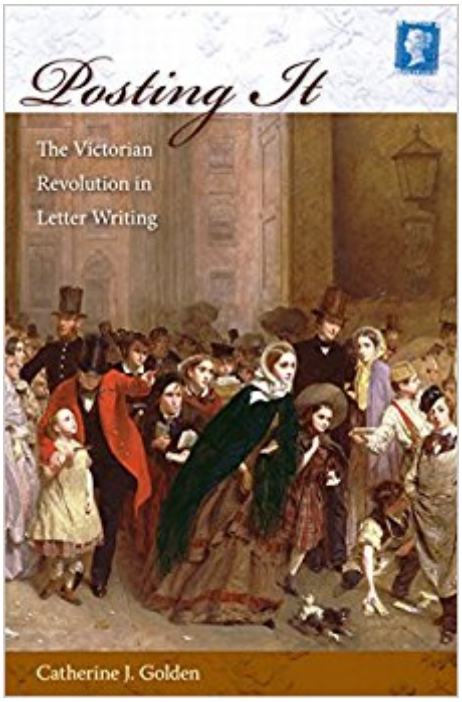
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Posting It: The Victorian Revolution In Letter Writing



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Synopsis

"A beautifully researched study of how the Victorian Penny Post altered human relations. As Golden eloquently documents, family and friends could, at last, easily keep in touch with distant relatives, but cheap postage also provided new opportunities for blackmailers and con artists. In her richly textured study, we learn not only about the pervasive use of letters as a literary device in fiction, but also the immense increase in paraphernalia related to the writing and sending of a letter or that new invention, the postcard. Anyone interested in the complex relationship between material and cultural change will find this book illuminating."--Martha Vicinus, University of Michigan Ã Â "Just as the Penny Post revolutionized communications, Catherine GoldenÃ¢â ¬â„¢s meticulous and imaginative analysis of its cultural effects transforms our reading experience of Victorian fiction. From the blackmail plot to the writing desk, the paraphernalia of the Victorian novel takes on new meaning and contemporary parallels."--Elaine Showalter, Princeton University"Provides an engaging and comprehensive account of the context and spirit of Victorian postal reform and the resulting rise in affective correspondence that continues to this day."--Eileen Cleere, Southwestern University"Combines historical perspective, social context, and literary criticism. It goes beyond the standard historical or literary work in that it provides insights into the daily lives and values of Victorians of all classes. As such it makes a significant contribution to Victorian cultural studies. Golden explains the impact of the Penny Post on the nineteenth century and draws parallels to the communications revolution of today."--Richard Fantina, Vermont State CollegesAlthough "snail mail" may seem old fashioned and outdated in the twenty-first century, Catherine Golden argues that the creation of the Penny Post in Victorian England was just as revolutionary in its time as e-mail and text messages are today. Until Queen Victoria instituted the Postal Reform Act of 1839, mail was a luxury affordable only by the rich. Allowing anyone, from any social class, to send a letter anywhere in the country for only a penny had multiple and profound cultural impacts. Golden demonstrates how cheap postage--which was quickly adopted in other countries--led to a postal "network" that can be viewed as a forerunner of computer-mediated communications. Indeed, the revolution in letter writing of the nineteenth century led to blackmail, frauds, unsolicited mass mailings, and junk mail--problems that remain with us today.Catherine J. Golden is professor of English at Skidmore College.

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Customer Reviews

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Long distance communication started the change towards the modern day. "Posting It: The Victorian Revolution in Letter Writing" discusses how cheap, efficient post changed the way the English kept in touch with one another. The Penny Post, which allowed the people of Britain to pay a single penny to send letters. Covering the development of the system, the controversy created, and focusing mainly on how it changed society, Catherine J. Golden provides much scholarly insight. Its history is an intriguing one, and it’s told well, making "Posting It" an excellent text, and a core addition to community and college library history collections.

As the rating says, "it was ok" and is more like 2 and a quarter stars. This book could have been so much better. It was an interesting look at the social pressures for the passage of the penny post law and a neat look at how Britons put it to use. At first glance, the book appears to be a scholarly treatment of the role of letter writing in mid-nineteenth century Britain, however several things distracted me from really enjoying this work. Stylistically, the author tends to repeat herself in almost every chapter, leading me to wonder if she proofread the final product. Another aspect of the book that really bothered me is that it seemed that either the author is very naive, historically speaking, or underestimates her audience. On page 92, in discussing the postal stationary created by Mulready, she seems fixated on the iconography Mulready used to symbolize the reach and diversity of the Empire in 1840/1850. She states, "By 21st century standards, Mulready’s design verges on the politically incorrect and arguably reflects...the natural xenophobia of the English." She then goes on to point out that the iconography reflect outdated stereotypes, racial supremacy and cultural bias. In a endnote on page 265, she feels compelled to pass judgement on British expansionism, which I don’t think is a debate suitable for a book on the social impact of the penny post. Her comments don’t reflect scholarly neutrality, and with the comment on political incorrectness, I have to wonder if

she assumes her audience is somewhat ignorant and fragile in psyche, that she has to explain the iconography. This is probably a minor point to most readers, but along with the repetiveness found in every chapter, I was distracted throughout the rest of the book.Overall the book is very informative, but it also has a superficial quality in terms of analysis. The postal history of this period of Britain is very rich and a large amount of research has been done by postal historians and philatelists that could have been marshalled into almost every chapter. The author failed to do this and her analysis, or lack thereof, reflects this. I still think that the definitive book on the social impact of the penny post has yet to be written.

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