

# *Writing and Victorianism*

*Edited by  
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Chapter 3. Writing, cultural production, and the  
periodical press in the nineteenth century,  
by Laurel Brake.

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### 3 *Writing, cultural production, and the periodical press in the nineteenth century*

Laurel Brake

#### 'How it strikes a contemporary': theory and history

For the student of nineteenth-century literature who is likely to be directed by syllabuses or teachers to canonical, high culture texts, the periodical press offers a pithy conspectus of the diversity of Victorian writing. For the magazine format, bringing together as it does a range of authors, topics and kinds of article into a single but serialized text, offers to twentieth-century readers a cheek by jowl structure which alerts us to the nuances of difference – categories of gender, genre, class, ideology, discourse – which allegedly more seamless texts are claimed to repress.<sup>1</sup>

Periodical or serial publication<sup>2</sup> was the form in which much of the period's fiction, criticism, history, theology, philosophy and art history first saw light, and in this form each piece is instantly and always contextualized, embedded in a matrix of other pieces which make up the issue in which it appears, and extend to the issues before and after. Periodical texts, by virtue of the format in which they appear, are self-confessedly historical, contingent, looking backward and forward, with a historical identity; Margaret Beetham's phrase is 'date-stamped'.<sup>3</sup> This constitutes a powerful antidote to the apparent self-containment or isolation suggested by the subsequent form of book publication – the format in which almost all Victorian writing reaches us now. Bakhtin's notion of dialogism and the related idea of intertextuality, whereby respectively all texts internally contain a range of discourses which interact, and some texts appropriate and digest other texts, has a

structural correlative in the magazine format which invites intertextual and dialogic readings of the larger, magazine text of which the individual text is a part.<sup>4</sup>

In this way, meaning is produced by the specificities of the *location* of writing, for example, of a well-known, canonical article by George Eliot, such as 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists'.<sup>5</sup> Its anonymous appearance in 1856 in the *Westminster Review*, the most radical of the heavy, more serious quarterlies, aligns this piece and its apprentice author with a free-thinking periodical which routinely published 'state of the art' work by, for example, the political economist Harriet Martineau, the evolutionist Herbert Spencer, the controversial historian J.A. Froude, and the natural scientist and critic G.H. Lewes. George Eliot had been its assistant editor between 1851 and 1853, and she was a writer of its regular review of contemporary *belles-lettres* at the time. In the same number as 'Silly Novels' and the following number are articles by Caroline Cornwallis on 'The Property of Married Women' and 'The Capabilities and Disabilities of Women', articulating what readers of the time would know: that the *Westminster* was characteristically interested in 'the woman question' and the upstart genre of fiction. Undeniably popular, fiction was undervalued by many of the educated, who had been taught to regard classical literature in Latin and Greek as superior to any writing in the vernacular.<sup>6</sup> Viewing work in its periodical context is an addition to the vertical category of 'author', which produces meaning by placing work in a succession of other works which constitute the author's *oeuvre*. Periodical contexts offer a horizontal slice which opens up the possibilities of viewing work outside the framework of authorship, and delineates clearly through difference the constraints and strengths of the author framework, what Michel Foucault calls the 'author function'.<sup>7</sup>

Just as narrative texts within a periodical are irrevocably linked, so the periodical format often links 'editorial' matter with the commercial business of journalism, making such editorial matter *commodified* text. For most Victorian periodicals, unlike books, carried a substantial 'wrapper' or 'supplement' of advertisements, adverts for products which often had no relation other than commercial with the editorial contents of the journal. That is, the press – newspapers and magazines – relied heavily on revenue from advertising; this arose from the monies raised by other advertisers

buying space in the supplements and the sale of other *titles* published by the host periodical's publishers secured through the free advertising space afforded by the regularity of their periodical's publication, month after month, or week after week. It is not surprising, then, that many successful nineteenth-century publishers owned periodicals. The following list of renowned titles paired with their publishing houses indicates the extent to which this commercial partnership between book and periodical publication was the rule: S.O. Beeton (*Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*), Richard Bentley (*Bentley's Miscellany*), Blackwood (*Blackwood's Magazine*), Bradbury and Evans (*Household Words*), Chapman and Hall (*All the Year Round*), John Lane (*Yellow Book*), Longman (*Longman's Magazine*), Edward Lloyd (*Lloyd's Weekly*), Macmillan (*Macmillan's Magazine*), Smith, Elder (*Cornhill Magazine*), Strahan and Company (*Good Words* and the *Contemporary Review*), and Tinsley (*Tinsley's Magazine*).

Publishers such as George Smith at Smith, Elder, and William and John Blackwood used their periodicals to lure authors to their firms with book as well as periodical publication in view. Moreover, the periodical serials often created anticipation in their readers, serving as 'trailers' to authors' works which readers might subsequently wish to borrow or purchase in book form. 'News' of these titles and the various formats in which these products might be accessed was obligingly supplied in the wrappers or advertising supplements of the periodical in which publishers' lists and library holdings were routinely present. Thus a popular monthly in the 1860s such as the *Cornhill Magazine* carried adverts in each number for new titles of many publishers who, attendant to the rhythm of magazine publishing, issued new book titles monthly; these adverts included books in cheap and expensive binding, as well as the latest number of their periodicals whose contents were often itemized. In addition, the largest circulating libraries also advertised the titles available to their members for borrowing, periodicals as well as books. Some periodicals, such as the weekly *Athenaeum* and the *Critic*, were renowned for their publishing-related advertisements, which constituted a form of news, and their regular columns unabashedly devoted to literary gossip. Certainly the advertising pages of the *Athenaeum* and its literary gossip are an important source for an initial view of any horizontal slice of nineteenth-century history of which a canonical text is a

part. Thus, in addition to reading George Eliot's 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists' in relation to the contents of the periodical in which it appeared, resort to the *Athenaeum* is always illuminating.

The function of periodicals in the nineteenth century, in what Robert Darnton calls 'the circuit of communication',<sup>8</sup> is complex but fascinating. Periodicals and part-issue, in so far as they fragment longer works by distributing them in parts over months or years, functioned economically in the period to lower the price of direct access to literature by spreading the cost over time, as well as the text. When Charles Dickens self-consciously decided to adopt part-issue of his fiction as a publishing format after *Pickwick Papers* (1836–37) had proved so successful in that fortuitous format, one of his motives was economic, in that part-issue made his work more accessible to readers who could pay a shilling a month, but were not sufficiently wealthy or located to subscribe annually to a circulating library at a cost of a guinea (just over a pound) or more.<sup>9</sup> The problem was that for the greater part of the nineteenth century, new fiction was largely issued in a very expensive format in its first book form – *three* volumes rather than one at a total cost of 1½ guineas. This resulted in deferred purchase of contemporary fiction in book form by most readers who either read new fiction in periodicals or part-issue which they purchased or borrowed, or read it in book form borrowed from the circulating libraries.<sup>10</sup>

Each stage of passage from one format to another was regulated and agreed by contract; the two or three-volume book publication coincided with, but did not precede, the appearance of the last (double) number of parts 19 and 20 of the part-issue or periodical serial; thus the revelation of the ending of the novel was safeguarded until readers of the serialized formats were afforded the same opportunity to know the ending as were the readers of the book edition. The date of publication of cheaper formats of texts was regulated by contracts of publishers with the circulating libraries, as the library subscribers constituted a high proportion of the first readers of the three-volume format. Only when the text appeared in a cheaper, single-volume edition (or the circulating libraries sold off their copies cheaply) did it finally come in reach again – as it had been in periodical or part-issue form – of the pocket of less well-off readers. In 1894, when publishers ceased to

offer the circulating libraries the huge discounts that had perpetuated the system and the circulating library system began to collapse, shorter, one-volume novels proliferated. The provision for readers, at the first point of access to the text, of an extended format which created conditions of reading that maximized the size and engagement of the readership – one of the primary functions of the magazine in the circuit of communication of literature – had been challenged.<sup>11</sup>

By this time the link of the fortunes of a certain important sector of the periodical press with the dissemination of fiction was indissoluble. The collapse of the system of the three-volume novel and the circulating libraries' monopoly, and the resultant publication of contemporary fiction in cheaper one-volume form, also resulted in a gradual diminution of serial fiction as a defining element of the monthly sector of the periodical press. Simultaneous with the tensions around the three-volume model, the single-issue, self-contained short story began to proliferate in the 1890s, as exemplified in the great success of George Newnes's *Strand Magazine* from 1891 which published short stories as well as serials by authors such as Conan Doyle and H.G. Wells.

The collapse at the end of the century of the circulating libraries' claim to constitute the most significant group of first readers of book editions of Victorian writing suggests what was indeed the case: the symbiotic interdependency among the private circulating libraries, the publishers, and the periodical press for over fifty years. But while the mutual dependency was constant, its character changed: at the beginning of the century the main players were periodicals and publishers; Mudie's, the largest and most famous of the circulating libraries, opened in 1842, and until the advent of a generation of magazines that prominently featured fiction from 1859, provision of first access to fiction for the middle and upper classes was largely shared between Mudie *et al.* and those few authors who published their work in part-issue, such as Dickens and Thackeray.<sup>12</sup>

For the first half of the century, fiction did not figure nearly so prominently in the market profile of the periodical press, even in periodicals such as *Blackwood's Monthly Magazine* (1817ff.) or its rival *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* (1830–82) which carried fiction in an admixture of articles on a range of subjects. The weightiest and perhaps the predominant periodical form in the

early part of the century for educated readers were the reviews, published four times a year; they are called quarterly reviews, or just quarterlies. Initially booklike in girth, expensive, closely printed, jealously anonymous, fiercely party-political and theoretical, and confined to long review essays of contemporary publications, the three early nineteenth-century quarterlies of renown were the Whig *Edinburgh Review* (1802ff.), the Tory *Quarterly Review* (1809ff.), and the initially Philosophical Radical *Westminster Review* (1824ff.). They sported frequently vituperative and nearly always partisan critical articles on diverse subjects, ranging from legislation and party politics to poetry, which made (Walter Scott) and destroyed (Wordsworth and Keats) literary reputations, as well as nurtured two generations of critics such as Francis Jeffrey and T.B. Macaulay at the *Edinburgh*, John Wilson Croker and John Lockhart ('the Scorpion') at the *Quarterly*, and Harriet Martineau, John Stuart Mill and G.H. Lewes at the *Westminster*. Between 1824 and 1839 John Wilson ('Christopher North') wrote a high proportion of *Blackwood's*, to which James Hogg also contributed in its early years. Other writers of the first half of the century closely associated as critics with specific periodicals include William Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt with the radical weekly *Examiner*, and Coleridge with *The Friend* which he founded and edited. Novelists too had longstanding attachments to specific periodicals as critics. Before Thackeray's recognition in 1847 with *Vanity Fair*, he had spent almost ten years as a regular contributor to *Fraser's*, for which Thomas Carlyle also wrote, and Margaret Oliphant wrote a significant number of *Blackwood's* literary reviews between 1854 and her death in 1897.

In the first half of the century periodicals as a whole were largely concerned with *reviewing* literature rather than publishing it, *except* in the form of criticism;<sup>13</sup> but they were part of the communication circuit, tied as they were to the reviewing of contemporary published books and the adverts of publishers among other advertising sources. As for monthlies such as *Blackwood's* and *Fraser's* which published fiction, both periodicals contained enough of independent interest to indicate to their contemporaries and to us that fiction as a genre was not incontestably dominant in the period, or in the magazines. *Blackwood's* helped ensure the integration of fiction with the rest of the contents of each issue, by applying the rule of anonymity to

it as to other material, and in the early days of *Maga* (as *Blackwood's* was called) the liveliness and scandalousness of the non-fiction was as absorbing as any fictional suspense or romance. *Fraser's*, which occupied itself far more with politics, extended this approach to its literary content, publishing a good deal of satire, and specifically satire on literary figures; when it did publish fiction, as it did irregularly in its early years, it was as likely to be a short story as a novel, possibly signed by name or with a pseudonym. Some of Thackeray's accomplished satires appeared serially in *Fraser's*, such as 'The Yellowplush Papers', 'Titmarsh and the great Hoggarty Diamond' and 'Fitz-Boodle's Confessions', as well as his satiric novel, *Luck of Barry Lyndon*, and from July 1848 Charles Kingsley's socio-political novel *Yeast* was serialized over six months.

The contrast of the place of fiction in *Blackwood's* and *Fraser's*, a modest part of a diverse display to tempt readers, and the high profile of fiction in the magazines of the 1860s is striking; it is an index of the rise in status of English fiction produced cumulatively by the outburst of fine novels in the 1840s such as *Vanity Fair* (1847–48), *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and *Mary Barton* (1848) and subsequent work by these authors, as well as by Dickens's ambitious and socially resonant works of the 1850s such as *Bleak House*, *Hard Times* and *Little Dorritt*. The achievements of English fiction paved the way for the proliferation of monthly magazines from 1859 whose identity and fortunes were married to fiction; these include *Macmillan's Magazine* (1859), the *Cornhill Magazine* (1860), *Temple Bar* (1860) and *Belgravia* (1866), to name but a few.

This shift from the generally low profile of fiction in the first half of the century to its high profile in the second is also indicative of a shift in the target readership of the periodical press, in relation to gender. Where there is little quarter if any given to the woman reader in the two earliest quarterlies, which include no fiction, my hypothesis is that through the inclusion of serialized fiction *Blackwood's*, a monthly in a less severe *magazine* format, was bidding for selective reading by women readers. By increasing the frequency of publication, the publication of serialized fiction was possible. The omnipresence of politics in *Fraser's*, which is likewise monthly, its robust humour, and the propensity to publish satire rather than romance, seem to be calculated to attract largely male

readers, despite the inclusion of various forms of fiction. My surmise on this count is based in part on the knowledge that when *Cornhill* began in 1860, under Thackeray's editorship, its inclusion of *two* serial novels in the first number (one by Thackeray and the other by Trollope) was accompanied by a policy decision to *exclude* politics, philosophy and religion, topics reckoned to be of no interest to women readers. That women were at this time excluded from higher education and participation in government and in the church may help to explain the construction of women that the *Cornhill* proffered.

This account of the literary and high culture periodical press prior to 1850 has so far confined itself to limning the quarterly and monthly formats, but there was a flourishing weekly press as well. I am going briefly to discuss the *Athenaeum* and the *Spectator* (both 1828), and the *Examiner* (1808–81), but only mention the pictorial press, exemplified by the upmarket *Illustrated London News* which cost 6d/week in 1842 and the satiric *Punch* (1841) and their many imitators. Weekly journals, by virtue of their frequency, were liable until 1855 to newspaper tax, or 'stamp' duty as it was called, if they contained 'news', and paper was taxed until 1861.<sup>14</sup> Periodicals published at weekly intervals combined the characteristics of monthly and daily journalism with respect to topicality, particularly in relation to politics. Geared as the publishing industry was to *monthly* issue of periodicals and books, a rhythm institutionalized in the designation of the day of issue towards the end of each month as 'magazine day', it was the printers of the newspaper press who were geared to daily and weekly imprints. The ambiguity of the weeklies is evident in their greater commitment to topicality and day-to-day events, which goes some way to explain the importance of politics in their pages. Thus the *Saturday Review* complained to James Grant, who had excluded it from his book in 1871–72 on *The Newspaper Press*, that it was a newspaper rather than a periodical.<sup>15</sup> Most working-class readers could not afford a daily newspaper which, before the taxes were removed in 1855, could cost as much as *The Times* at 7d/issue. During the Chartist movement of the 1830s, cheap, radical newspapers appeared such as the stamped, Chartist *North-ern Star* and the illegal, unstamped *Poor Man's Guardian*, but these ceased with the demise of the campaigns.<sup>16</sup> What were read in large numbers by working people were Sunday papers, such as

*Reynolds'* or *Lloyd's*, which included fiction and poetry, as well as social and political opinion.

Two of the general weeklies, the *Spectator* and the *Examiner*, have a marked political content throughout their history, in addition to a portion devoted to non-political material such as reviewing and the arts, and vestiges of this politics-arts axis were still visible in the structure of the weeklies such as the *New Statesman* through to the 1970s. The *Athenaeum*, however, identified itself as eschewing politics and devoting itself to other elements of culture; these included literature, visual art, science, music and drama. Under Charles Dilke, an early editor, the *Athenaeum* made strenuous efforts to avoid puffing in its reviews, while in the surrounding press the practice flourished, masked by the practice of anonymity conventional at the time. The journal's attempt at judicious reviews, its unsensational reporting of topical gossip which provides some insight into literary networks throughout the century, and its generous advertising space with its preponderance of publishers' adverts, make the *Athenaeum* a valuable literary document which warrants further study, both in its own right, and in terms of other literary texts of the period. In the *Examiner* may be read some of the most trenchant criticism of the early part of the century, by William Hazlitt on drama and poetry as well as politics, and by Leigh Hunt himself who together with Keats and Hazlitt comprised 'the Cockney school' so derided by Tory critics such as Lockhart in *Blackwood's* and the *Quarterly*. The *Spectator*, in relation to its literary content, is identified quintessentially with a single literary critic who edited it for over thirty years from 1861 to 1897; Richard Holt Hutton's serious interest in the novel is evident from his own numerous reviews, and in the space it was allocated as a genre. The *Spectator* and Hutton's writing did much to develop criticism of the novel after 1860, and to enhance the status of the genre.

But there is a danger in focusing too narrowly on what we now retrospectively define as the literary element of the nineteenth-century periodicals. I raise this caveat because the contemporary understanding of the term 'literature' was decidedly general, well into the second half of the century. I have written elsewhere about the transition between (general) criticism and (specialized) literary criticism in relation to the *Academy* (1869ff.), a monthly which went weekly in 1874, as an index of the term's changing

meaning.<sup>17</sup> The points to be made here are that at all levels of Victorian culture, imaginative literature was demonstrably integrated into the cacophony of discourses as imaged in the magazine format; it was intrinsically what we now call 'intertextual' and multidisciplinary. Moreover, the format and ubiquity of the periodical press created an enormous and proliferating market for the genre of the essay, as well as for the novel, short story, and illustration as an adjunct to print. It honed writers into critics and created a prodigious array of essays, which, as a dominant Victorian genre, is hardly read or studied today.

In 1855 Walter Bagehot contributed a famous essay to a new journal, the *National Review*, on 'The First *Edinburgh Reviewers*',<sup>18</sup> in which he commented on the common slippage between the essay and the review in periodical journalism; Bagehot's piece is only one of a plethora of essays on style, narrativity and genre, often by way of discussion of the discourses of journalism and literature, and the increasing differences between them that the development and professionalism of both were fast creating. In 1855, the year of Bagehot's essay, newspaper taxes were removed and journalism took off, with the dramatic multiplication of cheap dailies, especially outside London where almost no dailies were to be found before the removal of the tax. Bagehot's piece, in the second number of the new journalistic enterprise, was itself a 'review' of the discourses of periodical journalism, tracing a predictably enlightened present from a 'beginning' which he locates in the allegedly benighted *Edinburgh*. By the end of the century the divide between the daily and weekly newspaper press, conducted by those who now named themselves journalists, and those periodicals conducted by men and women of letters was far wider, as were the discourses. Few 'journalists' would admit to writing an 'essay' as opposed to an article or a report, and allocation of newspaper space to 'essays' was policed and resented. Even the 'new journalism' (1880s onwards), which fostered the feature and human-interest story, developed new journalistic discourses distinct from the essay. Likewise, 'journalism' became a derogatory term for authors of literature, as George Gissing's *New Grub Street* (1891) articulates.

Both the little magazines of the 1890s, such as *The Yellow Book* and *The Savoy* which published the literature and art of Beardsley, Yeats, William Rothenstein, Arthur Symons and Ella D'Arcy

among others, and the genesis of serious monthly reviews such as the *Fortnightly* (1865), the *Contemporary* (1866) and the *Nineteenth Century* (1877), inscribe the persistence of the alliance between the periodical press and 'literature' and its form, the essay, in the face of the incursions on its patch by the democratizing thrust of journalism and the popular market. My argument is therefore that the texts of the entirety of the periodical press of the nineteenth century offer a rich site of essays and criticism for scrutiny to those of us who study discourse now. Although journalism and literature may appear distinct today – each anxiously policing its borders against the other – in the nineteenth century they were nearly indissoluble in sections of the periodical press. These texts constitute appropriate subjects of study for readers of literature, culture, history, media studies and journalism itself which, ever absorbed by the constant reconstruction of the present, is so vehemently uninterested in (its own) history.

### Figures in the carpet

Located as we all are inside the discourse of authorship and individual writers, I want briefly to look at some Victorian figures, literary people who move between the production of different kinds of writing throughout their lives. I have chosen five eminent Victorians, a pinprick of representation of the constellations of known and unknown writers who serviced the 30,000 or more periodical and newspaper titles of the period. There is of course a politics in this selection of Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, Elisabeth Braddon and Margaret Oliphant: I wanted prominent and known figures who were both writers of books and associated with the press, but not those whose involvement was largely that of editor, since journalism is by definition a heavily mediated genre, and never the work of a single figure. And although the culture of newspaper journalism was and is heavily male, periodical journalism, while still overwhelmingly male in the nineteenth century in both its production and consumption, did include many women among its anonymous contributors, and some among the signed. Women did make up a higher proportion of authors of serial fiction, and there were women editors, three of whom, disproportionately, I have selected for discussion; but their loca-

tions in the production of periodicals are each contributory to an understanding of the gender issues and balance in this cultural formation, which the positions of Dickens and Thackeray do not make visible.<sup>19</sup>

Of the five figures here, the three most prominent launched their careers in literature via the press, which provides historical precedent to the otherwise surprising advice to young literary men in *Blackwood's* (1878) to enter journalism rather than authorship for the best result.<sup>20</sup> Dickens's involvement with the newspaper and periodical press throughout his life is well documented.<sup>21</sup> Writing for the press was 'in the family', his father having worked as a parliamentary correspondent on the *British Press*; and Dickens's earliest published writing was as a reporter for *The Mirror of Parliament*, a paper owned by his uncle. Other parliamentary reporting followed, as well as stories which appeared in the *Monthly Magazine*, *Bell's Weekly*, *Bell's Life in London* and the dailies, the *Morning Chronicle* and the *Evening Chronicle*. Some of these pieces were collected to make up Dickens's first book, *Sketches by Boz*, which constitutes the bulk of Michael Slater's first volume of *Dickens' Journalism* (1994). Dickens continued to move between literature and journalism. In 1837 *Oliver Twist* was serialized monthly in *Bentley's Miscellany*, a new periodical which Dickens edited, and having left *Bentley's*, he attempted to place the serial issue of *The Old Curiosity Shop* within a weekly periodical format in 1840 in *Master Humphrey's Clock*, which he ditched quickly, rescuing the novel rather than the periodical; and for a short period in 1846 Dickens edited the *Daily News*, a radical newspaper he founded. He was, however, prodigiously successful in establishing a market in 1850, when he founded and began to 'conduct' the weekly *Household Words* (1850–59), which he deployed to publish his own fiction (e.g. *Hard Times*), as well as that of others (e.g. Gaskell and Wilkie Collins), and to address his readers directly on all manner of contemporary issues; this he continued to do (from 1859 in *All the Year Round* in which *Great Expectations* appeared) until his death. That Dickens was able to 'conduct' a weekly journal for the last twenty years of his life and continue to publish the great novels of his middle and later periods is due to the help he had from another journalist, W.H. Wills, who acted as sub-editor of both periodicals, being succeeded by Dickens's son Charles in 1868. But

throughout his career, from beginning to end, Dickens was steeped in the material production of writing, and the time-released texts of his novels echo his periodical work, as founder, active contributor and editor, with their common involvement in capital, markets and readers, in weekly and monthly rhythms and inexorable deadlines.

William Makepeace Thackeray, Dickens's contemporary and author of *Vanity Fair*, *Pendennis* (that novel of a young journalist's life) and *Esmond*, gained recognition a full decade later than Dickens, but he spent that period equally immersed in the periodical press of the day, as a regular contributor to *Fraser's* and *Punch* (including the excellent 'Punch's Prize Novelists'), and sometime contributor to the *New Monthly Magazine* and *British and Foreign Review*, and an infrequent contributor to diverse others. The satirical skills he honed in his regular work for *Punch* and *Fraser's* are everywhere manifest in his subsequent novels. In 1859–60 he joined with Trollope and others in the founding of that successful vehicle of fiction, the *Cornhill*, served as its first editor, and contributed frequently to its early volumes. While *Vanity Fair* (its serial title was 'Pen and Pencil Sketches of English Society') appeared first in monthly part-issue in 1847, it was published by *Punch*, and in a format which was probably distributed and bound up with the magazine, on magazine day.<sup>22</sup> Thackeray's birth as a novelist from the nurturing formation of the periodicals is thus materially figured; certainly, the serial title of *Vanity Fair* is an analogue to the twin visual and verbal character of *Punch* which frequently published 'sketches', and refers to his own artwork which illustrated the novel in part-issue.

George Eliot's involvement with the periodical press is more short-lived; significantly, once she began to publish her fiction in 1857 she ceased to review, reserving her connection with the press to publication of her fiction, the first of which appeared in *Blackwood's*, and John Blackwood was her first publisher. She retained contact with the magazines through her partner G.H. Lewes, a prolific freelance journalist throughout his life, who was a (co-)founder and editor of the *Fortnightly Review* (1865–66) and the *Cornhill Magazine* (1862–64?, 1868?–71). After having cut her literary teeth at home, through undertaking the translation of a controversial volume of the 'higher criticism' in German, Strauss's *Life of Jesus* (1846), George Eliot served the second half of her

writer's apprenticeship in London, to which she boldly moved in 1851, as an assistant editor to John Chapman, who had just become editor of the formidable and heavyweight quarterly, the *Westminster Review*. Between 1851 and 1853 she helped edit the journal, and wrote and reviewed for it regularly until 1857; she had close contact with collective cultural production in the metropolis and with the *Westminster's* circle of radical contributors, many of them already well-known. The position at the heart of London intellectual life that the *Westminster Review* afforded, and its network of writers, philosophers and journalists of which she became a part, nourished her own period of intellectual gestation. It should be noted that very few women of the period were part of this or other such groups,<sup>23</sup> although the radical philosophical tradition in which the *Westminster* had its roots was distinctive in its positive interest in the woman question. That the young George Eliot made her way to London via the *Westminster*, and that its intellectual and social network proved to be the linchpin of her transition from translator/editor to that of author are as uncontroversial as they are anomalous and remarkable.

George Eliot took the path generally followed by would-be literary men of her time, from apprenticeship in the journals to authorship. However, unlike Dickens and Thackeray she did not elect to remain in active relation to the periodical press after 1859, and she eschewed any part in founding or editing periodicals subsequently or even contributing. It may be said that apart from publishing occasional short fiction she severed her links with journalism which was, in the 1850s in house, largely a male preserve. The identities of editors in the period and their assistants show this gendered element of nineteenth-century journalism, as do the figures of the two women journalist/novelists to follow.

Margaret Oliphant (1828–97) was a contemporary of George Eliot (1819–80), with whom she querulously compares herself, enviously and unfavourably, in her autobiography. Both began to publish in the 1850s, and both placed their fiction in *Blackwood's Magazine* at an early stage of their careers, Oliphant in 1852 (*Katie Stuart*) and Eliot in 1857 (*Scenes of Clerical Life*). The difference is that Oliphant moved from the writing of fiction to her lifelong involvement with the periodical press: she became a frequent and eventually hallmark contributor of literary articles



and reviews to *Blackwood's* and one of the most trusted of publisher's readers for the house of Blackwood, of which she wrote a history which is still 'standard'. Oliphant, like Dickens, continued writing and publishing her fiction, and combined the roles of author and journalist, but while she undoubtedly functioned as a woman of letters, and supported her family through her paid work, the opportunity to edit any periodical was never offered, nor would Blackwood's hire her on any regular paid basis, as other publishers' readers were employed late in the century.

Oliphant's anger about the withheld recognition and employment is evident in her *Autobiography*, in which she compares her work and career not only to those of George Eliot but to Trollope; she constructs herself both as an author supporting a family like her male counterpart, and (therefore) a producer of hack work which is inferior to that of George Eliot, who is presented as a kept, economically protected woman. Trouncing both of her contemporaries, she takes refuge in the *Autobiography* not in her authorship but in her success at fulfilling her *family* responsibilities as an earner and mother. It is a predictable and overdetermined space, uneasily occupied and culturally and historically defined. Though Oliphant's views, reviews and judgements were an important element of the public face of Blackwood in *Maga*, and in the shaping of the firm's list for over forty years, the incapacity of the publishing industry in the period to reward her inscribes the gendered formation which kept women authors domesticated, at home, and outside the perimeters of male power in the workplace, those other 'houses', of Blackwood and other publishing firms.<sup>24</sup>

But there were women editors of periodicals, and my fifth example is one: M.E. Braddon (1837–1915), the best-selling author of sensational fiction such as *Lady Audley's Secret* (1861–62) and *Aurora Floyd* (1862–63), both of which appeared serially initially in magazines founded by John Maxwell, a publisher who was also her partner. The first of these titles, which made Braddon famous overnight, was written for Maxwell to appear in his new 6d magazine *Robin Goodfellow*; because it failed after twelve numbers the novel was transferred to the *Sixpenny Magazine* where it was noticed by Tinsley and published in three-volume format in 1862. *Aurora Floyd* appeared simultaneously with the latter stages of *Lady Audley's Secret* in *Temple Bar*, another journal owned by Maxwell between 1860 and 1862. From

1866, and for a decade, Braddon edited *Belgravia*, a shilling monthly which was founded by Maxwell to carry her fiction in addition to the general and diverse fare with which shilling monthlies entertained their readers.

Braddon proved a prolific and professional writer and editor, as Eliot and Oliphant were, but the *abilities* of these women contributors and editors were not the issue in the nineteenth century. The problem was *access* to the male space of publishing and the male coteries and informal formations associated with the periodical press, such as the *Punch* table (*clearly* 'not a place for women!'), the Fraserians, or the Metaphysical Society associated with the editor and networks of the *Contemporary Review* until 1877, and then the *Nineteenth Century*. Both George Eliot in John Chapman and Braddon in Maxwell found men who were willing to give them access to periodical production space outside the domestic sphere, and thus to the networks to be found in and through the workplace. This is the access which Oliphant was denied.

The editorial contents, production, and advertisements of the nineteenth-century periodical press are as closely bound up with the literature of the period as the distribution of *Vanity Fair* was with *Punch*. It only remains to 'Read all about it'.

## Notes

1. The distinction between 'writerly' and 'readerly' texts made by Roland Barthes is helpful here. See R. Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York, 1974), pp. 3–5 and *passim*.
2. Most Victorian writing at issue here appeared within periodicals as one item in a succession of pieces which made up a number, but some material – notably fiction such as some novels by Dickens and George Eliot, and long works such as the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Dictionary of National Biography* – appeared in part-issue, which was confined to the single work in question, the series of parts terminating when the work was completed.
3. See Margaret Beetham, 'Towards a Theory of the Periodical as a Publishing Genre', in *Investigating Victorian Journalism*, ed. L. Brake, A. Jones and L. Madden (London, 1990), p. 21. This article in totality provides an excellent introduction to some of the theoretical questions pertinent to journalism.

4. M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, 1981).
5. George Eliot, 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists,' *Westminster Review*, 56 (Oct. 1856), pp. 442–61.
6. As the novel, fiction in prose rather than verse, was not a classical form, it remained largely disregarded by the learned; for the genteel, the religious and the puritan it was often characterized as morally dangerous, 'light' reading, or 'misleading' by its display of the possibilities of romance plots. Given our esteem for the nineteenth-century English novel, its neglect by some contemporary critics such as Matthew Arnold, Walter Pater, Swinburne and Oscar Wilde is noteworthy, as is their marked preference for European fiction, perhaps in part because it was not in *their* vernacular, and not therefore accessible to the untutored reader.
7. Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?', in *Textual Strategies*, ed. Josue V. Harari (Ithaca and London, 1977).
8. By this phrase Darnton is referring to the production circuit of communication, from author-publisher to printers and their suppliers to shippers to booksellers to readers and back to the author. See Robert Darnton, 'What is the History of Books?', in *The Kiss of Lamourette* (London, 1990), p. 112.
9. For a detailed discussion of the origins of Dickens's use of the part-issue format, see Robert L. Patten, *Charles Dickens and His Publishers* (Santa Cruz, 1991).
10. Dickens undercut the system at this part of the circuit as well, by publishing a number of his novels in less than three volumes immediately after serialization.
11. See John Sutherland's comments on the origins of serialization: John Sutherland, 'Dickens's Serialising Imitators', in *Victorian Fiction: Writers, Publishers, Readers* (London, 1995), pp. 87–106, and its persistence after 1894.
12. See Sutherland, *ibid.*, for the rare use and even rarer success of part-issue for Victorian fiction. I say 'largely' because as early as 1854 Dickens had further undercut the three-volume publishing system by conducting his own periodicals which carried his and others' fiction. *Household Words*, a weekly, dates from 1850 (to 28 May 1859) and *All the Year Round* from April 1859. Dickens edited the latter until his death in 1870. And *Blackwood's Monthly Magazine* had been publishing anonymous fiction since its inception in 1817.
13. The nineteenth-century periodical press did provide the forcing ground of criticism as we know it, and its 'progress' was not linear. Non-fiction could be the site of serious, methodical reviews in some of the early quarterlies, but reviews of fiction reflected its low cultural

- value at this period, and often consisted of little but excerpts and/or puffs, in the form of paid paragraphs from the publisher or kind words from an anonymous friend of the author or, in some cases, the author him- or herself. When in 1864 Matthew Arnold focused greater attention on criticism in his essay 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time' and in 1865 appended it as the introduction to *Essays in Criticism*, a collection of his periodical articles, self-consciousness about 'criticism' among periodical journalists was already evident.
14. These taxes and others on newspaper advertisements were called 'taxes on knowledge' and were originally imposed by the government from the late eighteenth century in order to control the circulation of news; they sought to keep press ownership out of the reach of poor, radical printers, to keep the prices of newspapers high, and to confine the readership of the press to the wealthier classes. They were gradually reduced and removed between 1833 and 1861.
  15. James Grant, *The Newspaper Press, Vol. III, The Metropolitan Weekly and Provincial Press* (London, 1872).
  16. See Patricia Hollis, *The Pauper Press* (Oxford, 1970) and Joel Wiener, *The War of the Unstamped* (Ithaca, 1969).
  17. See Laurel Brake, 'From Critic to Literary Critic: the Case of *The Academy*, 1869', in *Subjugated Knowledges* (London, 1994), pp. 36–50.
  18. Walter Bagehot, 'The First *Edinburgh Reviewers*', *National Review*, 12 (Oct. 1855), pp. 253–84.
  19. Margaret Beetham, *A Magazine of their Own?* (London, 1996), discusses the complex issue of what constitutes women's space in the nineteenth-century periodical press in relation to magazines which were targeted at women readers, but often largely written and edited by men.
  20. [Innes Shand], 'Contemporary Literature: I. Journalists', *Blackwood's Magazine*, 124 (Dec. 1878), pp. 641–62. For more on this interesting series by Innes Shand, see Laurel Brake, "'The trepidation of the spheres": the Serial and the Book in the Nineteenth Century' in *Serials and their Readers*, ed. R. Myers and M. Harris (Winchester, 1993), pp. 82–101.
  21. The amount and quality of Dickens's journalism have recently been recognized by Dent's decision to publish a four-volume edition of his best (i.e. selected) journalism, edited and annotated by Michael Slater. That such an edition has appeared so belatedly is an index of literature's anxious devaluation of its historic rival, journalism, even when the journalism is by a great author.
  22. See Sutherland, 'Dickens's Serialising Imitators', p. 95.

23. Over the years of the *Westminster's* history, Harriet Martineau, Harriet Taylor and Helen Taylor were three.
24. Elisabeth Jay is very interesting on Oliphant's version of her professional and domestic roles. See Elisabeth Jay, 'The Professional Woman', in *Mrs Oliphant: A Fiction to Herself* (London, 1995), pp. 241–88.