

**Welby, Victoria Lady**, i. e. Honorable Victoria Alexandrina Maria Louisa Stuart-Wortley, afterwards Honorable Victoria A. M. L. Welby-Gregory, Lady, b. April 27, 1837, Wortley, Yorkshire, England, d. Mar. 29, 1912, Harrow (London), England; founder of signifiics, a communication oriented theory of signs.

Lady W. never received a conventional upbringing but was instead deeply marked by her travels with her mother Lady Emmeline Stuart-Wortley, a well known authoress and poetess during her lifetime. After her mother's death, Lady W. lived from the end of 1855 to the beginning of 1861 with various relatives, for the major part, however, with her godmother, the Duchess of Kent (the Queen Mother). When the Duchess died in 1861, Lady W. was appointed Maid of Honour to Queen Victoria, her other godmother, and belonged to the royal court until her marriage on July 4, 1863, with Sir William Earle Welby (since Dec. 27, 1875, Welby-Gregory).

The emergence and development of signifiics from 1881 to 1912 are best understood as Lady W.'s own particular response to problems of interpretation and terminology she perceived in scientific disciplines at the turn of the century. Her point of departure (1881) is her criticism of "Universalism", of the idea that the teachings, definitions and interpretations of Christianity were eternally valid, and theoretical and methodological problems she ran across as part of her concern with a suitable contemporary interpretation of the Bible. In the way scientific knowledge intensified and extended Lady W.'s criticism of language and terminology in the fields of religion and theology, it led her to criticize philosophy and the natural sciences in the same fashion.

From around 1890 onwards the problem of meaning actually moved into the foreground in her own publications, and her article on "Sense, Meaning and Interpretation" (1896) became the beginning of signifiics. Here for the first time, even somewhat vaguely, a field of study in its own right (comprising "the difficult art of conveying our own meaning", the problem "of interpreting the meaning of others" and the question of "the genesis of sign, symbol, mark, emblem &c."; 1896: 24) is staked out with its own new concepts, introduced for the first time, to be used in analyzing this field. In order to stimulate professional research in signifiics she donated the "Welby Prize" which was awarded to the German philosopher and sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies in 1898 (Tönnies 1899/1900). In 1897 M. → Bréal gave her permission to take the steps necessary for a translation of his *Essai de sémantique* which was then finally undertak-

en by Lady W.'s daughter, Mrs. Henry Cust (i. e. Nina Cust), with the assistance of Charles Whibley (Bréal 1900).

Lady W. published three 'significant' books. In *Grains of Sense* (1897) she deals in numerous short essays, parables, satires and some aphorisms with subjects pertaining to the critique of language and scientific and pedagogical ways to improve mutual understanding; *What is Meaning?* (1903) is a comprehensive statement of the subject, presenting in summarized form the results of her thought over the previous 20 years; in *Significs and Language* (1911b) the individual essays discuss in a brilliant form central topics and goals of significs, for example the necessity of social control of the use of linguistic means, the epistemological status of imagery of language or figures of speech, the value of verbal and nonverbal means of expression, and the value of ambiguities in language.

Lady W.'s theory of signs (1911a) begins with individual instances of concrete sign processes, with emphasis placed on the process of interpretation that, when analyzed, serves as the key to understanding the sign situation. She takes any object that stands for something else to be a sign. Only sign relations having two variables are addressed explicitly, i. e. those between a sign and "sense," "meaning," and "significance," but Lady W.'s scheme always calls for at least one interpreter of the sign to be supplied mentally. "Sense" figures in this relation as the situationally or contextually influenced value of an experience, the spontaneous reaction of an organism to an environmental stimulus, or—from the vantage point of the person using the sign—reference facilitated by the sign to prior, present, or potential experience. "Meaning," on the other hand, is the communicative intent associated with using the sign. "Significance" (also called "ideal worth") includes the wide range of a (sign) event's or (sign) experience's consequences, implications, and results and, thus, always encompasses sense and, potentially, meaning, but extends beyond them. In a wider sense, "significance" stands for the basic possibility and necessity of a sign's very interpretation. Lady W. sees inherent plasticity and ubiquitous tropes in language, appreciates the connections between word and context, and recognizes the relevance of the maxims of communication ethics, all of which leads her, in combination with other considerations, to a stinging critique of inadequacies in grasping the functioning of communication processes, resulting in language usage ill-suited to its aims and untamed terminologies in the sciences.

Exchanging ideas, most often through correspondence, with the leading scholars of her day

(including F. M. → Müller, Ch. S. → Peirce, B. Russell, F. C. S. Schiller, G. F. Stout, F. Tönnies, G. Vailati), she discusses and develops her thoughts and seeks recognition and further systematic refinement of them. Lady W.'s persistent influence (1910–1911) on C. K. → Ogden is the moving force behind his early lectures on significs and preparations culminating in the book *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923), co-authored with I. A. → Richards, that evolved into an intermediary not only between Lady W. and Peirce, but future contributors to semantics and semiotics as well. Lady W. maintained contact with the Dutch man of letters, psychiatrist, and social reformer F. van Eeden (1860–1932) for many years (1892–1912), a fact which gave rise to the significs movement in the Netherlands (1916—approx. 1960). Renewed interest in the correspondence between Peirce and Lady Welby (e. g. Hardwick 1977) provided the main impetus for a rediscovery and re-evaluation of her ideas and works after 1980, accompanied by new editions of her most important writings (1983, 1985).

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H. Walter Schmitz

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