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15. I am especially grateful to Editor-in-Chief Juliet John, who invited me to write the entry and provided such constructive feedback.
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Organicism

JOHN KUCICH

ORGANICISM pervades nearly every sphere of nineteenth-century literature and culture. Most obviously, it infuses representations of economic and social interdependence in Victorian novels—at local and national levels, and also globally, as when Thomas Hardy invokes "the great web of human doings . . . weaving in both hemispheres from the White Sea to Cape Horn."[1] But Herbert Spencer also makes

it the cornerstone of sociological theory in "The Social Organism" (1860). Like many social theorists, Spencer roots organicism in the "vitalism" of early nineteenth-century biology, although its socio-biological ramifications later became a bone of contention in many disciplines, including in debates about liberal political theory between Spencer and Thomas Huxley.[2] Organicism also animates John Ruskin's naturalistic conception of Gothic architecture in the second volume of *The Stones of Venice* (1853), an inspiration to nineteenth-century writers and artists alike. It underpins political projects of vastly different kinds, from what E. P. Thompson calls the "feudal socialism" of Thomas Carlyle's *Past and Present* (1843), to William Morris's green utopia in *News from Nowhere* (1890), to imperial mythologies of colonial holism in the work of Joseph Conrad, Rudyard Kipling, and others.[3] It underlies Victorian medievalism, in all its guises. Its centrality to romantic conceptions of literary form carried over to later nineteenth-century debates about both poetry and fiction, with Henry James notably claiming that "a novel is a living thing, all one and continuous, like any other organism."[4]

It would be difficult to find any nineteenth-century cultural sphere in which organic thought did not play a major role. Yet recent critics have paid it scant attention, aside from casual scorn for the reactionary politics many assume are intrinsic to it. George Eliot's organicism attracted major studies by Sally Shuttleworth and Suzanne Graver in the 1980s; more recently, Denise Gigante and Amanda Jo Goldstein have written sweeping studies of the scientific bases for romantic organic form; and a few scattered essays have touched on the subject.[5] But for the most part critics turn a blind eye. Doubtless, such avoidance began with the withering ideological critiques of traditional "organic society" by Marxist critics of the 1970s: Raymond Williams, for example, called organicism a "lulling illusion," and claimed that it sustained social thought "mainly of a conservative kind."[6] Powerful as this prejudice continues to be, the absence of a distinct, coherent intellectual tradition of organic thought, as well as complex, often contrary uses of the term "organic" and ideas associated with it in nineteenth-century biology, sociology, political theory, art criticism, and literature, have been equally to blame. But precisely because organicism meant such different things to so many nineteenth-century thinkers, it tugged at cultural discourse with powerful (if murky) undertows and cross-currents. Such conditions can be a daunting but rewarding challenge for contemporary scholars.

Though nineteenth-century organic thought remains to be comprehensively mapped, there are several compelling reasons to give it a fresh

look. *Pace* standard critical assumptions about organicism's politics, for example, at least one strand of organic thought left a distinctly progressive legacy. The chief intellectual spokesman for the New Liberal welfare reforms of the early twentieth century, Leonard Hobhouse, explicitly invoked organicism as a rationale for state-sponsored unemployment insurance, old-age pensions, progressive taxation, estate taxes, and public ownership of resources and utilities: in *Liberalism* (1911), Hobhouse claimed that "no one element of the social life stands separate from the rest, any more than any one element of the animal body stands separate from the rest. In this sense the life of society is rightly held to be organic."[7] Hobhouse spoke for an activist group of New Liberal intellectuals, many of whom traced their collectivist social principles back to the late writings of John Stuart Mill and to novelists such as Eliot and Charles Dickens. This political genealogy needs considerable further exploration. So does another, very different one: i.e., the state-centered solutions to social problems proposed during the "paternalist revival" of the 1830s—both by social theorists and by the Condition of England novelists they inspired. In the writings and speeches of Thomas Sadlier, David Robinson, and other paternalists (who, according to Harold Perkin, anticipated Keynesian welfare economics) and in novels by Frances Trollope, Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, and Charles Kingsley, organic social thought supported calls for the regulation of factory conditions, child labor laws, sanitary improvements, and other reforms that laid the foundations for a centralized welfare bureaucracy.[8]

A series of socially progressive elements were also routinely spliced into conceptions of organic society by Victorian novelists, including tendencies to relax class hierarchies, to expand social inclusiveness, to accommodate social mobility and cross-class circulation, and to fuse liberal individualism with service to the common good. Many novelists also relocated moral authority from the top of the social scale, where it had resided in pre-Victorian organic models, to previously marginalized social actors (artisans, women, artist-figures, and middle-class professionals).

Moreover, nineteenth-century organic thought privileged nonteleological growth and development, drawing on both biological vitalism and romantic theories of form; as a historiographical model, organicism encouraged the rejection of static conceptions of social structure and process. The open-endedness of Eliot's (in)famous meliorism is curiously reflected, for example, by Mill's optimism in *On Liberty* (1859) that social progress, like individual development, resembles the energetic, internally directed, unpredictable growth of biological organisms.

In fact, Victorian organic writing often included critiques of static conceptions of social order associated with traditional models of organic society. A notable example is the sharp contrast between a rigidly hierarchical pre-Victorian organicism and a more elastic mid-Victorian version evolving out of it in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* (1853). But a critique of static, traditional organic society, in the name of more dynamic models, can be found everywhere in Victorian fiction.

Victorian writers often adopted formal techniques that broke the bounds of conventional literary form to express dynamically organic social ideals. First-person plural narration, a turn to the epic in poetry, time-traveling narratives, violations of poetic and narrative closure, and breaches of the boundaries between domestic and political plots are some of the many devices writers used to embody organic social models in innovative formal experiments. Some of these ventures self-consciously followed Samuel Taylor Coleridge's celebration of literary forms that incorporate dissonant energies. Organic thought infused nineteenth-century culture in these and many other ways, which literary scholarship of the last fifty years has largely neglected or repressed. It's time for a critical return to the topic.

Notes

1. Thomas Hardy, *The Woodlanders* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), 59.
2. For an excellent summary, see James Elwick, "Herbert Spencer and the Disunity of the Social Organism," *History of Science* 41, no. 1 (2003): 35–72.
3. E. P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (New York: Pantheon, 1955), 29.
4. Henry James, *Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers*, ed. Leon Edel (New York: Library of America, 1984), 54.
5. Suzanne Graver, *George Eliot and Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Sally Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science: The Make-Believe of a Beginning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Denise Gigante, *Life: Organic Form and Romanticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Amanda Jo Goldstein, *Sweet Science: Romantic Materialism and the New Logics of Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); recent short studies include Jacek Gutorow, "Toward the Incalculable: A Note on Henry James and Organic Form," *The Henry James Review* 35, no. 3 (2014): 285–94; and Devin Griffiths, "Deforming the

Novel," presented at the "Form and Reform" Conference, University of California, Santa Cruz, July 28, 2017.
6. Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 180; *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 228.
7. Leonard T. Hobhouse, *Liberalism and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 35.
8. See Harold Perkin, *Origins of Modern English Society* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 244.

Performance

LAUREN ERIKS CLINE

WHAT is Victorian about our world stage? While the criminalization of poverty, the corruption of bureaucracies, and the upward redistribution of wealth has put many observers in mind of a Dickens novel, we might also consider a less-studied Victorian object: the spectacle. Take 2017. In the same year that 20th Century Fox released *The Greatest Showman*, a movie dramatizing the life of nineteenth-century circus impresario P. T. Barnum, political pundits also scrutinized the stunts of a more contemporary media figure, whose "circus-like 'style,'" seems part of his "showman's reality-TV approach to the presidency."[1] The dramatic genre of the day, according to this critic, is not a Jacobean tragedy or even a *pièce du théâtre de l'absurde*, but a visually excessive, nineteenth-century extravaganza. If there's something showy about the state of play, in other words, there's also something Victorian about the methods of performance. So, what can the Victorians—who lived through what Tracy C. Davis and Peter Holland call "the performing century"—tell us about how to bear witness to the Greatest Show on Earth?[2]

For starters, nineteenth-century performance provides a privileged site for analyzing the power of loosely scripted spectacles. Many theater practitioners in Victorian London were at least as interested in exploring the affordances of new stage technologies as they were in dramatizing a particular literary text.[3] A fascination with visually arresting pageantry or exciting musical numbers was even more operative in the minor theaters,