

*Knowing the Past: Victorian Literature and Culture* edited by Suzy Anger. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2001. ix, 279 pp. ISBN 0-8014-3884-5. \$49.95 (cloth). ISBN 0-8014-8765-X. \$19.95 (paper).

At the beginning of David Cannadine's *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (1990) he writes that his book "seeks to understand [members of the late-Victorian patrician élite] better than they could ever possibly have understood themselves." He goes on: "It tries to lay bare the *reality* behind the myths that they invented or believed about themselves" (emphasis added). Cannadine's statement brings to the fore many of the problems and contradictions hovering over what we do as literary and cultural scholars. It seems to be extreme hubris that leads a twenty-first century scholar living in the post-Foucauldian, post-structuralist age to make such claims, since many of us have come to question the existence of that very reality Cannadine is trying to lay bare. Yet as teachers we often focus on the historical and social contexts of