

# Desubjugating Knowledges in Nineteenth-Century Print Culture, Saturday 13 October 2018 Keynes Library Birkbeck

... critique will be the art of voluntary insubordination, that of reflected intractability. Critique would essentially insure the desubjugation of the subject in the context of what we could call, in a word, the politics of truth.

Foucault, "What is Critique?"

In 1994 Laurel Brake published *Subjugated Knowledges*, a groundbreaking collection of essays on aspects of the Victorian periodical press that, as she combatively claimed in the introduction, highlighted the struggle between literature and a subjugated form of knowledge, journalism. Her enterprise is characterised by a concern to "desubjugate" knowledge, to critique what we think we know and how we know it, and how, in particular, assumptions about media form colour perceptions of what truth might be. With the coming of the digital age, print culture has taken on a new visibility as a field and Laurel's interests in print have been informed by her work on the re-mediation of the historical press into digital forms, and on new tools for reading.

In parallel with Laurel's work on the press has been a pre-occupation with 19C aestheticism, and its implication in print culture and the press. Her lifelong work on Walter Pater in this respect has probed his writing career (and that of other authors), re-positioning him as a 'man' of letters, and examining the close links between press work and books. An interest in gender and queer culture has also informed her teaching and research; her present biographical project, *Ink Work*, and *Clara and Walter Pater*, fuses these interests in aestheticism, media, and gender.

This study day, organised by the University of Greenwich and by Laurel's academic home for so many years, Birkbeck, is dedicated to the effects of Laurel's work on the desubjugation of knowledge, to the politics of truth, and to the art of critique as voluntary insubordination.

## Proceedings of the Day

9.30 coffee

10.00 **opening / plenary:** Professor Aled Jones, **Points of Departure: engaging with Laurel Brake's writing (to date).**

Chair: Professor Andrew King

**11.00-1pm workshop**

1pm lunch

**Talks by Laurel's colleagues and former PhD students**

2pm Professor Marysa Demoor, **Time Capsule: the genesis and birth of the *DNCJ***

2.20 Professor Andrew King, **Subjugations: the Case of the Stanfield Hall Murders and J.F. Smith's *Stanfield Hall* (1848)**

2.40 Dr Jim Mussell, **Issues, Extras, and Indexes: Revisiting the Archive with W.T. Stead**

3. 15 coffee break

3.30 Dr Melissa Score, **Suitable Jobs for Women? Female Composers and Book Folders in the mid-Nineteenth Century**

3.50 Professor Mark Turner, **The Culture of Seriality in the Nineteenth Century (and Beyond)**

4.10 Dr Minna Vuohelainen, **The Lure of Illustration: the Case of the *Strand Magazine***

4.40 coffee break

5pm **plenary/ response:** Professor Laurel Brake, **Op Ed: the state we're in**

Chair: Professor Hilary Fraser

6pm – 7.30 wine reception

## **Aled Jones**

### **Opening/ Plenary**

#### **Points of Departure: engaging with Laurel Brake's writing (to date).**

Some brief but not wholly random observations on Laurel Brake's work, with an emphasis on issues of discipline, identity, activism and writing as a social as well as a solitary practice. I'll also offer some reflections on the many directions in which her work might lead us across a range of disciplines.

### **Workshop Materials**

Laurel Brake, 'Theories of Formation: *The Nineteenth Century, 1877*', *Subjugated Knowledges, Journalism, Gender and Literature in the Nineteenth Century*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994, 51-62.

Laurel Brake, '“Trepidation of the Spheres”: Serials and Books in the Nineteenth Century', *Print in Transition 1850-1910: Studies in Media and Book History*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001, 3-26.

Laurel Brake, 'Symons and Print Culture: Journalist, Critic, Book Maker', *Volupté: Interdisciplinary Journal of Decadence Studies*, 1 (2018), 74-88.

Marysa Demoor

### **Time Capsule: the Genesis and Birth of the *DNCJ***

We didn't know each other very well in 2002, Laurel and I, although our paths had crossed on the odd occasion. But this renowned researcher immediately said 'yes' when I broached the idea of a collaboration of the two of us on a project that would try to be the "ultimate" reference work on nineteenth-century journalism.

This short paper then will explore the ways in which we tentatively explored the idea, looked at possible publication modes and at its feasible scope in order to reach the dream we had. I will try to give a brief overview of this collaboration that started in 2004 when, with the money granted by the Royal Flemish Academy, we settled down in our offices on the premises of the Academy in Brussels for our first research stay. I will look at the questions that we were faced with and the answers that we came up with. I will end with the final product, the *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism*, launched in December 2008 (but officially published in 2009), so more or less ten years ago.

The paper will hopefully be a kind of reminder of the state of the art at the beginning of this century, not only in respect of reference works on nineteenth-century periodical studies, but also how, ultimately, it was the combination of Laurel and the research community that made *DNCJ* happen.

Andrew King

### **Subjugations: the case of the Stanfield Hall Murders and J.F. Smith's *Stanfield Hall* (1848)**

One of Laurel's many insights in *Subjugated Knowledges* (1994) was that a material and transient "journalism" was locked in a struggle for status with an immaterial and somehow eternal "literature" both in the nineteenth century and in the twentieth-century academy where nineteenth-century texts were studied. Laurel is a key player in getting us to rethink that dichotomy, and following on from her work, I consider a case of the passage of literature into journalism and out again, and, crucially, why this passage took place in the way it did. What the case suggests is not just a struggle for status between journalism and literature but the need for the assiduous definition of terms: what "literature" and which "journalism" are being subjugated and subjugating?

In late 1848, a double murder was committed at Stanfield Hall, near Norwich: a wealthy landowner and his son were killed in one night. The case was widely reported in the press but the sources for all reportage were just two: *The Times* and the *Norfolk Chronicle* (though the *Illustrated London News* also sent artists and a reporter to cover some points of the trial). All newspapers – including even the radical *Northern Star* – interpreted the story as a family romance with more than a glance towards contemporary trends in novel plots, hinting at Oedipal drama involving a resentful illegitimate son and an abused governess. My initial conclusion will come as no surprise: journalism, controlled here by *The Times*, exploited fictional tropes to drain the murders of social causes or any possible relation they might have had to contemporary rural riots in Norfolk.

But the story does not end there. Very soon literature appropriated journalism: a now-forgotten, mass-market serial novel by J.F. Smith called, suitably enough, *Stanfield Hall*, sought to trace their origins in a family curse involving fatal love between a Norman invader and a Saxon girl. The novel suggests that the murders were anchored in a misty idea of Britishness that readers somehow participated in. It offered thereby a Gothic thrill that, like the journalism it depended on, justified a *laissez-faire*, anti-ameliorist social and political

stance: the murders occurred because they were fated to do so and there was nothing to be done (except get hooked on the story).

My point is that it was journalism's turn to the literary and the literary's appropriation of journalism that occasioned the sensational rise both of J.F. Smith ("the most popular novelist in the world!" according to the *Speaker* when he died in 1890) and, through him, of *The London Journal*, whose sales were boosted enormously by Smith's serial. It was not just politics that encouraged the fictionalisation of the murders, it was the profit-driven media system itself. The Stanfield Hall murders anticipate thus the same logic of the far better-known - and still very lively - treatment of "Jack the Ripper" four decades later.

The question this case brings before us concerns the nature of the struggle over the status of such literature and the journalism that enabled it. It operated (and still operates) very differently from the struggles around the *Nineteenth-Century*, *Harper's* and the *Savoy* that Laurel described so brilliantly: how?

**James Mussell**

### **Issues, Extras, and Indexes: Revisiting the Archive with W.T. Stead**

W.T. Stead was obsessed with the now but also worried what would happen to it. His publications exhibit a fevered attempt to identify and occupy moments in their readers' lives, proliferating various versions of the present, whether as one-offs, breaking stories or interventions into ongoing debates or the temporalities created by daily, weekly and monthly publication. At the same time, Stead's concern for the record meant that his publications were often associated with one another, gathered into series and sets, or were designed at the outset to retrospectively assert some sort of bibliographic control. However, as much as Stead attempted to repurpose his publications into a record of a single past, the marks of his activity betrayed both the provisionality of the moment and the many ways in which it was lived.

In 2012 Laurel was both the instigator and one of the organisers of "W.T. Stead: Newspaper Revolutionary", a two-day conference held at the British Library to mark the hundred years since Stead's death on the *Titanic*. Laurel also delivered one of the keynotes at the conference, examining how Stead understood journalism as a tool for governance as well as something that needed governing. The (unexpected) revenue raised by the conference was invested in what became the Stead Lectures, and the Stead Lecturers – James Harding, Alice Bell, and Aled Jones – all used Stead to frame their accounts of journalism today.

My paper follows the Stead lectures, but, rather than just consider journalism, I want to question the notion of 'today'. Taking Laurel's lead, I turn to Stead to examine how print media was used to create nowness, the sense of a shared present; however, necessarily predicated on passing, such nowness poses an archival problem. Stead, with his eagerness for the new yet reluctance to let anything go, has much to teach us about the difficulties in making today's journalism a record of the past.

**Melissa Score**

### **Suitable Jobs for Women? Female Compositors and Book Folders in the mid-Nineteenth Century**

The efforts of Emily Faithfull and the Victoria Press to provide employment in printing for women are relatively well-known. Faithfull adapted traditional methods of composing type to suit women workers in the face of protests that the job was too arduous for females. However, there is an alternative narrative of gender, class and print production that begins earlier than the 1860 founding of the Victoria press. As soon as the early prototype composing machines

were introduced in the 1840s and 1850s, printing firms and publishers attempted to replace skilled male compositors with cheap female labour, in order to bypass the wage scales agreed by the trade associations. Far below this level were the largely invisible and unremarked book folders, mainly female, who were drawn from the lowest ranks of the working class.

In this talk, I focus on two specific mid-century disputes involving women working in the printing and binding trades, and the way in which gender played a significant role in how they were represented in the press. The first example centres on the representation of female compositors operating the Young and Delcambre machine on the first incarnation of the weekly *Family Herald*. The masthead illustration likens composing type to playing the piano or doing needlework. The second is a strike by women book folders that was supported by the predominantly male bookbinders' trade association and which received positive coverage in the press. Rather than presenting them as domestic embroiders, the book folders' plight was depicted in much the same way as that of the impoverished seamstresses of the period; in both cases gender and class prejudices dominated. I will also contrast the ways in which these respective disputes were presented in the relevant trade association journals.

Mark Turner

### **The Culture of Seriality in the Nineteenth Century (and Beyond)**

Much of my recent work on Victorian print culture has sought to think about how we might best conceptualize the forms of serial print that were so pervasive across the nineteenth century. By the end of the century, the world was mapped by overlapping and interconnected print and electronic media, and it was made sense of through sophisticated and ever more elaborate ways of organizing, containing and representing that networked, systematic world. But the enmeshed seriality that seems so familiar to us at the end of the century was not especially new, except perhaps in degree and expanse. The continuous movement outwards of serial print and the need to give some shape and form to the proliferation and spread of print was ever thus – indeed, the logic of seriality requires shape and form in the face of fast-paced geographical and other forms of expansion.

During the 1830s-40s when cheap print really began to explode, innovative publishers like Charles Knight were simultaneously publishing weekly journals, serial encyclopaedias, serials about science, pictorial histories, guidebooks, maps, pictorial Bibles, pictorial Shakespeare, travel literature, and still more, in a variety of periodicities. Some of these were short-lived or had a natural endpoint, some of them were titles that never appeared, some of them were titles that appeared but never finished, some of them were titles that appeared for a while but merged into other new titles. Almost everything seemed to appear in a serial form. What strikes me about this period is that it was an unsettled one in which new genres and forms were being defined, launched, and tested, providing an extraordinary range of choice for the reader. I think it's probably fair to say that, a generation later, there were a set of established serial forms in which much print appeared – the daily or weekly press; the shilling monthly magazine; the penny paper; the Dickensian serial part. That more fixed sense of serial forms was still to come, and in the 1830s and 40s, the world of print was more chaotic, less certain of its forms and temporal rhythms. What gets established early on in the nineteenth century is what I have called a 'culture of seriality', an idea that helps us to see one of the defining features of modernity. In my talk, I hope to outline what this is, why it matters, and the ways Laurel Brake's ongoing work have led me to think the way I do.

Minna Vuohelainen

### **The Lure of Illustration: The Case of the *Strand Magazine***

Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor's edited collection *The Lure of Illustration in the Nineteenth Century: Picture and Press* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) represents an important attempt 'to examine discursively the trajectory of illustrated journalism across the century'.<sup>1</sup> As the editors note in their introduction, the illustrated press has received a limited amount of critical attention, perhaps because scholars keen to establish periodical research as a field of academic study have tended to focus on more august, often unillustrated periodicals, dismissing illustrated journalism, which typically targeted semi-literate working- or lower-middle-class readers, as of low cultural value. Interpreting its theme as comprising '[t]ext and image, text alongside image, text as image', *The Lure of Illustration* performs an important service to periodical research by promoting the study of the illustrated press in its various manifestations.<sup>2</sup>

This paper provides a case study of one of the most successful illustrated magazines of the late nineteenth century, George Newnes's *Strand Magazine* (1891–1950). Newnes described his journalism as 'humble and unpretentious', 'giving wholesome and harmless entertainment to crowds of hardworking people, craving for a little fun and amusement' rather than attempting to 'direc[t] the affairs of nations' or 'buil[d] up Navies'.<sup>3</sup> At sixpence a month, the *Strand* was designed to offer its half-a-million middle-class readers outstanding value for money in the shape of some 120 monthly pages of short and serial fiction, interviews, popular science, factual articles, celebrity features and brain-teasers, all plentifully illustrated. This monthly therefore fits many of the common perceptions of the low cultural status of the illustrated press. Drawing on *The Lure of Illustration*, this paper examines the interaction of text and image in the pages of the *Strand*, exploring the ways in which illustration, layout and technological advances contributed to the success of this 'national institution' and seeking to establish the cultural significance of this popular illustrated monthly.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor, 'Introduction: The Lure of Illustration', in *The Lure of Illustration in the Nineteenth Century: Picture and Press*, ed. by Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 1–13 (p. 4).

<sup>2</sup> Brake and Demoor, 'Introduction', p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Hulda Friederichs, *The Life of George Newnes, Bart* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911), pp. 116–17.

<sup>4</sup> Reginald Pound, *The Strand Magazine, 1891–1950* (London: Heinemann, 1966), p. 9.