

## Periodicals and reviewing

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Journalism will, no doubt, occupy the first or one of the first places in any future literary history of the present times, for it is the most characteristic of all their productions.<sup>1</sup>

Fitzjames Stephen's predictive remark on the prominent place that will be occupied by journalism and the periodical press in an imagined literary history of the future is borne out by the positioning of this chapter, which foregrounds their status as among the most important and exemplary of the literary forms of the Victorian age. The nineteenth century saw the beginnings of the modern mass media. Tens of thousands of serial titles were published in the course of the century, encompassing a vast range from intellectually heavyweight quarterlies to popular penny weeklies, fashionable magazines, and esoteric specialist journals, and touching the lives and minds of every Victorian citizen. As a medium for the circulation of new ideas and discoveries and forum for reviews, the periodical press, it is generally agreed by Victorian and modern commentators alike, provided a dynamic context for lively argument during a period of unprecedented, unresolved, and irresolvable speculation and debate. It played a critical role in defining nineteenth-century literary and political culture. However, although the convenient fact that both the Victorians and ourselves regard periodical literature as a pre-eminent sign of the times may seem to confirm that the cultural prominence of the periodical press at this historical moment has always been a self-evident truth, the fact that for many decades, with a few honourable exceptions,<sup>2</sup> journalism was virtually invisible in

<sup>1</sup> Fitzjames Stephen, 'Journalism', *Cornhill Magazine* 6 (1862), pp. 52–63: p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> See Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800–1900* (University of Chicago Press, 1957; 2nd edn, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998); Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Scrutinies* (London: Athlone Press, 1972); Louis James, *Fiction for the Working Man, 1830–1850* (1963; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974); Michael Wolff, 'Charting the Golden Stream: Thoughts on a Directory of Victorian Periodicals', *Victorian Periodicals Newsletter* 13 (1971), pp. 23–8. The Research

twentieth-century literary studies of the Victorians, other than as a 'background' to the canonical forms of the novel, poetry, and drama, suggests otherwise. The last *Cambridge History* of Victorian literature, commissioned a hundred years ago as the 'long' nineteenth century was making way for the Moderns, does laudably include two chapters on journalism, but they are placed in the middle of the second volume devoted to the period. As Joanne Shattock and Michael Wolff note in the Introduction to their collection of essays *The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings*, whilst periodicals are widely referred to in scholarship on the Victorians, they had never before then been the subject of extensive study in their own right.<sup>3</sup> This serves to remind us that modern views of what was 'characteristic' of the Victorians are inescapably shaped by the cultural and critical world we ourselves inhabit, and by the institutional and commercial practices that form the contexts from which our histories of an earlier age are produced. Furthermore, even where we do agree with the Victorians that journalism is one of the most characteristic of Victorian literary forms, do we understand precisely the same thing when we speak of the quintessential period features that writing for the serials in the nineteenth century ostensibly displays? It is, I suggest, in the robust dialogue between nineteenth-century and early twenty-first-century perceptions of what it is that is so characteristically Victorian about journalism and reviewing that we may find a focus for mapping the literary historical journey that critical scholarship on the press has taken over the century and a half that separates Stephen's observations from our own time, and for determining the significance of the periodical press as a locus of Victorian cultural formation.

The sheer scale of the press in the nineteenth century is astounding. *The Waterloo Directory of English Newspapers and Periodicals, 1800–1900* lists more than 50,000 newspapers and periodicals, and within that vast number there is a staggering range.<sup>4</sup> Victorian directories, most notably *Mitchell's Newspaper Press Directory* (which was first issued in 1846, and appeared annually from

Society for Victorian Periodicals was founded in 1968, and with it the *Victorian Periodicals Newsletter* (1968–78), which later became *Victorian Periodicals Review* (1979–). *The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals 1824–1900*, 5 vols. (1966–89) and *The Waterloo Directory of Victorian Periodicals, 1824–1900* (1976) provided valuable research tools for these pioneering researchers into the Victorian periodical press, complementing *Poole's Index to Periodical Literature 1802–1906*, 7 vols. (1882–1906).

3 Joanne Shattock and Michael Wolff (eds.), *The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings* (Leicester University Press, 1982), pp. xiii–xv.

4 See Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor (eds.), *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland* (Gent: Academia Press; London: The British Library, 2009), p. 663 on the *Waterloo Directory*. Both the *Waterloo Directory* and the *DNCJ* are invaluable resources for periodicals research.

1856) and *May's British and Irish Press Guide* (from 1871), give the modern student of the nineteenth-century press not only a rich sense of local variations and specializations in serial publication, but also insights into the velocity of growth in the periodical market. We learn from the former, for example, that, in 1864, 1,764 periodical titles are in production; by 1887, 3,597 were listed.<sup>5</sup> Circulation figures are similarly astonishing. The *Cornhill Magazine* (1860–75), for example, according to Richard Altick sold 120,000 copies of its first number – impressive given its price at a shilling; while the penny illustrated fiction weekly *London Journal* (1845–1928) achieved sales of over half a million copies per issue in the early 1850s.<sup>6</sup>

As both nineteenth-century and modern commentators have understood, periodicals in the nineteenth century were at once defined by and constitutive of modernity. At a material level, modern technological advances had a huge impact on the production, the cost, the appearance, and the distribution of periodical publications. For example, the period saw great changes in the techniques, quality, and cost of graphic reproduction. The revival of wood engraving in the 1820s and 1830s enabled a profusion of cheap illustrated publications, and was particularly favourable to the development of the early Victorian radical graphic press and illustrated miscellanies, whilst photography played an increasingly important role in the expansion of illustrated periodical publication in the 1880s and 1890s. The coming of the railway transformed distribution networks, and produced a new kind of reader on the move. At the same time, as Gilles Deleuze reminds us, ‘A society is defined by its amalgamations, not by its tools’, and so the importance of such technical innovations lies in what he terms ‘the interminglings they make possible or that make them possible’.<sup>7</sup> It is, then, in the particular constellations and dialectical exchanges at different historical junctures between new technologies and other social, economic, and cultural forces – such as the labour market and employment legislation, urbanization and demographic change, the legal regulation and taxation of the media, education and literacy, feminism, and imperialism – that we must look for the definitively Victorian characteristics of the periodical press as genre.

5 Simon Eliot, *Some Patterns and Trends in British Publishing, 1800–1919* (London: Bibliographical Society, 1993), p. 148.

6 Altick, *English Common Reader*, 2nd edn, p. 359; Andrew King, *The London Journal, 1845–83: Periodicals, Production and Gender* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 82–9, 243–4.

7 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 90.

The Victorian periodical is imbricated in political, material, and institutional histories, and detailed analyses of these form an important branch of modern studies of nineteenth-century print media.<sup>8</sup> This double role, producing and being produced by changing forms of knowledge and practice, is something that Victorian commentators themselves acknowledged and critiqued, often, self-reflexively, in the pages of the very publications that are invoked. They were seemingly intrigued by periodical writing and its broader cultural meanings, in particular its entanglement with and its articulation of the modern. Thomas Carlyle, for instance, identified reviewing for the periodical press as the paradigmatic cultural form of what was, in his view, a morbidly self-obsessed age. In his *Characteristics* (1831), which itself began life as a review in the leading periodical the *Edinburgh Review* (1802–1929), the first of the nineteenth-century quarterlies, he observed, not without an ironic sense of his own implication, that ‘Reviewing spreads with strange vigour’, predicting that ‘By and by it will be found that all Literature has become one boundless self-devouring Review . . . Thus does Literature . . . like a sick thing, superabundantly “listen to itself.”’ Reviewing is regarded as symptomatic of ‘the diseased self-conscious state’ not only of literature, but of modern life. ‘What’, he asks, ‘is all this that we hear, for the last generation or two, about the Improvement of the Age, the Spirit of the Age, Destruction of Prejudice, Progress of the Species, and the March of Intellect, but an unhealthy state of self-sentence, self-survey; the precursor and prognostic of still worse health?’ Contemporary culture is relentlessly pathologized; the periodical press at once its most diseased organ, the agent of quackery, and the medium through which contagion is spread:

all things must be probed into, the whole working of man’s world be anatomically studied. Alas, anatomically studied, that it may be medically studied, that it may be medically aided! Till at length indeed, we have come to such a pass, that except in this same *medicine*, with its artifices and appliances, few can so much as imagine any strength or hope to remain for us. The whole Life of Society must now be carried on by drugs: doctor

8 See, for example, Laurel Brake, Bill Bell, and David Finkelstein (eds.), *Nineteenth-Century Media and the Construction of Identities* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000); Laurel Brake and Julie F. Codell (eds.), *Encounters in the Victorian Press: Editors, Authors, Readers* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Marysa Demoor, *Their Fair Share: Women, Power and Criticism in the Athenaeum, from Millicent Garrett Fawcett to Katherine Mansfield, 1870–1920* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000); Margaret Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own? Domesticity and Desire in the Woman’s Magazine, 1800–1914* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996); Hilary Fraser, Stephanie Green, and Judith Johnston, *Gender and the Victorian Periodical* (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

after doctor appears with his nostrum, of Coöperative Societies, Universal Suffrage, Cottage-and-Cow systems, Repression of Population, Vote by ballot. To such height has the dyspepsia of Society reached: as indeed the constant grinding internal pain, or from time to time the mad spasmodic throes, of all Society do otherwise too mournfully indicate.<sup>9</sup>

Uncannily anticipating Jean Baudrillard's post-modernist concept of 'the precession of simulacra' whereby representation precedes reality,<sup>10</sup> Carlyle critiques the 'artifices and appliances' – or what he elsewhere referred to as the 'machinery' of modern life – of which the review, at a remove from the authenticity of real literature, is for him so symptomatic. His very deployment of the extended metaphor of disease and diagnostic treatment itself seems to exemplify that retreat from the real of which he writes. At the same time such rich metaphorical language conveys the cultural embeddedness of the periodical, its 'interminglings' with broader intellectual and discursive fields.

The metaphorical resonances of journalistic genres and practices sprang naturally to mind for many other writers of the period too. Writing several decades after Coleridge, the journalist Walter Bagehot finds in the press the quintessential modern urban form. 'London is like a newspaper', he writes in an article for the *National Review* (1855–64) on 'Charles Dickens' in 1858:

Everything is there, and everything is disconnected. There is every kind of person in some houses but there is no more connection between the houses than between the neighbours in the lists of 'births, marriages, and deaths.' As we change from the broad leader to the squalid police report we pass a corner and we are in a changed world.

Dickens's own journalistic experience equips him admirably to represent this modern metropolis in his fiction, according to Walter Bagehot, for 'He describes London like a special correspondent for posterity.'<sup>11</sup> In Bagehot's phrase, writing that is definitively live and of the moment, eyewitness news, is envisaged as nonetheless preserved for readers who are yet to come. Dickens writes the present for the future. The trope of journalism expands to encompass both the Victorian novelist-reporter and the modern reader thumbing through the newspaper of the past. In another article of this

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Carlyle, 'Characteristics', *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, 3 vols. (London: 1887), vol. III, pp. 191–227: pp. 218, 208.

<sup>10</sup> Jean Baudrillard, 'The Precession of Simulacra', in *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (1981; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 161.

<sup>11</sup> [Walter Bagehot], 'Charles Dickens', *National Review* 7 (1858), pp. 458–86: p. 468.

period, 'The First Edinburgh Reviewers' (1855), Bagehot contrasts the older early nineteenth-century model of journalism typified by the *Edinburgh Review* with the modern style. He identifies 'the review-like essay and the essay-like review' not, like Carlyle, as symptomatic of the cultural malaise at the heart of modern life, but as 'the very model of our modern writing', something to be welcomed and celebrated as meeting the new needs of the times. He comments on the 'casual character of modern literature', of which he notes 'everything about it is temporary and fragmentary . . . The race has made up its mind to be fugitive, as well as minute.'<sup>12</sup> Such remarks point up the expendability of periodicals within commodity culture: the periodical, as Margaret Beetham notes, is decidedly an 'ephemeral form', whose 'claims to truth and importance are always contingent'; it is 'designed to be thrown away'.<sup>13</sup> Bagehot's emphasis on the temporary and the fragmentary is taken up again by Charles Baudelaire, who similarly sees journalism as the key cultural medium of modern life. In 'The Painter of Modern Life' (1863), he identifies the magazine fashion-plate as the art form that most effectively registers the nuances of modernity, by which he means 'the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent', and he proposes Constantin Guys (1802–92), a graphic artist who was for some years at mid-century on the staff of the *Illustrated London News* (1842–1989), as his representative modern artist. By the final decade of the century, Oscar Wilde, himself a writer for the periodical press and one-time editor of the magazine the *Woman's World* (1887–90), can at once complain 'We are dominated by Journalism', and celebrate the modern cultural values that journalism had come to enshrine, such as the elevation of the 'Critic' to 'Artist' and 'The Truth of Masks'.<sup>14</sup>

This is the kind of contemporary writing about nineteenth-century journalism that appeals to modern critics, who frequently see themselves as inhabiting a 'society of the spectacle' in which, according to Guy Debord, 'all that once was directly lived has become mere representation'.<sup>15</sup> We are drawn to a cultural form whose fragmentary, contingent characteristics mark it out as an intrinsically modern medium suited to the disaggregated experience of individuals within an emergent consumer society. Interest in

12 [Walter Bagehot], 'The First Edinburgh Reviewers', *National Review* 1 (1855), pp. 253–84: pp. 54–55.

13 Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own?*, p. 9.

14 Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* (New York: Da Capo, 1964), p. 13; Oscar Wilde, 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism', *Fortnightly Review* o.s. 55, n.s. 49 (February 1891), pp. 292–319: p. 309.

15 Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994), p. 12.

popular and ephemeral forms, in criticism and theory as a distinct field of study, and in the fertile cross-connections between different disciplinary fields, deriving from late twentieth- and twenty-first-century developments in new historicism, film theory, gender, and cultural studies, has drawn modern scholars to look more attentively at the periodical press as a product of its time and, further, as signifying the new consciousness of time that accompanied modernity. This consciousness appears exemplified by the rhythms and periodicities of this genre's publication, by its quarterly, monthly, weekly, or daily chromatic regularity, by journalism's simultaneous engagement with being of the moment, and with duration and seriality.<sup>16</sup>

For literary and cultural historians today, the Victorian periodical press is in considerable part of interest because it seems such an index of the contemporary; appearing to bring us closer to an understanding of both the condition of modernity and the everyday lives and preoccupations of ordinary people. It does seem to offer us an experience of the Victorian present, and of Victorian presentism, what Richard Altick calls the 'presence of the present'.<sup>17</sup> There was indeed an urgent awareness of the historical moment of the present but, given the sense of the acceleration of time, of its contingency as well; and so alongside the valorization of instantaneity and the instant there was a contradictory desire to arrest and store ephemera and, effectively, time itself. This was manifested in the development of new kinds of interest in archival processes and technologies. For the nineteenth century was also the great age of the museum (with the opening of the National Gallery in 1824, Sir John Soane's house-museum in 1837, the South Kensington complex in 1857, the National Portrait Gallery in 1859, the Natural History Museum in 1881, and the Tate Gallery in 1897) and, as well as being agents and engines of the present day, periodicals both reflected and participated in the general passion for collecting, preserving, classification, and display that characterized Victorian museum culture.

It is not unusual, of course, for particular cultural obsessions to derive from their opposites, and visual theorists have identified other, and related, contradictory dynamics that are characteristic of this moment of modernity. Writing of the mid-late 1800s, Jonathan Crary, for example, observes that, at the very moment when perception seems to be 'characterized by

16 See James Mussell, *Science, Time and Space in the Late Nineteenth-Century Periodical Press* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

17 Richard D. Altick, *The Presence of the Present: Topics of the Day in the Victorian Novel* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1991).

experiences of fragmentation, shock, and dispersal' – to be defined, in short, by distraction – reciprocally and paradoxically a disciplinary regime of attentiveness was inaugurated.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Mary Ann Doane considers how the new sense of the divisibility of time that emerged in the late nineteenth century posed a challenge to traditional ideas of time as the ultimate continuum. She identifies the 'dilemma of discontinuity and continuity' as the 'epistemological conundrum that structures the debates about the representability of time at the turn of the century'.<sup>19</sup>

Such oppositional categories can help frame our thinking about the Victorian press, which notably exemplifies, in relation to both its form and its content, at once distraction and attention, continuity and, equally, discontinuity – for example, in the juxtaposition of diachronic narration and synchronic images, or the contiguity of attention-grabbing headlines and advertisements with discursive text. It also participated in the ironic cultural project of archiving the present whereby, as Doane argues in relation to early film, 'what is archived is not so much a material object as an experience – an experience of the present'.<sup>20</sup> The contradictory imperatives of currency and storage are enshrined in the very titles of some nineteenth-century serials, from the early *Lady's Monthly Museum* (1798–1828) and *Monthly Repository* (1806–37) to later journals such as the *Monthly Record* (1869–91). Interestingly, both aspects of periodicalism, its presentism as well as its archival recording function, intensified in the later part of the century. The sense of journalistic immediacy was vastly enhanced by the use of illustration, and publications such as the *Illustrated London News* (1842–1989) and the *Penny Illustrated Paper* (1861–1913) led the way in featuring large numbers of sometimes crude yet often vividly effective pictures that powerfully evoke the immediacy of newsworthy contemporary events, even though early on, as Peter Sinnema points out in relation to the *ILN*, the scene of production was often at a distance from the actual events portrayed, with 'the lion's share of drawings' in the 1840s and 1850s, 'astonishingly, produced in the immediate vicinity of the publishing house, based on news already reported in the daily press'.<sup>21</sup> As periodical illustration became more and more lavish from the mid-1880s, with

18 Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2000), p. 1.

19 Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 9.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 82.

21 Peter W. Sinnema, *Dynamics of the Pictured Page: Representing the Nation in the Illustrated London News* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), p. 70.



the development of new reproductive technologies and the dedication of more space to pictures and illustrated advertisements and supplements, and as, increasingly, woodcut engravings were superseded by photographic images, the press's capacity to capture the moment of the present became ever more convincing. The world becomes, in such illustrated news periodicals, and in the more ephemeral fashion magazines that proliferated at the turn of the century, in Siegfried Kracauer's phrase, a 'photographable present'.<sup>22</sup> But this is precisely where the dilemma of the drive to capture the ephemeral present is most evident. Roland Barthes memorably finds in the photograph a curious conjunction of the 'here' and 'then',<sup>23</sup> and this formulation seems particularly apt when we think about the early use of photographs in news stories, at a time when communication was sometimes slow and uneven. Indeed, this was still to be the case in 1912, when pictures of the intact *Titanic*, the indexical sign of its unsinkability, appeared on the front pages of the press immediately following the disaster, with headlines reporting 'Everyone safe' (the *Daily Mirror* (16 April 1912)), 'No lives lost' (the *Daily Mail* (16 April 1912)). Such stories became, immediately, a part of the *Titanic* archive.

This last example reminds us that of course we experience time in a different way now than it was experienced a hundred years ago and more. But, as Doane points out, 'The ideologies of instantaneity, of temporal compression, of the lure of the present moment that emerge in this period have not disappeared; they confront us now in the form of digital technologies',<sup>24</sup> so-called 'time-based' media not least, and this is another lens through which, as twenty-first-century critics, we view nineteenth-century periodicals. If the development of digital technologies and the cultural phenomenon of the Internet have encouraged modern readers to think about the temporal properties of the Victorian press in new ways, the growth of electronic media has also contributed to changes in the ways we think about authorship, about texts, and about literature and the public sphere, complementing the important theoretical work in these fields that dominated the final decades of the twentieth century. Again, we can see why it is that modern scholars are attracted to Victorian periodicalism, because in all its different forms, from elite highbrow journals such as the

22 Siegfried Kracauer, 'Photography'. in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed. and trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 59.

23 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, ed. and trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), p. 77.

24 Doane, *Cinematic Time*, p. 20.

*Westminster Review* (1824–1914) to magazines for women and girls, such as the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* (1852–79) and the *Girls' Own Paper* (1880–1956), it is a medium that destabilizes and complicates ideas about authorship and authorial voice, about the integrity of the text, about what we understand by the literary, about the public sphere. Periodicals, like the Internet, unsettle the boundaries between writers and readers, between the verbal and the visual, and between the cultural, the counter-cultural and the commercial. They likewise offer not a discrete, homogeneous, single-authored text but an open-ended dynamic debate in process, a dialogue between contributors offering different points of view, between text, illustration, and advertisement, between different forms of communication (what we now think of as multimedia experience). The popular Victorian magazine, especially, represents miscellaneity, fragmentation, polyphony, anonymity, and the democratization of knowledge, but, more interestingly perhaps than its post-modern counterparts, it does so within, and as the mouthpiece for, a culture that ostensibly valorized integrity, singularity, identity, authenticity, and elitism.

This tension is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the case of the Author, who may be said to have come into being as a professional entity only a century or so before Roland Barthes controversially announced his death in 1967.<sup>25</sup> The Victorian era saw the rise of the celebrity author and also the establishment of professional associations such as the Guild of Literature and Art, promoted by Dickens and Bulwer Lytton in 1850, and the Society of Authors, founded in 1884. Being a writer in the nineteenth century, equally for major authors and minor players and hacks, generally involved engaging in a number of different kinds of writing practice, not least because of the influence of periodicalism, the expansion of which in the first half of the nineteenth century was the major catalyst for the professionalization of authorship. The main forum for the debates that emerged at mid-century around the dignity of the author and the calling of literature was, of course, the periodical press. Yet ironically, except in those periodicals specifically designed to showcase celebrity writers (such as Dickens's *Household Words* (1850–9) and *All the Year Round* (1859–95), the *Cornhill* (1860–1975) under Thackeray's editorship, or *Belgravia* (1867–99) with its promotion of Mary Braddon's sensation fiction), the Author was typically

<sup>25</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Death of the Author', first published in the American journal *Aspen*, reprinted in *Image-Music-Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).

invisible in this the fastest growing sector of the literary marketplace. For the prevailing convention in the monthly and quarterly periodicals was to publish articles and reviews anonymously or pseudonymously, rather than over the signatures of individual contributors, and this was a practice that was widespread until the 1860s, when it began to come increasingly under attack.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, the preferred 'house style' of some nineteenth-century journals tended to flatten out the personal and the idiosyncratic, the individual voice of the author, rendering their own work sometimes unrecognizable to writers when they looked back at their early work. Leslie Stephen, for example, reading his youthful contributions to the *Saturday Review* (1855–1938) many years later, was startled to discover that he 'could rarely distinguish them by internal evidence', and had evidently 'unconsciously adopted the tone of [his] colleagues, and, like some inferior organisms, taken the colour of [his] "environment"'. 'The contributor', he concludes from this, 'occasionally assimilates: he sinks his own individuality and is a small wheel in a big machine.'<sup>27</sup> And writers' work was shaped by the medium in other ways that undermined the idea of the authority of the Author: they had to write to strict deadlines and word limits; they were ideologically constrained to conform to the political line of the journal to which they contributed; they had to share the publication space with other authors; often their role was to be responsive to an editor's initiative, or reactive to another piece of writing, rather than independently creative; and as reviewers they were expected to 'puff' books published by the publishing house that owned the very magazine for which they wrote.<sup>28</sup>

In his 1969 essay, 'What Is an Author?', Michel Foucault argues that works of literature are collective cultural products and do not arise from singular, individual beings, and this seems a particularly apt model for the nineteenth-century periodical.<sup>29</sup> Whilst novelists often published their fiction in serials as well as writing critical articles and reviews for the periodical press, the 'author function' of the journalist, as distinct from the novelist, was

26 The *Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals*, first published in five volumes (1965–88) is an immensely valuable research tool in this regard, attributing authorship to anonymously published articles in forty-five key monthly and quarterly journals, and providing a list of pseudonyms for British periodicals.

27 Leslie Stephen, 'Some Early Impressions – Journalism', *National Review* 43 (1903), pp. 420–36: p. 432.

28 See William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 187.

29 Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?' in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 124–7.

predicated upon a less personal relationship between writer and text, and between writer and reader. Both the convention of anonymity and the practice of stylistic assimilation made the genre and discourse of journalism more collaborative and inclusive than forms of writing, like the novel, in which authorship was – at least for men – more commonly singular and announced (women were more likely to make the strategic decision to publish under a pseudonym). The practice of anonymity interestingly did not lead to the erasure of gender in the discourse of journalism. On the contrary, the periodical press played a key role in the formulation and circulation of Victorian gender ideologies, and the gender of both reader and author was a primary category in reviewing.<sup>30</sup> Anonymity, indeed, gave unprecedented opportunities for authorial performativity and masquerade, for posturing and playfulness: for example, it comes as a surprise that the gentleman crackling the *Times* (1785–) and leaving ‘the “ladies” to discuss their own matters’ in an article of 1854 in the *Westminster Review* (1824–1914) was in fact George Eliot; that the author of the most vituperatively misogynistic of the ‘Girl of the Period’ articles in the *Saturday Review* (1855–1938) in the 1860s was Eliza Lynn Linton; and equally that ‘Barbara’, who presided over the column ‘Chats about Books’ in *Woman* (1890–1912) in the 1890s, was Arnold Bennett.

Periodical publication at the beginning of the century had been dominated by the great mandarin reviews – the Whig *Edinburgh Review* (1802–1929), the Tory *Quarterly Review* (1809–1967), and the monthly *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* (1817–1980) – and these were the authorial preserve of educated middle-class men of letters. But the opportunities for self-concealment, disguise, and cross-dressing afforded by the convention of anonymity, together with the prospect of regular remuneration, opened up journalism as a profession to women and to men of more modest social backgrounds, especially after the launch of the Radical quarterly, the *Westminster Review* (1824–1914). According to Barbara Onslow, ‘The numbers of women in journalism almost certainly increased over the century’, as entry to the profession became more democratic.<sup>31</sup> Journalism was increasingly identified as an open profession to which anyone could apply themselves, rather than a closed shop that was the

30 See Fraser et al., *Gender and the Victorian Periodical*; Laurel Brake, *Subjugated Knowledges: Journalism, Gender and Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994); and Nicola Diane Thompson, *Reviewing Sex: Gender and the Reception of Victorian Novels* (London: Macmillan, 1996).

31 Barbara Onslow, *Women of the Press in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. 15.

exclusive preserve of an educated male coterie. This was a regrettable development for some, such as the hostile reviewer of 'Modern Periodical Literature' in the *Dublin Review* (1836–1968) of 1862, who blames the 'reward of money' for having 'tended to reduce the public writer to the level of a tradesman', and having brought about a situation where, of the battalions of journalists now writing, 'a vast number, we may fairly say the majority, were never meant for authors'.<sup>32</sup> But it was an inevitable consequence of the press's particular role in the popularization of specialist knowledges for the general reading public, which, as the periodical market expanded, demanded of journalists that they be able to turn their hands to any area of general knowledge that might present itself.

Furthermore, the traditional hierarchy of author and reader changed in the nineteenth century as a direct consequence of periodical and newspaper publishing practices. As Walter Benjamin was to write in 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936):

For centuries a small number of writers were confronted by many thousands of readers. This changed toward the end of the last century. With the increasing extension of the press, which kept placing new political, religious, scientific, professional, and local organs before the readers, an increasing number of readers became writers – at first, occasional ones. It began with the daily press opening to its readers space for 'letters to the editor'.

He predicts that with the development of this practice, which may be said to have begun in the UK with the 'Letters to the Editor' page of *The Times* under Thomas Barnes's editorship of the paper from 1817 to 1841 and became a particularly popular feature of Sunday papers from the 1850s, 'the distinction between author and public is about to lose its basic character. The difference becomes merely functional; it may vary from case to case. At any moment the reader is ready to turn into a writer.' The modern situation (which has only become more pronounced since Benjamin's time, with the development of the new electronic media and the possibilities of hypertext), whereby 'Literary license is now founded on polytechnic rather than specialized training and thus becomes common property', was inaugurated in the nineteenth-century press.<sup>33</sup>

32 [Thomas Donnelly], 'Modern Periodical Literature', *Dublin Review* 51 (1862), pp. 275–308: pp. 276, 305.

33 Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. H. Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), pp. 217–52: pp. 231, 232, 232.

The text of the periodical itself became an increasingly democratized literary form during this period, one that participated in a network of cultural production and consumption, and was characterized by plurality rather than singularity. In this new age of mechanical reproduction, such plurality was experienced in the Victorian periodical in multiple ways: some weekly serials, such as the *Northern Star* (1837–52) and the *Leader* (1850–60), were issued in multiple, often slightly different regional editions in order to reach readers at a geographical distance from the place of publication at the same time as local readers; intellectual property was flagrantly stolen and cheaply reproduced (copyright was legislated for in 1842, reported on by a Royal Commission in 1878, flouted and fought over throughout the period); articles were collected and republished, novels were serialized and reprinted in volume form, and writing of all kinds was sampled, or re-presented in the form of a popular synopsis or a review, in the pages of periodicals. The Victorian periodical text is also characterized internally by its plurality, its multivocality, and its multivalency, by its dialogic and heteroglossic energy, that is, by the dynamic interplay of competing and sometimes conflicting discourses that comprise it. It is a collection of voices and images that speak to each other within each issue as well as serially and intertextually, their meanings shaped by their relation to other periodical texts as well as to the world to which they refer.

The plurality of the periodical text and the periodical author was intimately bound up with an equivalently radical plurality of readership, which again puts us in mind of the contemporary democratization of knowledge experienced by the Internet generation, and provides an imaginative connection between our own conceptualization of the mass media and that of the Victorians. Then as now, a congruence of technological advances, population growth, rising living standards, political and cultural change, and legal and fiscal reform provided the catalyst and the mechanism for this revolution. Tom Standage draws similar parallels with the Internet age in his study of the nineteenth-century telegraph in *The Victorian Internet*.<sup>34</sup> Such cultural and technological resonances are suggestive, but of course it is important not to erase important differences between forms of technology, publication, and communication in the two periods.

The Reform Acts of 1832 and 1867 and the Education Act of 1870 triggered far-reaching social and economic changes, the most significant of which for the democratization of the press were the vastly increased literacy rates

34 Tom Standage, *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century's Online Pioneers* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1998).

among all classes, which made possible a huge expansion in readership, and the new sense of political agency and class identity engendered among those hitherto excluded from the political process. New developments in printing technology, such as the introduction of steam-powered rotary presses from about 1815 to the 1830s, and typesetting machines, such as Robert Hattersley's in 1857, Alexander Mackie's steam-driven model ten years later, and Frederick Wick's rotary casting machine patented in 1881, lowered the cost yet improved the quality of periodical publishing, and the rapid expansion of the railways and shipping lines enabled more efficient distribution networks. Economic reforms such as the removal of the so-called 'tax on knowledge', through the reduction of Stamp Duty on newspapers to 1d in 1836 and its eventual abolition in 1855, and the removal of tax on paper in 1861, significantly affected the production costs of journals. Furthermore, as Andrew King and John Plunkett point out in the introduction to their valuable reader on *Victorian Print Media*, the very nature of the printing process meant there was an economic logic driving the expansion of the low-cost popular market in print media, for '[i]ncreasing numbers of readers created economies of scale for publishers, which overall favoured lower prices and more production, which attracted more readers, and so on and so forth in a continuously widening gyre'.<sup>35</sup> Added to this there were other incentives to the expansion of the reading public that were the result of changes in the material conditions of reading: the removal of the window tax in 1851, which enabled bigger windows and brought more natural light into the houses of the poor; new and cheaper forms of domestic lighting, brought about by developments in candle technology (the discovery of paraffin wax in the mid nineteenth century, the development of better wicks, the industrialization of candle production in 1834 when Joseph Morgan invented a machine to manufacture 1,500 per hour, which meant that even the poorest people were able to afford candles) and, for the wealthier classes, by the introduction of gas lighting and, in 1879, the incandescent electric lamp; an increase in the availability of public reading spaces in the form of public libraries, mechanics' institutes, coffee houses, and railway carriages.

This was the context for the massive explosion of popular print media forms in the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>36</sup> An article of 1849, quoting

35 Andrew King and John Plunkett (eds.), *Victorian Print Media: A Reader* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 5.

36 See *ibid.*, pp. 165–236, for a fruitful discussion of the ambiguities for both Victorian and modern commentators of the term 'popular', which 'emerges as always political and always ready for tactical redefinition' (p. 165).

from another published in *Blackwood's* twenty years earlier, in a way that testifies to the prolonged and continuing escalation of this new mass reading culture, reiterates its claim that, 'A great revolution there has been, from nobody's reading anything, to every body's reading all things.'<sup>37</sup> Beginning with the 'improving' *Penny and Saturday Magazines* (1832–45 and 1832–44) and the first serialized fiction launched in the 1830s, the popular market came into its own with the serialized publication of Dickens's *Pickwick* in 1836–7 and Edward Lloyd's 'Penny Dreadfuls'. In the 1840s and 1850s, numbers of penny fiction magazines were produced for family reading, the most successful of which were the *Family Herald* (1842–1940), the *London Journal* (1845–1928), *Reynolds Miscellany* (1846–69), and *Cassell's Illustrated Family Paper* (1853–67). These were widely circulating magazines relying on the serialized fiction they included, described by Wilkie Collins (anonymously) in 1858 as 'a new species of literary production', the reading matter of 'a public of three millions – a public unknown to the literary world; unknown, as disciples, to the whole body of professed critics; unknown, as customers, at the great libraries and the great publishing houses; unknown, as an audience, to the distinguished English writers of our own time'; as an 'unknown public', in short, which lies right 'out of the pale of literary civilisation'.<sup>38</sup> Notwithstanding the sensationalizing and racializing tones of Collins's article, which recalls the language of nineteenth-century social investigators on the 'unknown country' of 'darkest England', it draws attention to a class of periodical literature that has only recently been brought back in the pale of literary history.

Collins's article was published in Dickens's journal *Household Words* (1850–9), and it is journals such as this – *All the Year Round* (which replaced it in 1859, and ran till 1895), *Temple Bar* (1860–1906), the *Cornhill* (1860–1975) and *Longman's Magazine* (1882–1905) – widely circulating magazines that published the serialized fiction, reviews, and social reportage of writers who have become part of the Victorian canon – that are most familiar to modern readers. But an increasing amount of critical attention has been given to investigating the full breadth and variety of print culture in the period. Alongside the mass-market publication aimed at the vast middle ground, and these more elevated literary magazines, as well as those devoted to investigative journalism and the influential high-cultural journals such as *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (1817–1980), the *Fortnightly* (1865–1954), and

37 *Eliza Cook's Journal* 1 (1849), p. 182, quoting [John Wilson], 'Monologue, or Soliloquy on the Annuals', *Blackwood's Magazine* 29 (1829), p. 950.

38 [Wilkie Collins], 'The Unknown Public', *Household Words* 18 (21 August 1858), pp. 217–22.



the *Westminster Review* (1824–1914) for which the intellectual critic wrote, were a proliferating number of periodicals aimed at specialist interests, and targeting niche readerships. There were magazines for men, for women, for boys and for girls, for servants, for colonials; for Chartists, for Christians, for cyclists; for conservatives and for radicals, for travellers and for home-makers. There were quarterlies, monthlies, and, increasingly importantly, weeklies, such as the influential *Athenaeum* (1828–1921), the *Spectator* (1828–), and the *Saturday Review* (1855–1938) – which ensured that publications in volume form were reviewed right after their publication date, and that theatrical productions and art exhibitions were also covered extensively and while they were still open. These periodicals ranged from the morally and intellectually serious to the satirical and the slapstick (*Punch* was launched in 1841, remaining in print till 2002, *Judy* in 1867, running till 1910), from the uncompromisingly highbrow to the middlebrow to the definitively lowbrow. The period saw the establishment of specialist art publications, such as the *Art Journal* (1839–1912) and the *Magazine of Art* (1878–1904) and general scientific journals such as *Nature* (1869–) and *Mind* (1876–), while both the more intellectually inclined general journals and specialized periodicals enabled the circulation of new ideas in science, philosophy, history, politics, economics, sociology, anthropology, and other emerging disciplines.

Not least, the periodical press was the main public forum for literary criticism in the nineteenth century, and provided the context within which the emerging discipline of English was forged and defined. Literary reviewing evolved over the decades, broadly speaking, from an illustrative model depending on lengthy quotation and paraphrase, to more analytical, and often more judgmental (or overtly laudatory) pieces. Reviewing practices expanded to include more autonomous disquisitions on some aspect of the central theme of a literary work that sometimes seemed only tenuously related to the book under review. Gladstone's monumental twenty-two-page review of Mrs Humphry Ward's novel *Robert Elsmere* (1888) in the *Nineteenth Century* (1877–1901), for example, which was reprinted in pamphlet form and very widely read, is not so much a detailed literary analysis of the novel as a vigorous refutation of the hero's (and author's) religious position.<sup>39</sup> While in the early nineteenth century the critical essay depended for its existence upon the books it reviewed, as the century progressed the contrary increasingly became the case, with books emerging as collections

39 William E. Gladstone, 'Robert Elsmere and the Battle of Belief', *Nineteenth Century* 23 (1888), pp. 766–88.

of review essays which had first appeared in periodicals. Mark Pattison observed, indeed, in 1877 that 'books are now largely made up of republished review articles'.<sup>40</sup>

In the course of the nineteenth century the critic achieved recognition as an intellectual and creative phenomenon with an equivalent cultural capital to the artist. Criticism and imaginative literature had always, of course, been closely intertwined; for example, what Jerome McGann has identified as 'the Romantic ideology' was formulated in the critical essays and creative manifestos of the writers whose poetry exemplified it.<sup>41</sup> This tendency was continued and elaborated by Victorian writers: George Eliot honed her writerly skills as a periodical reviewer for the *Westminster Review* (1824–1914), and critically redefined what a 'lady novelist' was capable of before publishing her first work of fiction;<sup>42</sup> the Pre-Raphaelite poets and artists launched their own journal, the *Germ* (1850), in which to publish a critical manifesto for their creative work; and Oscar Wilde first articulated the aestheticism that was to define his literary identity in his critical journalism.

But additionally, and growing out of the more independently critical journalism of early nineteenth-century writers like William Hazlitt and James Leigh Hunt, Victorian journalists such as G. H. Lewes, R. H. Hutton, and Alfred Austin exercised considerable influence as literary and cultural critics for the periodicals. Furthermore, the practice and purpose of criticism itself as an intellectual discipline and a cultural tool began to be articulated and theorized in the Victorian period, in the writings of figures such as Matthew Arnold, John Ruskin, Walter Pater, and Oscar Wilde. Arnold's seminal essay 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time' (1865), for example, emphasizes the crucial role of the critic in the modern world, his principal task being in a dispassionate and non-partisan way 'to see the object as in itself it really is'.<sup>43</sup> According to this expanded definition, literary

40 Quoted by Walter E. Houghton, 'Periodical Literature and the Articulate Classes', in Joanne Shattock and Michael Wolff (eds.), *The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings* (London: Leicester University Press, 1982), pp. 3–27: p. 21. Joanne Shattock, in *Politics and Reviewers: The Edinburgh and The Quarterly in the Early Victorian Age* (London: Leicester University Press, 1989), p. 9, quotes Leslie Stephen's opinion that 'much of the most solid and original work of the time first appears in periodicals'.

41 Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology* (University of Chicago Press, 1983).

42 See [George Eliot], 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists', *Westminster Review* 66 (1856), pp. 442–61.

43 Matthew Arnold, 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time', in *Essays in Criticism, The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. R. H. Super, 11 vols. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960–77), vol. III, p. 258.

criticism is conceived as a particular application of a broader critical imperative to make ‘a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world’.<sup>44</sup> Arnold was Professor of Poetry at Oxford when he produced this and his other major critical works, and it was precisely for its ivory-tower elitism that R. H. Hutton criticized Arnold’s definition of the function of criticism in his reviews of his work in the *Spectator* (1828–) in the 1860s: ‘he regards the power of seeing things as they are as the monopoly of a class; and indeed, arrived at as he arrived at it, it must always be the monopoly of a class’. For a ‘cut-and-dried man of culture’ like Arnold, who in Hutton’s view despises the populace, ‘the only criticism which is really likely to be useful on the minor works of every-day literature is that which has been trained and disciplined in worthier studies’, and ‘no doubt it is a trial to men steeped in the culture of the noblest literature of the world, to appreciate fairly the ephemeral productions of a busy generation’. But according to Hutton, ‘Unless he can enter into the wants of his generation, he has no business to pretend to direct its thoughts.’ It is, instead, the critic reviewing for the press who responds to the real cultural needs of ‘ordinary Englishmen’, rather than the ‘intellectual angel’ who pontificates from on high, that in Hutton’s view best serves the interests of British cultural life broadly conceived.<sup>45</sup>

Wilde, in a very different kind of work written a quarter of a century later but also in response to Arnold’s essay, similarly recognizes the elitism of Arnold’s critical stance. ‘The Critic as Artist’, first published in two parts in July and September 1890 under the title ‘The True Function and Value in Criticism’, is a witty commentary in dialogue form on the theories and practices of criticism in the nineteenth century. Wilde’s celebration of ‘criticism of the highest kind’ as an art form in itself, in that ‘It treats the work of art simply as a starting-point for a new creation’, represents no single critic’s theory, and indeed significantly modifies the individual views of writers such as Arnold, Ruskin, and Pater, and yet ‘The Critic as Artist’ provides an effective summation of what ‘criticism’ had come to mean by the end of the century.<sup>46</sup> Wilde’s essay pays homage to these individuals

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 283.

<sup>45</sup> R. H. Hutton, ‘Mr Grote on the Abuses of Newspaper Criticism,’ in R. Tener and M. Woodfield (eds.), *A Victorian Spectator: Uncollected Writings of R. H. Hutton* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1989), pp. 39–43; pp. 42–3. See also Hutton, ‘An Intellectual Angel’, *Victorian Spectator*, pp. 111–16.

<sup>46</sup> Oscar Wilde, ‘The Critic as Artist’, in *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, introduced by Vyvyan Holland (London: HarperCollins, 1966), p. 1028.

who had such a formative influence on the development of criticism in his century, but it also, like Hutton's review, recognizes the importance of the periodical press. He distinguishes between cultured critics of 'the higher class', who 'write for the sixpenny papers', and the 'ordinary journalist', who is described as 'giving us the opinions of the uneducated' and 'keeping us in touch with the ignorance of the community', reminding us that, just as Arnold's idea of 'Culture' was conceived as a response to the 'Anarchy' of political democracy, so, with the democratization of the press, criticism was necessary for the cultural control of the vast and expanding newly literate reading public. The exaggeratedly effete upper-class tones of Gilbert's sympathy for the 'poor reviewers' of second-rate three-volume novels, who are 'apparently reduced to be the reporters of the police-court of literature, the chroniclers of the doings of the habitual criminals of art', underline the imbrication of the literary review with the class dynamics of nineteenth-century society. It is significant that, although like Arnold he recognizes the crucial role of criticism in contemporary nineteenth-century life, Wilde's Gilbert envisages the critic as one who retreats from the demands of the 'real world', who detaches himself from history; he predicts, indeed, that 'as civilisation progresses and we become more highly organised, the elect spirits of each age, the critical and cultured spirits, will grow less and less interested in actual life, and *will seek to gain their impressions almost entirely from what Art has touched*'.<sup>47</sup>

Hutton's review and Wilde's essay, in their engagement with the question of the function and different modes of criticism, throw interesting light on the question of the unstable literary history of critical scholarship on the Victorian periodical press with which this chapter began. For all that he insisted upon the fact that art should not be conceived as something isolated from life, Arnold's critical position has continued to be identified as an elitist one that does just that. The convergence of the perceived functions of criticism and of the academy in his cultural programme has not gone unnoticed by modern critics and theorists, and he has been either hailed or condemned for what all agree was his crucial role in the institutionalization of literary studies within universities and in the development of 'English' as an academic discipline. When Wilde's Gilbert announces in 1890 that 'It is to criticism that the future belongs', and imagines an 'educational system' which would 'try and develop in the mind a more subtle quality of

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1022–48.

apprehension and discernment',<sup>48</sup> it is as if he foresees the rise of English from its unsteady beginnings in the Mechanics' Institutes and Working Men's Colleges to its triumphant establishment in the Cambridge of the 1930s. Arnold's emphasis on criticism as a moral activity involving the transmission of fundamental human values was to be refined and elaborated by the Leavises, but the roots of their own critical practice are clearly to be found in Arnold's dogmatic assertions of 'correct literary opinion', of what is 'right and wrong', 'sound and unsound'; in his cultural 'touchstones'; and in his ranking of writers, and erection of a canonical 'great tradition'. For as long as qualities such as 'high seriousness' and 'the grand style' were the measure of what constitutes the 'literary' and the touchstones of academic English, journalism and the periodical press, purveyors of what Hutton referred to as 'the ephemeral productions of a busy generation', were (somewhat ironically, given their role in the development of literary criticism) not considered worthy of literary critical study. It is only under the very different critical and institutional conditions that prevail today, and from the more interdisciplinary perspective of Victorian Studies that recognizes the porosity of literary studies and its inflection by cultural history and by media and cultural studies, that 'the reporters of the police-court of literature, the chroniclers of the doing of the habitual criminals of art', pitied and dismissed so summarily by Wilde's Gilbert, are found to have an interest of their own, giving us a unique window on to an age that shared, and was perhaps responsible for forming, many of our own cultural preoccupations.

48 *Ibid.*, pp. 1054–5.