s authorial pseudonym, both she and Victoria in this year ‘experience[d] difficulties in reconciling their private feelings with public demands’. They both had to ‘articulat[e] ... a public persona’, and by showing the frustrations this involved, Marshall reminds us of the implications for the women of our cohort in taking on public roles.

A genealogical research approach enables Helen Rogers to add a very different woman, Susanna Inge, to the otherwise all-male cohort of working-class Britons, born within a year of Victoria, who we know to have written autobiographies. They are therefore a cohort for whom we can begin to describe and calibrate degrees of generational belonging and differentiation. The genealogical approach does not just add in women’s experiences, however: it draws attention, in a way other methods may fail to do, to the extent to which the generation of Britons born in the wake of the Peninsular Wars and Peterloo was shaped, and reshaped, by emigration. Again, we see the extent to which different bodies of data, and the different methodologies they invite, not only change the questions that can be asked of

generational identity (what happens to a sense of generational identification when migration is involved?) but interrogate some of the fundamentals of generational definition (does generation as a heuristic survive globalization, and if so in what form?).⁶

Martin Hewitt pauses to consider how robust our current tools are for analyzing generation in the nineteenth century, and to consider how we can build better ones. He points out that our current theoretical apparatus for generational analysis is excessively dependent on the work of Mannheim, and thus ‘rooted in the twentieth century’. He argues that the models Mannheim provides do not map as well onto the nineteenth century, where ‘the language of generations was almost as ubiquitous as in the twentieth, but generational affiliations were less readily adopted, and generational solidarities are much less obviously discerned.’ Instead, he suggests we would do better to think about ‘distinctive nodes of coalescence and commonality’. Among our cohort’s mid-Victorian generation, he suggests these include ‘adolescent encounter with the reform agitations of the 1830s’, responding in different ways from their parents who saw it through the lens of their prior fear of Jacobin Revolution. This cohort also had in common a ‘consciousness of the strength of religious orthodoxy’ that could ostracize those who rejected it, thus shaping the tone of religious debate.

Martin Myrone’s essay identifies the distinctive role played by ‘generational thinking’ in his discipline of Art History, as it prioritizes artistic schools and movements that have articulated clear affiliation and differentiation. He illustrates how in the nineteenth century, vertical models of patrilineal succession were ‘put under pressure’ by horizontal regimes of ‘brotherhood’ in European art, where groups with shared generational identity situated themselves in opposition to the previous generation. However, as a cross-current within this general trend, the perception of British art from outside at the time was that it was ‘inherently diverse and individualistic’, with less ‘generational coherence’ than contemporaneous movements on the continent. He brings fresh insights to this accepted narrative by moving away from ‘programmatic artistic groupings’ and instead drawing on documentary records – many of them digital – that enable an ‘aggregated’ overview of all artists born in Britain and Ireland in 1819.

⁶ If we had framed this project around ‘Scots born in 1819’ rather than around ‘Britons’ (a category numerically dominated by the English), for instance, the outcome would have been very different, not least because a distinctive, and more inclusive, educational system produced different kinds of lateral ties, and because a much higher proportion of the Scottish cohort of 1819, including about half of its notabilities, died far from the UK. The question of generational identity would have to be posed differently, and this would inflect what a sense of contemporaneity consisted of.

Lastly, Helen Kingstone's piece uses an existing dataset about our 'Born in 1819' cohort to explore, via the methods of corpus linguistics, the relationship between late Victorian historiography, biography and the construction of eminence. Examining how this group were represented shortly after their deaths in the *Dictionary of National Biography* (1885–1900; *DNB*), she investigates the difference that contemporariness – experienced as historical and generational proximity – made to the ways our cohort was commemorated in the late nineteenth century. In doing so, she explores the role of collective biography as a narratively diffuse and topically dispersed genre in mitigating the uncertainties and compromises of recent hindsight. Kingstone demonstrates that analyzing the *DNB* entries for the cohort born in 1819 as at once a cross-section and a corpus 'can offer us new glimpses of collective biographical techniques and reveal shared patterns of representation.'

Hewitt, Myrone and Kingstone use the opportunities afforded by digitization to develop prosopographical and historiographical readings. The generational patterns they identify ultimately point away from the more familiar landmarks of modernization, and towards a different apprehension of cultural change. This new narrative might place emphasis instead on shifting class relations, emigration and empire, the development of the UK regions and the advent of a sustainable middle-rank in the creative industries.

Does the salience of contemporariness as an historical axis depend on, or belie, a group's shared values or horizons, conscious cohort solidarities and generational identifications? The first three papers in this set focus, as did Roundtable 1, on contemporaries' own perceptions of generation, while broadening the focus to consider group relationships as well as individuals. In the latter three papers, Kingstone's shows how the 1819 cohort's close contemporaries found themselves reflecting on them as biographical, and even historical, subjects, and struggling to achieve a vantage point. The essays by Myrone and Hewitt extend the perspective even further, reflecting on the conventions and challenging the methods by which historians of art and ideas have shaped our perception of Victorian generations. Their use of large datasets affords new ways of thinking about familiar categories, 'schools' and disciplinary paradigms.

We hope that these two Roundtables together will help to spark new conversations about periodization in Victorian Studies and beyond. Might our field look different if we saw the period as starting not with Queen Victoria's accession in 1837, but in 1819? More broadly, current debates often envisage generational identities and divides as new ('Baby-Boomers vs. Millennials' is the most common battleground at the moment). However, the

generation of which the 1819 cohort formed a part – whether we see them as a post-Napoleonic generation, the first Victorians or the mid-Victorians – shared various experiences and characteristics with each of those modern generations. This might enable us to pause and think: perhaps these two living groups have more in common with each other than we might think.