Appendix 2

Questions of terminology and historicisation

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If it is true that ‘reading is a transaction, a relation between the cultural vocabulary of the text, and the cultural vocabulary of the reader’, to paraphrase Catherine Belsey (2002: 31), then any discussion of the nineteenth century has to take into account that both vocabularies shift over time. The following few paragraphs are not intended as explanations of terms or of problems with historicisation, but function to illuminate areas where misunderstandings may arise, specifically to do with Duval’s main preoccupations (as we have identified them, such as class, gender and comedy) and her employment (as an actor and artist). There is an added layer of complexity due to the fact that the book is interdisciplinary (incorporating periodical studies, Victorian studies, theatre studies, Comics Studies, drawing studies, comedy studies, media studies, cultural studies, and women’s studies) because not all these disciplines and fields agree on definitions.

First is the issue of class. This book has refrained from defining ‘working class’ and ‘middle class’.¹ The categories are contentious and constructed differently at different times (Munt 2000). For example, in the Duval epoch (late 1860s to mid-1880s) most ‘working-class’ people were rural and labour was agricultural: the great migration to the cities was still ongoing. Further, the ‘lower-middle class’ was coming into being as a distinct group, entailing more than just creating a space away from the crowding, smog and disease of the inner city, and initiating a lifestyle.

Further, we can say that wealth (capital) is not a reliable guide to class stratification. For example, membership of the middle and working classes was not entirely based on earnings: as historian Liza Picard points out ‘a skilled London coach-maker could earn up to five guineas [...] a week – considerably more than most middle class clerks’ (Picard 2009). However, education and tenure (a bank clerk’s job was for life) defined the middle classes, and social mobility was usually seen as both possible and desirable.² This meant that poverty conversely was often seen as a matter of personal fault, with the poor as feckless and therefore responsible for their own plight, which in turn justified the workhouse

system. Many of the adventures of Duval's character Ally Sloper are a parody of lower-middle-class aspirations (Sabin 2014; Kunzle 1985).

When it comes to taste distinctions (cultural capital), the difficulties over class definition are multiplied (Gunn 2005). Commonly referred-to signifiers such as clothes, food choices, speech and social manners do not always provide instantly recognisable clues, and there have been changes in the historical forms which cultural capital has inhabited. The number of Duval stories with working-class people using 'chivalrous' (supposedly middle-class) language, wearing 'bourgeois' garb (for example, Sloper's suit and hat), or eating 'genteel' food, are many.

Thus, class distinctions in Britain were obvious towards the end of the nineteenth century in theory, if less clear cut in practice. The rise of socialist ideas in the period served to solidify the language of class, and to question assumptions around the 'age of capitalism' and the 'undeserving poor'. (The downturn in the economy from 1873, known at the time as the 'Great Depression', and the rise of trade unions, made this questioning more urgent.) The notion of class struggle was therefore an ever-present backdrop to Duval's work (Waters 1990).

As for Duval's own class status, this is debatable. In terms of upbringing, her father was a schoolteacher or private tutor (it is not possible to ascertain which), which were undoubtedly middle-class professions. Also, when she and Charles Ross were living together, it would seem likely that they would have defined themselves as middle class, especially given his status as editor, playwright and producer. As Picard points out a '£100-a-year clerk and his wife could find a cottage to rent in a suburb within walking distance of his work [...] His wife might employ a 'slavey' or maid-of-all-work, for only £6 a year' (Picard 2009). This would have been well within Ross and Duval's joint means and would have placed them in the middle class, according to Rowntree's 1901 definitions.

In terms of Duval's employment, she might be said to hover between working class and middle class. Picard gives three layers in the Victorian working class, namely 'working men' or labourers, the 'intelligent artisan' and the 'educated working man' (Picard 2009).³ As a periodical journalist, Duval might be an 'educated working woman'. However, whilst journalism is widely if loosely referred to as a profession throughout the era, and the education required would seem to equate it with the middle classes, the job brought with it social stigmas which militate against a simple class definition. Thus historian Martin Conboy explains how 'despite well-documented liberal accounts of journalists as operating within a politically important forum of communication, daily journalists themselves suffered from a reputation as scoundrels with no scruples, in great part, on account of their need to get a story, meaning that bribery and blackmail were frequently imputed to them' (Conboy 2016: 743). For Duval, as a visual journalist, working in a mode that was distinct from the *Punch*-style satirical tradition, and which was typically seen as inferior to it, these prejudices would have been exacerbated (see Chapter 1).

Duval the actor was a worker in a different field, but this too had stigmas attached, and as a woman, she would have been viewed as transgressive, partly because of the job's

associations with sex work (see Chapters 2, 7 and 9). On the question of class positioning, it has been argued that performers (and managers) belonged to a kind of class of their own, on account of the nature of their self-supporting community, and the liminal nature of the employment, which was becoming more professionalised in the period (Bailey 1986; Rutherford 1986). This professionalisation was given credibility by coverage in magazines such as *Judy*.

Second, there is the issue of gender. This book has assumed that ‘men’ and ‘women’ were (and are) constructed categories. The Victorian period was dominated by the ‘two spheres’ theory of society, discussed by Simon Grennan in Chapter 2. In other words, according to Lisa Tickner, masculinity and ‘femininity became associated with a division between the rational, competitive, and public world of production on the one hand, and the affective, nurturing, and private sphere of the [...] home on the other’ (Tickner 1987: 213). This meant that women were typically seen as inferior biologically and emotionally, as ‘under-developed men’. Within the system, their place in the home was therefore obvious, and their main function, to look after their spouses and raise children, was supposedly the bedrock upon which the modern British state was founded. This logic explained their position as second-class citizens, denied certain legal and property rights, as well as being excluded from the vote and positions of power.

Certainly, the late nineteenth century saw challenges to the patriarchy, and a questioning of the ‘natural’ hierarchy of the sexes. Important educational, legal, professional and personal changes were instigated. But how far this translated into any real loosening of power structures is debatable, and gender equality was as distant at the end of Duval’s life as it was at the beginning. The law still enforced dependency, and men never relinquished their right to provide financially, or to be ‘served’ within the family. Similarly, the vote remained a utopian dream.

Duval’s work has to be seen in this wider context, and how far it conformed to received gender politics, or offered symbolic opportunities for women’s self-fashioning, is a constant theme of this book. As such, the usual concerns about historical revisionism are acknowledged. For example, her comedy of manners often revolved around ‘mashing’, a ubiquitous term that is explored in Chapter 9, and which encompasses a wide range of flirting: but from a twenty-first-century perspective, it is possible to see its more extreme manifestations in the light of twenty-first-century social phenomena such as <https://everydaysexism.com/> and #MeToo.⁴

This book appears at a time when concepts of masculine and feminine are hotly contested, as they were in the nineteenth century, a debate motivated by the keen imperatives of different opinions, traditions and ways of life and thought. Compiling, reflecting and commenting upon Duval’s work, we recognise that we are unavoidably historicised by our own experiences, concepts, capacities to influence and motivations, compared to others’. In researching, reflecting upon and representing the work of a nineteenth-century woman, our own work on Duval identifies our historicised position. Our work has contributed to the creation of our own identities, as much as reflecting upon Duval’s.

Moving on to the issue of comedy and humour. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, words like 'wit', 'irony' and 'satire' were being defined afresh in the face of new pop cultural forms, George Meredith's *An Essay on Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit* being an example (Meredith: 1898). From today's vantage point, the historian has to 'rebuild the joke' in order to understand it, and to apprehend why people at the time might have thought it funny (Wagner-Lawlor 2000: 43). By decoding a gag's reference points and unpacking its dynamics, we can in theory 'restore its energy'. But we have to ask how far this is possible. The past is gone, evidence is missing, and all we can do is make a 'best guess'. Therefore, because we can never restore the energy altogether, Duval's work can never appear quite so hilarious as it did to her Victorian fans.

To modern eyes, Duval's output is often immediate, voguish and already seems 'energetic'. It is frequently 'cartoony', and not layered with symbolism like contemporaneous satirical ('*Punch*-like') work, and the captions often tell a story that is easily graspable. However, elsewhere her humour has become detached from the cultural, social and political contexts that underpinned it, and is harder to understand. Take, for example, her illustrations for the continuing text series 'A Conscientious Chronicle of Pretty Women's Prettiest Frocks', which was about fantasy women from history and their wardrobes, as filtered through a music hall imagination ('Egyptian style', 'Roman style') (Duval 1875n). This requires us to understand the Victorians' complicated relationship with antiquity, with fashion, and with music hall; and that is before trying to unravel what 'pretty women' might mean in the context of prevailing gender norms.

The politics of the jokes are therefore difficult to unravel. For example, in the same way that we might seek to understand a gag by relating it to a modern context, so it is tempting to look for 'progressive' signs. Thus, one legacy of 1970s and 1980s approaches in cultural studies is to look for 'radical' and 'resistant' moments. They are present in Duval's work if we look for them. But applying a retrospective lens can be misleading, and what is 'progressive' today may not have been in the 1860s or 1880s. This is a point taken up in Chapter 9.

If unpacking the humour can help us to access the minds of readers in fresh ways (therefore offering new insights into their shifting concerns, tastes and attitudes) then we have to ask how far they were passive consumers. Peter Bailey has argued (in the context of music hall) that pop culture audiences were far more 'knowing' than is often assumed. They were proactive and were licensed to 'fill in the gaps and complete the circuits of meaning' (Bailey 1998: 185). He goes on to note that in the halls, 'sexual knowingness was a highly developed second language' (Bailey 1998: 186). Bearing in mind Duval's closeness to the stage, and the 'gaps' she leaves in her drawings, this is an extra dimension to her humour that is worth considering (and, indeed, the issue of 'serio-comic' address is covered in Chapter 9).

Finally, there is drawing. The general background to Duval's work involves the repeal of the so-called 'taxes on knowledge', improvements in printing technology and increases in literacy rates, resulting in a proliferation of cheap publishing, both fictional and

non-fictional. This shift in the culture is explored in Chapter 1, and has been well covered elsewhere (Scully 2018; Easley, King and Morton 2017).

The term 'cartoonist' was not in common usage in the late nineteenth century, and Duval was usually referred to as an 'artist' or 'illustrator'. The other frequently used term was 'caricaturist', but today this has associations with a bygone era of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century print tradition. Today, Duval is sometimes referred to as a 'comics creator', but this is again placing her in a particular tradition, this time with modern associations, which assumes definitional boundaries around the primacy of strips, and to which, therefore, she can only be said to tangentially belong.

By contrast, 'cartoonist' is derived from 'cartoon', a word which itself went through a swift evolution in meaning following the publication in *Punch* of Leech's 'Cartoon No 1' in 1843, which heralded the twin ideas of a mix of journalism and art, and a drawing (or series of drawings) with humorous intent, which moved the word away from previous associations with a preliminary drawing for paintings (Leech 1843). 'Cartoonist', according to Richard Scully, 'is an even more recent coinage, appearing only in the 1860s' (Scully 2018: 31). By 1893, the word was current enough to be included in the first edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

Notes

- 1 Except in the context of household income relative to the capacity to employ a domestic servant, which was a measure used by Rowntree in 1901.
- 2 Samuel Smiles's bestseller *Self Help; with Illustrations of Character and Conduct* (1859) was effectively a manual of how to achieve social mobility through industriousness, aiming to show how to use education and hard work to get on.
- 3 Of course the role of the working woman, as described by Simon Grennan in Chapter 2, was a matter of social disturbance and anxiety to male-dominated structures and philosophies, as working-class women (and children) worked extensively following the industrial revolution alongside, and often in the same jobs as, men.
- 4 At the time of writing, a CFP (call for papers) has just gone out for the Summer 2020 special issue of *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies*, around the topic of 'Victorian Literature in the Age of #MeToo', stating: 'For decades, feminist scholars have been identifying and analyzing scenes of sexual assault and harassment in Victorian imaginative literature. In the age of #MeToo, it is no longer tenable to simply cast such actions or literary scenes as products of a different time.'