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Suzanne Keen

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This study of narrative technique in Victorian novels introduces the concept of “narrative annexes” whereby unexpected characters, impermissible subjects, and plot-changing events are introduced within fictional worlds which otherwise exclude them. They are marked by the crossing of borders into previously unrepresented places and new genres or modes, challenging Victorian cultural and literary norms. Suzanne Keen’s original readings of novels by Charlotte Brontë, Dickens, Disraeli, Hardy, Kingsley, Trollope, and Wells show these writers negotiating the boundaries of representation to reveal in narrative annexes the subjects (notably sexuality and social class) which contemporary critics sought to exclude from the realm of the novel. Fears of disease, of working men, of Popery, of dark-skinned others, of the poor who toil and starve in close proximity to the rectories, homes, clubs, and walled gardens of Victorian polite society draw readers down narrow alleys, through hedges, across desolate heaths, into narrative annexes.

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Nineteenth-century British literature and culture have been rich fields for interdisciplinary studies. Since the turn of the twentieth century, scholars and critics have tracked the intersections and tensions between Victorian literature and the visual arts, politics, social organization, economic life, technical innovations, scientific thought – in short, culture in its broadest sense. In recent years, theoretical challenges and historiographical shifts have unsettled the assumptions of previous scholarly syntheses and called into question the terms of older debates. Whereas the tendency in much past literary critical interpretation was to use the metaphor of culture as “background,” feminist, Foucauldian, and other analyses have employed more dynamic models that raise questions of power and of circulation. Such developments have re-activated the field.

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# VICTORIAN RENOVATIONS OF THE NOVEL

*Narrative Annexes and the Boundaries of Representation*

SUZANNE KEEN

*Department of English  
Washington and Lee University  
Lexington, Virginia*



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*For Beth Tamar Schulman*

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## A NOTE ON EDITIONS OF NOVELS

Whenever possible I have used Penguin or Oxford paperback editions of the novels discussed in detail in the chapters that follow. When one of these readily available teaching editions does not exist, I have chosen a standard or easily accessible edition likely to remain in print. In the remainder of cases, I have resorted to the first edition of the novel in question.