

**The Serious Mrs Stopes: Gender, Writing and Scholarship in Late-Victorian Britain**

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‘And thus, in a Court of Common Law, amid peals of irreverent laughter, the Constitutional Privilege of British Freewomen was *taken from them*, as a Justice worded it, ‘for ever.’  
(Charlotte Carmichael Stopes, *British Freewomen*, 175)

‘Dress reform has at last done this for us ... it has inaugurated a sensible era.’  
(*Rational Dress Society Gazette* (Jan 1889))

<1>The influential mother of a famous daughter, early twentieth-century birth control campaigner Marie Stopes, Charlotte Carmichael Stopes was no insignificant figure in her own time. A successfully published independent writer and scholar, she was the first woman in Scotland to take a university qualification (Blain 1034), and became one of a ‘new generation of university educated women who combined her interest in feminist activities with a keen interest in women’s history’ (Purvis 3). This discussion explores aspects of gender and authorship in late-Victorian Britain with reference to the ambitions and achievements of Charlotte Carmichael Stopes as a writer, feminist and literary critic. The paper provides some insight into Stopes’ life and work, specifically addressing correspondence received in 1888 and 1889 from the editors of two contemporary periodicals, the *Rational Dress Society Gazette* and the *Woman’s World*.

<2>Born in 1841, the daughter of Scottish artist J. F. Carmichael, she attended university classes in Edinburgh, taught by John Stuart Blackie, Professor of Greek at Edinburgh University, ‘at a time when the University was not open to women and courses were given to them privately by the male Professors’ (Briant 20). She achieved the highest qualification then available to a female student, in subjects as diverse as literature, philosophy and science, achieving first class honours (Briant 20).(1) As a female scholar and writer, however, she faced gendered conventions of what could be taken seriously – and what could not – within the culture and society of the 1880s. At the mid-point of this decade, as she gradually began to publish articles and essays in the periodical press, Stopes embarked on a broad investigation of the record of women as citizens in Britain. As she pointed out some years later, in the Preface to her 1894 *British Freewomen*, ‘so many have been surprised at the facts’ of women’s history which, she argued, showed that women had been gradually ‘dissociated first from property, thence from privilege’, until in the nineteenth century, ‘finally she became property’ (Stopes, *BF* 23-24).

<3>Charlotte Carmichael married Henry Stopes, scientist, engineer and brewer, in 1879. He was eleven years her junior (Hall, 1977 16). After their marriage the couple travelled widely. Their first-born daughter Marie travelled with them as a baby on several occasions (Briant 20). Throughout the course of her adult life, Charlotte Carmichael Stopes wrote and published articles, political pamphlets and books on a range of topics, addressing most of her energy towards two field of endeavour: the emancipation of women and the literary history of the English renaissance. Her husband, Henry Stopes, was a keen amateur palaeontologist, an interest that he bequeathed to their daughter, Marie. According to Keith Briant, Stopes was left alone for considerable periods during her husband's expeditions and she used this time for her committees, writing and research (20).

<4>Charlotte Stopes' first book was *The Bacon/Shakespeare Question*, published in 1888: a refutation of the popular speculation that Francis Bacon was the actual author of Shakespeare's plays. This was the first of her nine works of scholarship concerning Shakespeare and literature of his period. Stopes received an award from the British Academy in 1916 for her Shakespearian research, thirteen years before her death in February 1929.(2) It was her study of British women's history, however, that would prove the most popular and influential of her numerous publications.

<5>Stopes is a neglected and significant figure in the history of women's suffrage and her literary scholarship is cited in early twentieth-century academic journals, albeit in sometimes qualified terms (Whalen 1). She combined writing, research and a commitment to social reform. She actively sought the life of a public intellectual, placing her own literary ambitions and political activism above her husband's more conventional parliamentary ambitions. During the parliamentary election campaign of 1889, she was involved in agitating for women's suffrage instead of accompanying her husband on his political rounds. Constance Wilde wrote to her bluntly, 'I think you ought to help him and not Lady Sandhurst' (BL MS Add. 58454: f. 38).

<6>In his 1931 biographical study, *Charlotte Carmichael Stopes, Some Aspects of her Life and Work*, Frederick Boas observed that his subject, "felt during her early years a sense of wrong at the fact that her brother might go to the university and did not care to do so, whereas she wanted to join but was not admitted" (79-80). Given Stopes' intellectual curiosity and hard-won achievements, her resentment the inequities between men and women was perhaps unsurprising. It was the seriousness of her determination to pursue both university education and public recognition for her writing and scholarship that was, however, remarkable. Stopes was equally serious in pursuing the various causes that she embraced, whether on behalf of rational dress, women's suffrage or Shakespearean authorship. Others were not always in a position to regard her as seriously as she took herself. Although her husband was supportive and regarded her as great-minded, he nevertheless felt the need to apologise for her maternal inattention to his daughters (Hall, 1977 25-26). The literary establishment was qualified in its reception of her research, but Stopes evidently paid little attention to any obstacles, striving to win academic recognition and acceptance. Writing to Marie in May 1906 of a formal dinner with the Shakespearians she noted that, 'they put me at the high table again ... the only woman on my own account – the others were wives and daughters...'. Marie knew well how to wound her competitive mother. In a reply to Charlotte which criticised her mother's support for the radical

actions of the Pankhursts in their campaign for female suffrage, she wrote: 'I was speaking about the subject today and not one ... [had] ... even *heard* of you' (Hall 54).

<7>Gabriele Schwab argues that 'literature may intervene' in the production of otherness because it 'engages language' in forming culture and discourse (xi). This is particularly so with regard to the 'threatening otherness' of women.(3) Stopes sought to change the gendered boundaries of scholarly discourse through her own interventions in the sphere of letters and ideas and to pave the way for women to participate fully in public life. Women had succeeded privately throughout the nineteenth-century as novelists, essayists and as contributors to popular and specialist magazines, largely accepting the public limitations placed upon them.(4) Their acceptance as authoritative scholars and judicial literary critics was slower to achieve. Solveig Robinson observes, with reference to the work of Kate Flint, that recognition of women as serious readers and writers was constrained by entrenched and antagonistic notions of gendered authority until well into the twentieth century. In a time when 'authors as diverse as Sarah Stickney Ellis, Alfred Tennyson, and John Ruskin reiterated the theme that woman's proper place was in a domestic supporting role to masculine authority, women's ability to judge for others was assumed to be strictly limited' (Robinson xi).

<8>Stopes' efforts during the 1880s to reach a wider readership were met by reluctance to embrace her as a contributor. The publisher Cassell had given editorial imprimatur of a new magazine for women to Oscar Wilde. Wilde saw it as an opportunity to produce a publication for the types of stylish and informed women readers who attended his public lectures on aesthetics and dress. His approach and the literary status of its contributors attracted Stopes. Her first submissions to the *Woman's World* were initially ignored and then returned. But, as Keith Briant observes, 'Charlotte had the quality of tenacity' (20). She continued to send in submissions, regardless of rejection.

<9>Any picture of Stopes written since 1977 must be coloured by the perspectives of her daughter's mid-twentieth-century biographers: notably Keith Briant's *Passionate Paradox: The Life of Marie Stopes* and Ruth Hall's substantial study *Passionate Crusader: The Life of Marie Stopes*. Briant's work was published in 1962, a by-product of his flirtation with Marie in 1938, at the time of his editorship of the literary magazine *Isis* (Hall, 1977 280-282). Hall's account of Marie Stopes, written more than a decade later, during the 1970s, depicts Charlotte Carmichael Stopes as a 'born old maid', distant and preoccupied with her feminist and literary interests, repelled by Henry's physical ardour and afflicted with the shame of her Victorian religious upbringing (19). As the correspondence between Marie and Charlotte shows, cited in Hall's biography (53-54), Marie's view of her radical mother as demanding, annoying and eccentric arose at least partly from her equally powerful need for recognition; which drove her own achievements as a woman scientist, famous author, proponent of birth-controlled sex, divorcee and seeker after erotic transcendence. Briant's account is kinder to Charlotte Stopes. He suggests that her husband Henry's preoccupation with paleontology contributed to the distance between them, noting that Henry does not once refer to his wife in his travel journal (20). Hall argues, however, that evidence from correspondence proves that Stopes was sexually unaware and therefore 'frigid' and antagonistic to her husband's husbandly desire (19).

<10>Other characterisations of Charlotte Carmichael Stopes have also alluded to her in gendered terms. Shakespearean aficionado Sir George Greenwood's 1925 discussion of the controversy surrounding the Droeshout engraving, describes Stopes rather dismissively as an 'ardent and orthodox worshipper at the Stratfordian shrine...!' (Greenwood 18).(5) Two years after her death, in 1931, Boas assured his readers that despite her heroic public endeavours, 'Mrs Stopes neglected none of the domestic duties' (83). Decades later Stopes had not shrugged off her fusty Victorian lady's mantle, even in the context of feminist historical recovery. A substantial reference for literary scholars, published in 1990, remarks that Stopes 'never ceased to find sex repellent, and inculcated guilt in her daughter' (Blain 1034). In another significant study of British women's history she is portrayed gently but humorously in reference to her daughter: 'Charlotte Stopes was a supporter of feminist causes and a pillar of the Rational Dress Society. Marie, adhering to this creed, never wore corsets under her floating and rather artistic garments' (Hall, 1993 119).

<11>In these examples, Stopes is never presented as a dedicated and ground-breaking scholar of literary history, nor as a successful freelance writer and journalist, nor as a feisty turn-of-the-nineteenth-century activist for women's emancipation, although, arguably, all these achievements were hers. Rather, she is portrayed as domestically dutiful, sexually repressed, slightly foolish, at times misguided and ultimately trivial. Her Shakespearean interests are characterised in terms of exaggerated emotive fervour and religious excess; her intellectual endeavours almost invisible within a gendered discourse of female embodiment and sublimated desire.

<12>What seems to me most fascinating, therefore, among these cross-currents of representation, egoism and desire, is the extent to which the picture of Charlotte is framed by thoroughly conventional post-Victorian representations of the obsessive, unfeminine intellectual woman and that these are absorbed and rearticulated by late twentieth-century accounts. Her efforts were to live an independent, active and intellectually rewarding life and to improve conditions for women, yet Charlotte Carmichael Stopes has been fixed in the public record as a distant, self-absorbed, frigid bluestocking of the dullest and most irritating kind, with only a handful of references by feminist historians to expand or enrich this view.

<13>Considerable feminist scholarship, historicist and theoretical, has examined and criticised contemporary representations of nineteenth-century woman as nastily embodied: voracious, duplicitous, preoccupied with fashion and other superficial pursuits, or as hideously obsessed with religious and social reforms.(6) There is plenty of evidence that Stopes could be pestiferous, but, equally, she made a substantial contribution in her fields of endeavour. To take up Schwab's reference to the 'threatening otherness' of the intelligent and opinionated woman reader, this paper argues that resistance to Stopes' earnest literary offerings and interventions, may have been motivated as much by established codes of social position and involuntary gendered assumptions, as by her sometimes irritating and repeated insistence on being heard.

<14>The discursive tensions between seriousness and frivolity, sincerity and insincerity, authenticity and artifice can be identified as a theme with some longevity in Victorian culture, from Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* to *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens. The contradictions of moral and intellectual earnestness are famously satirised in Wilde's most celebrated play *The*

*Importance of Being Ernest*, his ‘trivial play for serious people’ about the double life of the Victorians. As can be seen in the case of Charlotte Carmichael Stopes, however, ‘seriousness’ is also a gendered discourse that shaped how women were commonly represented; as passive fretful creatures, incapable of real intellectual pursuit, driven by vain desire for success or by bodily limitations. The periodical press of the era, not least the satirical *Punch*, provides a rich and wide-ranging source for examples of feminine representation and caricature, from its famous cartoons mocking ‘Bloomers’ in 1851 to later verses and cartoons of New Women as mannish, bespectacled and neglectful of wifely duty. Broadly speaking these and numerous other examples demonstrated that where women exercised a zeal for social reform or public endeavour, particularly in the arena of scholarship or female emancipation, they were liable to be mocked, disparaged and caricatured (Shapiro; Cunningham).(7)

<15>The work of making visible the contributions of women writers is crucial for the development of historical and literary scholarship, and more importantly for the recognition and republication of significant writers. My project here is not, or at least not wholly, the recovery of a neglected Victorian woman's life. The instantiation of Victorian women writers in terms of literary/historical recovery can tend to reproduce and reposition women writers as always covered or hidden by other more dominant and presumably more masculine ideological layers. Or, it may tend to operate within a translucent disciplinary frame, which may only serve to return Victorian women writers and readers to silence as the popularity of gender studies waxes and wanes. At the same time, this work continues to be crucial in guiding scholars and writers in their attentions to the past and its relevance to the present. Charlotte Carmichael Stopes is interesting in this context precisely for her radically unfashionable, but purposeful, contribution to feminism *and* her determination to engage with other scholars, including the British academic establishment, on subjects as reified as Shakespearean history.

<16>By 1888 Victorian England had experienced decades of wide ranging social and political reforms, among them the the Public Health Acts of 1848, 1872 and 1875, the 1867 Representation of the People Act, the Married Women’s Property Acts of 1870 and 1888 and the 1880 Free Education Act, to name just a few. Women were permitted to study at universities, with colleges for women established at both Cambridge and Oxford, although full degree qualification was not yet available. Social reform had, however, become a way of life for the Victorians and a significant rhetorical device for social control, as much as for improvements in health, education and living conditions for poor and working people. If these concerns were addressed through evolving discourses of emancipation, social and economic progress, established presumptions of social hierarchy and male authority remained ascendant. As Maureen Moran observes, while these enacted reforms “might give the impression that the ethos of Victorian politics was one of pro-active reform, new legislative changes were as much about compromise as permissiveness” (47). With the 1880s, Victorian consumerism had reached unprecedented levels, double moral codes were notoriously commonplace with respect to sexual practice and as the Victorian era drew to a close, these repeatedly erupted into public scandal surrounded by a new rhetoric of moral and social decline (49).(8)

<17>Charlotte Carmichael Stopes was a woman of her time in the sense that she joined the Victorian fever for reform as a campaigner for rational dress and later for women’s suffrage. Her

work on Shakespearean history too was pursued in a spirit of campaign. She entered the fray with her 1888 attempt to debunk the theory that Francis Bacon was the actual author of the Shakespeare plays. In 1904 she took on a controversy among Shakespearian aficionados concerning the identity of Hollar's engraving of a drawing from the famous Stratford bust, which she argued had been previously altered.<sup>(9)</sup> It might be said that the greatest of Stopes' causes was herself and indeed she was tireless in seeking to interpolate her voice into the public arena. Early in her career she encountered resistance to the promulgation of her views and theories from at least one uninterested male editor, namely Oscar Wilde. This did not weaken her persistence: Stopes demanded to be taken seriously, by friends, editors and co-reformers. She wrote copiously to periodical editors and chided members of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies on those rare occasions when they were slow to support her writings. Towards the end of her career, in 1906, she complained to NUWSS Secretary Edith Palliser, for example, that the *Women's Suffrage Journal* had not yet published her reports from her public lecture tour (WL Autograph Letter Coll. Item 9/01/0164, 27 Nov, 1906). She later lobbied Palliser's successor, Phillippa Strachey, for assistance with circulation of her books and pamphlets (WL, Autograph Letter Coll. Item 9/01/0166, 12 Nov, 1907).<sup>(10)</sup> The NUWSS had published Stopes' writings in the *WSJ* and had helped to disseminate Stopes' work. It continued to do so, even as she expressed sympathy for Emmeline Pankhurst's radical splinter group, the Womens' Social and Political Union.<sup>(11)</sup> Of more pressing and immediate concern for both the NUWSS and the WSPU at this time, however, was the political context in which the womens' suffrage movement found itself, following the 1906 General Election which brought to power a Liberal government opposed to female suffrage.

<18>While pursuing literary research interests and writing short articles for which she sought publication in various journals and magazines, Stopes worked as an activist and pamphleteer in favour of women's rights. Her second book was entitled *British Freewomen: Their Historical Privilege* published by Swann Soennenshein in 1894. A study of the role and rights of women in British history, this work established historical precedents for female citizen participation in decision-making, professional and public life, drawing on some of the shorter articles Stopes had written on these themes. Although criticised by some of her contemporaries (Crawford 656), it provided fuel for the female suffrage movement until well into the twentieth century. As Laura E. Nym Mayall remarks, *British Freewomen* was 'perhaps the single most influential text in casting women's struggle for the vote within the radical narrative of loss, resistance and recovery' since Stopes' arguments, as outlined in successive editions of *British Freewomen*, were frequently cited by 'suffragists of all stripes in making the case for women's suffrage in print, before crowds, and in the courtroom' (Mayall 350). Jane Rendall notes that the book was first published in a shorter version as a pamphlet for distribution by women's suffrage societies (Rendall 33). However, earlier articles on related subjects had also been published in the *Women's World* in 1889.<sup>(12)</sup>

<19>There was a gap of approximately six years between the publication of Stopes' first and second books. In 1888 at the time of the release of *The Bacon/Shakespeare Question*, her eldest daughter, Marie, was eight years old and absorbed a good deal of her mother's attention. Her younger daughter, Winifred, was born in August 1885. A 'serious and romantic-minded young woman,' Charlotte Stopes attempted to tutor Marie from an early age, for instance in languages, but her daughters were not always receptive to her teachings. Briant observes that while her

mother doted on Marie, she later goaded her daughter 'by criticism and expression of disappointment in her worldly progress' (Briant 20).

<20>In 1888 Stopes was absorbed in achieving some worldly progress of her own. She wrote prolifically on worthy subjects which she strove to publish in the periodical press. She joined the Rational Dress Society founded by Lady Haberton and Emily King and contributed several articles to its mouthpiece, the *Rational Dress Society Gazette*. The *Gazette* ran for about 2 years and became a financial drain on its supporters. Its stance, as announced on the first page of its first issue, was 'against the introduction of any fashion in dress that either deforms the figure, impedes the movements of the body or in any way tends to injure the health' ('Editorial Note', April 1). As with other cultural manifestations of the late-Victorian period the *Rational Dress Society Gazette* floundered between radical critique and social conservatism: 'We do not profess to do more than *suggest* a new form of dress' ('Editorial Note', July 1). The *Gazette* made its contribution to feminism by helping to liberate women from the physical damage caused by waist compression and heavy skirts. It received coverage, if at times mocking, in the press of the day. Only six issues were ever produced, however, and neither these, nor the garments sold by the Society were able to pay their way.

<21>Seeking a wider readership than the select band of converts who received the *Gazette*, Stopes made repeated efforts to achieve publication in the new *Woman's World*. Wilde had been appointed literary editor to the magazine by Cassell & Co, following his popularly celebrated American lecture tour, courtesy of the impresario Richard D'Oyley Carte. Famous for his personal style and injunctions on aesthetics, Wilde had lectured on topics related to rational dress for women and took the opportunity to publish his views in the new magazine, arguing, for example that 'without freedom there is no such thing as beauty in dress' ('Literary and Other Notes' 40).(13)

<22>At the outset of his editorship of the *Woman's World* Wilde corresponded speculatively and flatteringly with many potential contributors inviting them to send work to his office, then stringing them along when he was besieged with offerings from women writers and journalists. In the case of Minnie Simpson, for example, he wrote:

I have been asked to become the literary adviser of one of Cassell's monthly magazines and am anxious to make it an organ through which women of culture and position will be able to find expression for their views ... I would take it as an honour to have your name among the contributors ... I should like an article about six or seven pages on some literary subject - some woman of letters for instance - or some salon in Paris (Ellman 259).(14)

<23>He later dragged out the correspondence in a thoroughly dissembling manner. When Simpson submitted a long article, Wilde complimented her work, first suggesting the breaking up of her article into parts, and later holding publication over altogether. He eventually wrote again insisting that "any short article from your pen would be very welcome at any time" (N. W. Senior Papers E704).

<24>In the context of these and other such editorial negotiations, the Wilde/Stopes correspondence may be useful evidence for extended considerations of Wilde's editorship of the *Woman's World* and how the magazine was promoted. My emphasis here, however, is to foreground the efforts of Charlotte Carmichael Stopes in the fields of journalism, activism and scholarship as part of the wider consideration of the difficult mechanics through which women operated as agents of social and cultural change during the late-Victorian period and into the twentieth century.

<25>In some ways Charlotte Carmichael Stopes possessed solid credentials as a cultural commentator and literary historian.(15) She occupied a relatively secure social position. She had achieved an unusually high level of education for a woman of her time and was already published, both in book form and among the pages of the periodical press. Her husband held business interests which were, at the time, lucrative (Briant 20; Pearson 193). Mindful of their readership, however, the editors of the *Woman's World* – Oscar Wilde assisted by Cassell's in-house editor Arthur Fish – were unreceptive.

<26>Wilde sought to create a magazine that honoured the history and culture of women: a publication that would embrace writing about art, literature and style, but would be popular with a wide readership.(16) Initially the *Woman's World* identified itself as supporting the role of women in public life through its stylish investigations of women in the liberal arts, education, sciences, etc, although it became narrower and more conservative as Wilde's interest and involvement waned. For a number of women writers, the *Women's World* also offered a new opportunity for publication and income.(17) For writers like Stopes, Wilde's pose of one who was serious about frivolous things and vice versa, his embrace of persiflage alongside philosophy and literature suggested the possibility of bridging the conventional barrier between femininity and rational discourse. Thus, issues such as the health effects of women's costume could be taken seriously but, just as importantly, women themselves could be seen as serious participants in public life. Wilde himself appears to have been interested in the *Women's World* for its possibilities as a source of metaphor and identity transformation. His previous experiments with his own costume and public pontifications on the subject of dress were widely published.(18)

<27>Stopes, however, was not a glamorous woman of fashion, nor a dazzling and mysterious figure of the European intelligentsia, nor a member of the British social and cultural elite whom Wilde aspired to publish. Her interests were too highbrow, indeed too earnest, and she was inclined to press obscure and particular theories with which others were not always in sympathy. She was strong-minded, insistent and, as some of her correspondence indicates, could be something of a nuisance. Even so, she knew the importance of making her presence felt in order to succeed.

<28>The correspondence relating to these two journals is held with the Stopes Papers at the British Library. The first series of letters is from Constance Wilde to Charlotte Carmichael Stopes. As secretary of the Rational Dress Society, Constance Wilde oversaw the management of their new mouthpiece, the *Rational Dress Society Gazette*. Although she advised Stopes that she was not the editor of the journal, Constance Wilde undertook all *Gazette* correspondence and remained Stopes' primary point of contact with the Society. She also deflected several queries

from Stopes about publication in the *Woman's World*. The second series of letters is from the editor of the *Woman's World*, ostensibly written by Oscar Wilde. The letters are mostly unsigned, (except with the sobriquet 'The Editor') and are not written in Wilde's hand, although arguably the earlier items adopt a 'Wildean' tone and style. Presumably the letters were dictated: several are written in the hand of Arthur Fish who was to take over the management of the magazine following Wilde's withdrawal towards the end of 1889. Given a discernable shift in the letter-writer's language, Fish can be assumed author as well as scribe for the later letters in the series.

<29>These letters are mentioned in several accounts of the life of Marie Stopes, as background into her connections and influences. There has been no substantive discussion of them, as far as I am aware, nor has there been any consideration of the life of Charlotte Carmichael Stopes since the essay produced for the Royal Society of Literature by Frederick S. Boas in 1930. She is referred to, often in somewhat patronising terms, in various early twentieth-century discussions of Shakespeare and Stratford history. More recently, as indicated during the course of this discussion, her contribution to the women's emancipation movement has been referenced in scholarly studies of women activists in British history. The Wilde/Stopes correspondence offers evidence that Stopes' was engaged in active and professional pursuit of publication and reveal a fascinating, dialogical interplay between the three correspondents. This research has not found access to any extant letters from the Stopes side of the correspondence, to date. The letters from the Wildes are fascinating, however, for the extent to which they provide clear indication of Stopes as an intellectually independent, if at times relentless, responding voice.

<30>In early 1888 Stopes wrote to Constance Wilde about the work of the Rational Dress Society. In the same letter she expressed interest in writing for Oscar Wilde's new magazine the *Woman's World*. Whether her interest in rational dress was a cover for her ambition to publish in the famous Oscar Wilde's fashionable magazine, or whether she was attempting to encourage Constance to use her personal proximity to the editor of the *Woman's World* as a vehicle to enhance the cause of women's health and freedom, can only be speculated. In any case, Stopes evidently submitted an article to *Woman's World* in early 1889, had the piece rejected and could not resist mentioning it to Constance Wilde. In an attempt to distance herself from any responsibility in the matter Constance wrote back firmly:

I have nothing to do with the editing of the *Woman's World* and I did not know that my husband had returned manuscripts of yours. I know that he has enough for about two years hence, and his magazine being an illustrated magazine he *requires* illustrated articles more than anything else. I am sorry you should have been disappointed (BL MS Add. 58454: f. 21, March 1889).

<31>Given the circumstances of their marriage, it is necessary to consider that the relevant parts of Constance Wilde's correspondence with Stopes may have been viewed by her husband. We cannot assume, therefore, that all her letters to Stopes are written precisely in her own 'voice'. (19) The dialogical interplay of voice, gender, authority and authorship, however, seems to me one of the interesting aspects of this material. Indeed, Bahktinian Dialogism may offer a useful approach to the mediations of power and identity at work here. On the one hand, the

correspondence can be seen as an example of what Bakhtin terms 'heteroglossia', a term used in his narrative analysis where the 'monological' voice of authority may be engaged in dialogue or mediated by minor 'characters', or non-authoritative speakers.(20) As the celebrated editor, Wilde speaks in the voice of narrative authority, issuing his determinations of Stopes' ideas and submissions through the personae of Constance Wilde and Arthur Fish, as well as in his own public voice. Stopes cannot have her voice, her writings, 'heard' without broaching a public arena determined by 'monological', gendered practices and representations. On the other hand, Wilde's turns out not to be the only voice heard within this story. Stopes persistence, her refusal to accept rejection as the final word, eventually enabled her to break through editorial resistance.

<32>Stopes was, meanwhile, becoming a regular contributor to the *Rational Dress Society Gazette*. She wrote several times to Constance with (probably unhelpful) suggestions for professionalising the *Gazette* by improving the size of its circulation, such as increasing the number of advertisements, allowing articles to be signed by contributors instead of appearing anonymously and possibly even paying authors for their work. Constance replied first to these suggestions by explaining that: 'I am sorry to say that we shall have to be content at first if we can pay the expense of printing, as we cannot advertise anything that we do not approve' (BL MS Add. 58454: f. 2, Feb, 1888), and later that 'we only print 500 copies which is small inducement to a firm to advertise. If we had more subscribers we should be able to pay our contributors' (f. 21, March 1888). Regarding the question of signed authorship Constance noted: 'I have written to Mrs Pfeiffer to ask if she will consent to have her name to her paper. If she consents I will sign yours too, but the committee did not seem anxious to sign their names' (f. 6, June 1888). It was not yet conventional practice among the organs of the British periodical press to publish signed articles and the move to publish authors' names in the *Gazette* did not succeed. It may have been characteristic of Stopes to want her name attached to her work and indeed to expect authors to take a public stand on any vocational issue at hand. In any case, the debate as it is exercised here is a reminder of the relative obscurity of female authorship within the periodicals of the day.(21) The *Woman's World*, however, did name the authors of feature articles.

<33>Stopes did not confine her opinions and suggestions to the subject of rational dress. In 1889 she suggested that Constance Wilde, then living at Tite St, Chelsea, should mobilise the members of the Chelsea Women's Association to work in support of parliamentary candidates who publicly supported women's suffrage. Constance replied: 'I should explain to you that our ... Association consists almost entirely of working women who, of course, cannot afford time or money to come out of their own district to work' (f. 37, June 1889).

<34>If Stopes could be said to have hounded Constance Wilde, her persistence ultimately proved effective, up to a point, since she was evidently noticed. In September 1889 she received an invitation from Oscar Wilde to write for his magazine:

Dear Madam, I am thinking of taking up the subject of rational dress, upon which I observe you read a paper at the meeting of the British Association. I should be glad to know if you could see your way to write a bright, piquant article on the question (f. 29).

<35>Wilde wrote again on 1 October, asking Stopes to call on him in London – ‘a great favour’ – to discuss the possibility of her future contributions: ‘I could explain our ideas on the subject of an article on the rational dress question much better than by letter’ (f. 29).(22) This opened the floodgates. Keen to capitalise on her opportunity, Stopes sent a considerable number of manuscripts to Wilde's office. Her interests were wide-ranging. She also held a powerful conviction that she was the best one to promote them. The editors of *WW* remained unenthusiastic:

Dear Mrs Stopes, I have been excessively busy on other work or your letter would have been answered before. I have already made arrangements for a series of notes on the Annual Meeting of the RDS when you kindly offered to supply them, and had I known that in default of hearing from me you would write them I should of course have written at once to save the fruitless labour. All that I can do now is with great regret to return them ... I am also returning 'Bonnie Little Mary' and 'Prometheus Unbound' together with 'The Newhaven Fisherwomen'. The paper on Shelley's poems is too profound for our class of reader...  
P. S: I am afraid 'Women's Discussion Societies' is too academical a subject for us. (f. 52, 21 Dec 1889).

<36>Stopes continued to submit her copious writings, in the face of receiving further polite rejections from the *Woman's World*.

Dear Mrs Stopes, I have been through your articles - more than one of which by the way I have seen before - and while recognising their interest I am afraid that they are not especially suitable ... I must also compel myself to decline the paper you are good enough to offer on George Eliot... It was very kind of you to invite me to the meeting of the Norwood discussion class at your house last Friday and but that I was entertaining friends I should have been glad to come (f. 52, March 1890).

<37>Several of her submissions were accepted for publication by the *Women's World*, including an article on Newnham College and another on the question of rational dress: ‘I am particularly pleased with your paper on rational dress ... precisely what I wanted being at once practical and vivacious (f. 52, 11 Oct 1889). An attempt by the magazine to promote a debate on the rational dress question, by inviting readers to write in their comments, failed to produce a response.(23) In January 1890, a letter from the editor observed: ‘The correspondence of the Dress question was very meagre and poor ... we could, of course, have got up a controversy by encouraging someone to assail you, but that was not our object’ (f. 39).(24) Two pieces that had been previously rejected were finally published, including ‘The Newhaven Fishwomen’ and ‘Food and Frost’. However, Stopes was inclined to debate editorial matters. In reference to an apparent complaint about proofs, the editor replied: ‘are you not forgetting that after I had cut a few lines out of your article on ‘Frozen Food’ ... I had at your request to remove the footnote in which you had made a mistake...?’ (f. 39, 27 Feb 1890).

<38>With its contributions from notable women writers and vanguard feminists, including Florence Fenwick Miller, Millicent Garrett Fawcett, Amy Levy, Ella Hepworth Dixon, Emily Faithfull and indeed Charlotte Carmichael Stopes, the *Women's World* can be seen as a precursor

to the more experimental expressions of culture and gender that emerged during the 1890s. In its attempts to merge the genres of popular women's fashion magazine and stylish literary journal, under the initial enthusiasm of Wilde's editorship – to adapt Bakhtin's notion of the Carnivale – the magazine offered a space in which the (as yet) unenfranchised keepers of hearth and home could enter the privileged, masculine domain of public discourse and be acknowledged by name for their contributions.(25)

<39>The *Women's World* thus offered a 'contained subversion' (Edgar and Sedgwick 14), a holiday from everyday Victorian convention, a space where women could speak in playful and serious terms, of clothes and literature, gossip and history, art and emancipation – indeed in the multiple languages of 'new' womanhood. In this context, Stopes can be said to have engaged Wilde in her own Carnavalesque moment. Resistant to authority and officialdom, she repeatedly wrote back to the magazine in earnest mockery of the polite rejections penned by Arthur Fish, refusing to be dismissed and thus insisting that her dialogue with Wilde and, more importantly, the possibility of publication should remain open.

<40>Undoubtedly frustrated by her partial success, Stopes evidently did not hesitate to offer criticism of *Woman's World*, just as she had instructed Constance on her ideas about the improvement of the *Gazette*. The editor replied:

I take note of what you say about the magazine and hope that as time goes on you will find that it holds the balance pretty evenly between the higher and the lower. What we want to do is to justify its title, which is neither the intellectual *WW* nor the Frivolous (BL MS Add. 58454: f. 39).

<41>Although Stopes may well have provoked the air of irritation and condescension expressed in their replies, neither magazine closed the door against her, repeatedly thanking her in fulsome terms for her contributions. Constance Wilde may have been harassed by Stopes' frequent missives, but in her capacity as secretary for the Rational Dress Society she sought and published articles by Stopes on the question of women's dress, also inviting her to speak publicly on the society's behalf. By 1890, however, the *Gazette* was defunct and the *Woman's World* in decline. Wilde had left his editorial post to pursue other interests and Stopes herself moved on, writing articles on William Shakespeare for the *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*.(26)

<42>The case of Charlotte Carmichael Stopes, literary critic, journalist, advocate of women's rights, offers an apt example, for the study of women, agency and authorship in the Victorian period and beyond, and is most interesting for its rehearsal of the tensions in achievement and restriction experienced by non-conformist late-Victorian women writers and critics. Early in her career, Stopes' motivation to write on 'serious' issues relating to women and literature was resisted by her editors as unappealing to women readers. In twentieth-century references to her life she has been represented as domesticated, eccentric, sexually repressed and as inculcating peculiar dress habits in her daughter. The obstacles she faced were not unusual in late-nineteenth-century Britain. Women had entered the fields of writing and journalism in increasing numbers, but inclusion in the establishment press remained harder to achieve. Stopes' eventual success in her chosen arenas relied upon her characteristic persistence and determination. In her conclusion

to *British Freewomen* she wrote of the feminist movement as she might have written of herself: 'if they have not yet reached the Promised Land they can clearly see it ahead, and *they know the way to get there*' (220). Her income was significantly reduced with Henry's illness and death, but this only served to spur her on (Briant 36; Pearson 193). She continued working well into the twentieth century as a feminist activist, Shakespearean scholar and writer.(27)

## Endnotes

(1)Cited in Boas, 1931. Scottish universities were opened to women in 1892.(^)

(2)One Obituary read: 'Mrs. Charlotte Carmichael Stopes died on 6 February, aged 88; she had devoted herself to researches among records in the hope of elucidating the life of Shakespeare, publishing her discoveries in books entitled *William Hunnis and the Revels* (1910), *Burbage and Shakespeare's Stage* (1913), *Shakespeare's Environment* (1914), and *Henry, Third Earl of Southampton* (1922), and in many smaller works; she also edited the fourth volume of *Harrison's Description of England* for the New Shakespeare Society (1908). Mrs. Stopes concentrated her efforts on manuscripts of the late sixteenth century' ('Notes and News'. *History: Journal of the Historical Association* 14. 53 (April 1929): 45).(^)

(3)In examples from male-authored texts of the period, Schwab argues, the two characteristics that mark women's threatening otherness are seduction and abjection (xiii).(^)

(4)For elaboration of the role of women in the Victorian periodical press: Margaret Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own?: Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine, 1800-1914*, London & New York: Routledge, 1996; Barbara Onslow, *Women of the Press in Nineteenth-century Britain*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000; Hilary Fraser, Stephanie Green, Judith Johnston, *Gender and the Victorian Periodical Press*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.(^)

(5)Greenwood also praises Stopes rather fulsomely, but in equally pompous terms, as 'the learned, industrious, and devoted Mrs. Stopes' (13).(^)

(6)Among the groundbreaking feminist analyses of the workings of Victorian gender, sexuality and power, alongside those already cited here, see for example, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, Yale University Press: New Haven, 1979; Elaine Showalter, *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, New York: Pantheon, 1995; Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1987, Deborah Cherry, *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists*, London & New York: 1993.(^)

(7)The Victorian Web posts a selection of relevant images courtesy of Phillip Allingham at <[www.victorianweb.org/periodicals/punch/subjects4.html](http://www.victorianweb.org/periodicals/punch/subjects4.html)> as does the Victorian London website <[www.victorianlondon.org/punch/cartoon17.htm](http://www.victorianlondon.org/punch/cartoon17.htm)>(^)

(8)For discussion of the evolutions of the late Victorian culture see: Herbert F Tucker, *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture*, London: Blackwood, 1999; Elaine Showalter, *Daughters of Decadence: Women Writers of the Fin-de-Siècle*, Rutgers University Press, 1993; and Richard Jenkyns, *Dignity and Decadence: Victorian Art and the Classical Inheritance*, Cambridge, Massachussets: Harvard University Press, 1992.(^)

(9)‘For Mrs. Stopes it was who first set this ball rolling, to wit, the theory that the Stratford Bust was altered when the monument was "repaired and beautified" —as it certainly was—in the years 1748-9. [See her able and copiously illustrated article in the *Monthly Review* of April, 1904, subsequently reprinted in a pamphlet entitled, *The True Story of the Stratford Bust* (John Murray 1904)]’ (Greenwood, 18-19).( ^)

(10)Although her health had been poor, the NUWSS correspondence indicates that Stopes’ capacity for sheer gall had not faltered at the age of sixty-five. Her publications in the leading literary periodical *Fortnightly Review* around this time may have affirmed her sense of her own value to the suffrage cause (Crawford 656).( ^)

(11)Stopes remained a member of the NUWSS but appeared on the platform with Pankhurst at a public rally organised by the WSPU in June 1908 (Crawford 656-57).( ^)

(12)‘The Newhaven Fishwomen’ (Vol 3, 290-294). Stopes writes: ‘In no condition of life is the marriage union based more firmly upon equal duties, responsibilities, and rights, in none is the importance of the woman so freely and fully recognised. Her position as saleswoman, as purchaser, banker, manager ... makes her practically independent (294).’(^)

(13)See also pp 84 and 136 in the same volume.( ^)

(14)Selected correspondence between Wilde, Simpson and other contributors to the magazine is published in the various editions of his collected letters.( ^)

(15)‘Charlotte Carmichael came of what is normally called ‘good Scottish stock’’ (Briant, 19).( ^)

(16)Clayworth (84-101); Green, 1997 (102-20).( ^)

(17)Wilde advised Minnie Simpson that he would pay the same rates as the *Nineteenth Century* (N. W. Senior Papers, Item E704, National Library of Wales).( ^)

(18)*Pall Mall Gazette*, 14 Oct, 1884 and 28 Feb,1885.( ^)

(19)The Wildes had been married for little more than four years. Oscar had just experienced his first literary success with publication of his short stories for children, collected as: *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*. London: David Nutt, 1888.( ^)

(20) 'Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated – overpopulated with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process' (Bakhtin 294).(^)

(21) Fraser (2003) provides a useful discussion of the permutations and negotiations of identity and gender surrounding 'the custom of anonymous publication in the press' (29-30).(^)

(22) Eventually published as 'Arraignment of Fashion in Dress by Mrs Stopes' (Vol 3, 62-65).(^)

(23) In January 1890, a letter from the editor observed: 'The correspondence of the Dress question was very meagre and poor ... we could, of course, have got up a controversy by encouraging someone to assail you, but that was not our object' (BL MS Add. 58454: f. 39, Jan 1890).(^)

(24) By Jan 1890 Arthur Fish had taken over the magazine's editorship. Wilde withdrew from active involvement before the end of 1889. (^)

(25) Clark and Holquist (299-302).(^)

(26) Several of these were later published as a book entitled *Shakespeare's Warwickshire Contemporaries*, Shakespeare Head Press, Stratford-on-Avon: 1907. (^)

(27) Pearson provides a summary of Henry Stopes' public achievements as a brewer and engineer (193). (^)

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