

The Publishing World

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In his 1883 *Autobiography*, Anthony Trollope describes his fifth novel, *Barchester Towers* (1857), as his “first real step on the road to substantial success” as a novelist (1980: ch. 6, 105). For Trollope, the novel represented such a step for one simple reason – he received for it more money than he had received for any previous manuscript. Associating, if not equating, literary with economic “success,” Trollope gives a great deal of attention throughout the *Autobiography* to the terms of his contracts for various works, and concludes with a table of his earnings. As a result, Trollope’s *Autobiography* not only contains a wealth of information about the business of Victorian novel-publishing, but also communicates much about the matter-of-fact manner in which one mid-Victorian novelist accepted both his role as a producer of goods in a competitive marketplace and the values of that marketplace. For Trollope, there seems to be no tension between literary and economic value – the “good” novel is simply the novel that yields the most in the marketplace, the “successful” author he or she who most effectively exploits the market.

Though the *Autobiography* is in many ways a unique document, the vision of literature and authorship it sets forth was arguably the dominant one throughout much of the Victorian period. Proudly declaring himself a “prose labourer,” for example, a character in Thackeray’s *Pendennis* (1848–50) echoes Trollope when he insists, “capital is . . . the bargain-master. It has a right to deal with the literary inventor as with any other” (1986: ch. 32: 355). Such a vision did much to shape the practices of producers, distributors, and consumers of fiction in the Victorian period, as well as the form and content of the novel.

As Trollope recognized, however, this picture of the “prose labourer” and his publisher as professionals whose success depended upon “industry,” “perseverance,” and a keen business sense would have been anathema to both earlier and later generations. On the one hand, while the tremendous popularity and profitability of Scott’s “Waverley” novels did much to inspire and shape the efforts of Victorian novelists and publishers, Scott saw himself as a professional only because he was a lawyer, referred

to publishers as mere “retailers,” and refused to acknowledge for most of his life that he wrote novels; instead, he bankrupted himself in the effort to use the funds raised through his (secretive) labors as a novelist to become a landed gentleman. On the other hand, the generation of writers coming of age at the time Trollope’s *Autobiography* was published were no less horrified than Scott likely would have been by the vulgarly commercial attitudes it reflected. In Thackeray’s *Pendennis* it is the heroic George Warrington who describes himself as a humble “prose labourer,” and it is setting out to “earn [his] bread” “with [his] pen” that helps to turn Pendennis himself from “worthless idler and spendthrift” to hero (1986: ch. 32, 357). In George Gissing’s *New Grub Street* (1881), however, it is the unheroic Jasper Milvain who declares, “Literature nowadays is a trade . . . your successful man of letters is your skilful tradesman” who “thinks first and foremost of the markets” (1998: ch. 1, 8–9). As this suggests, any account of Victorian publishing must distinguish between the 1830s through the 1870s – the era of Trollope, Thackeray, Charles Dickens, and George Eliot – and the 1880s and 1890s – the age of Gissing, George Moore, Walter Besant, and Marie Corelli.

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During the era that began with Scott and ended with George Eliot, publishing became a major, multi-million-pound industry that both benefited from and contributed to the more general economic and technological developments of the Victorian period. Early in the century, publishing remained a traditional, exclusive affair: books were expensive luxuries produced in small editions designed for the wealthy and discriminating few by a close-knit group of long-established publisher–booksellers who cooperated to keep newcomers out of the trade. Readers purchased new novels from the few booksellers scattered throughout the country or from traveling peddlers, or borrowed such volumes from local circulating libraries that charged high yearly subscription rates. However acquired, such books were still printed much as they had been in Gutenberg’s time.

Starting with Scott, all of this began to change. While new novels remained expensive, Scott’s tremendous popularity helped to reveal hitherto undreamed-of possibilities in terms of both the size of the potential audience for fiction and the profits to be made from it. While early in the century novels were printed in fairly small editions of 500–750 (and while the norm for first editions remained fairly low throughout the century), Scott’s novels sold in the tens of thousands: 1,000 copies of his first novel, *Waverley* (1814), sold within a few weeks, and 2,000 more were purchased within three months; by 1829, 40,000 “cheap editions” had been sold. More importantly, the numerous “Waverley novels” that followed sold equally well: the first printings of *Rob Roy* (1818) and *Ivanhoe* (1820) sold 10,000 copies each, while 7,000 copies of *The Fortunes of Nigel* (1822) sold on the morning of publication (Altick 1999: 292). When Scott’s publisher, Archibald Constable, failed in 1826 for around £250,000,

leaving Scott himself £120,000 in the red, the very size of their debts revealed just how large the potential profits and the potential risks were in the high-stakes game of fiction publishing – a lesson reinforced by the fact that Scott eventually published his way back to solvency.

While the example of Scott and Constable helped to effect radical changes in the thinking and practice of publishers, theirs was an ambivalent legacy: for if it encouraged authors and publishers to see fiction as an avenue to fortune and fame, it also demonstrated that one might instead easily write or publish one's way to the poorhouse. Partially for this reason, Victorian publishing came to be characterized by an odd blend of daring speculation and cautious conservatism. That odd blend became most apparent in the way that successful innovations tended to become orthodoxies: if a particular type of novel or a particular publishing format proved successful, then authors and publishers tended to ride the wave until readership and profits ebbed.

If such were the long-term effects of the Scott–Constable debacle, its short-term effects were to chase from the field of fiction publishing what one writer in 1852 called the “old easy-going race” of established publishers, thus making way for a new generation characterized by a “busy spirit of enterprise and competition” (quoted in Barnes 1964: 122). Of the eight family-owned houses that dominated early and mid-Victorian novel publishing, only Longman's dated back to the eighteenth century, while just two – Blackwood's and Smith, Elder – had published books before the Constable failure. The rest – Chapman & Hall, Bentley, Macmillan, Bradbury & Evans, and Tinsley – were all recent arrivals on the scene, establishing their businesses in the thirties, forties, or even fifties. These publishers were also remarkably young when they first achieved positions of influence and prominence: the brothers Macmillan had only fifty-five years between them when they published their first book in 1843; and in 1836, when Chapman & Hall published Dickens' *Pickwick Papers*, the combined ages of the three young men barely totaled seventy (Sutherland 1976: 10). Publishers like Chapman & Hall and novelists like Dickens thus quite literally represented a new generation.

The “busy spirit of enterprise and competition” that drove these young publishers made them remarkably active managers who negotiated directly with authors, printers, and booksellers; solicited, read, and often commented elaborately on manuscripts; and encouraged writers to undertake particular topics, genres, and formats and to steer clear of others. As a result, individual publishers did much to shape the content and form of Victorian fiction and even of particular novels. While Charles Lever's first novel – *The Confessions of Harry Lorrequer* (1839) – was still being serialized in the *Dublin University Magazine*, for example, Richard Bentley was one of four publishers to make overtures to the young novelist, offering both a contract for his next novel and advice about what subjects he should tackle and how he should treat them. Lever eventually took Bentley's advice, making an Irish officer the hero of his next novel, *Charles O'Malley* (1841), and mixing sentiment with comedy in a way he had not done previously (Gottmann 1960: 156). Though more seasoned writers might enjoy more

freedom, they were often (and often quite happily) subject to influence of a more subtle kind. Dickens's contract for *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843–4), for example, echoed others of the period by requiring that the novel be “in form, size and price, precisely similar to the *Pickwick Papers* [1836–7] and *Nicholas Nickleby* [1838–9]” – language through which Chapman & Hall tacitly encouraged the novelist to stick to a popular and profitable formula (quoted in Sutherland 1976: 77). If, at its best, such advice could help a novelist to find both voice and audience, it also helped to ensure that particular types of fiction – the “silver-fork” novel, the historical romance, nautical and military novels, etc. – tended to come into vogue, dominate the market for several years, and then disappear rapidly as readerly interest and profits declined (Gertmann 1960: 59). Many mid-Victorian novelists eagerly sought out the advice of publishers, whom they saw as partners in the enterprise of producing novels that might prove popular with readers.

Though popularity was prized for many reasons, one of them was undoubtedly the unprecedented economic benefits into which it translated. While the £100 advance he received for *Barchester Towers* seemed significant to the young Trollope because it equalled his yearly salary as a Post Office official, by the 1860s he was earning as much as £3,200 per novel (Trollope 1980: 363–4). Even such receipts, however impressive, did not put Trollope on the top rung of the earnings ladder: the single largest payment for a novel in the nineteenth century seems to have been the £10,000 that ex-Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli received for *Endymion* in 1880, and Dickens – who left an estate of £93,000 upon his death in 1870 – earned £9,000 from the first edition of *Dombey and Son* (1846–8); between 1876 and 1879, George Eliot made £9,000 from *Daniel Deronda* (Jones 1974: 154); and, over the course of his career, Thackeray earned back, through writing, an amount equivalent to the £20,000 inheritance he lost early in life through bad investments. Publishers, too, reaped the benefits: at his death in 1891, George Routledge left an estate of £94,000, while George Bentley four years later bequeathed his family almost £86,000 (Gertmann 1960: 152). Those associated with Longman's left behind even bigger legacies: Thomas Longman III nearly £200,000, Longman partners Thomas Brown and Bevis Green £100,000 and £200,000 respectively (Briggs 1974: 10). Still, as Royal Gertmann rightly points out, such legacies seem small when compared to the multi-million-pound fortunes amassed by the manufacturers, bankers, and top professionals of the day, and the average novelist could not hope to realize anything like the small fortunes earned by a Dickens or a George Eliot. Between 1830 and 1850, Bentley paid an average of £250 per novel, and throughout the century organizations such as the Royal Literary Fund (est. 1790) and the Guild of Literature and Art (created by Dickens and Edward Bulwer-Lytton in 1851) sought to help the ever-increasing tribe of impoverished writers. Yet the prospect of riches encouraged unprecedented numbers of people to try their hand at writing and led would-be writers to privilege fiction over every other genre.

While the concern with popularity and profitability might seem mercenary, there was something profoundly democratic about the respect for ordinary readers it

implied. As novelist Wilkie Collins insisted, "I don't attach much importance to the reviews . . . But the impression I produce on the general public of readers is the lever that will move anything" (quoted in Sutherland 1976: 46). Such a view also involved seeing an author's success as a matter less of inherent "genius" than of, in Trollope's words, "industry" and "perseverance." By this scheme, every reader's opinion of a work – expressed, in part, through their willingness to buy it – is granted equal value, while every author – no matter how well-born or well-connected – must compete on what is theoretically a level playing field.

One of the most obvious ways in which this concern for "the general public" shaped Victorian fiction was through publishers', editors', authors', and reviewers' enforcement of an unwritten set of rules governing fictional propriety. While these rules obviously forbade the direct representation of anything even vaguely sensual or sexual, they also enforced certain ideas about (among other things) gender, class, and British character. This was the case in part simply because of the way authors, publishers, readers, and reviewers tended to justify such unwritten rules by referring to the (imagined) sensibilities and susceptibilities of the distinctively English "young lady": nothing, in other words, should appear in a novel that a middle-class British father would be ashamed to read aloud to his family or that might make his young daughter blush. While Thackeray mildly protested such restrictions in the preface to *Pendennis* and Dickens ridiculed "Podsnappery" in *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–5), in practice they, like other early and mid-Victorian novelists, agreed with Margaret Oliphant that the "very high reputation" of "English novels" (as opposed, particularly, to French ones) rested on their peculiar "sanity, wholesomeness, and cleanness" – qualities that derived from, and encouraged, "that perfect liberty of reading which is the rule in most cultivated English houses" (1867: 257). While later generations saw such prudery as requiring a sacrifice of artistic freedom, of realism, and even of moral range, one of its more positive effects was to train Victorian novelists in the fine art of allusively and symbolically representing the darker, more sensual aspects of human experience.

Another upholder of these unwritten rules and a major force in the world of Victorian publishing was Charles Edward Mudie, proprietor of Mudie's Select Circulating Library (est. 1842). Mudie's role was vital for many reasons, one being the way the library widened the audience for fiction by allowing readers to borrow as many novels as they wanted (one volume at a time) for a yearly fee of one guinea – two-thirds the cost of a single three-volume novel. Mudie's became so popular and respected a Victorian institution that its proprietor could single-handedly ensure the success of a given novel by choosing to include it in his "Select" Library. As Margaret Oliphant remarked, Mudie's thus did "more . . . than any other agency in existence to make a name, or at least to ensure a sale," and "patronage of Mudie was a sort of recognition from heaven" (1897: 457–8). Mudie's patronage, like a reviewer's praise, ultimately depended as much on moral qualities as on literary ones: among the novels banned from Mudie's on moral grounds were George Meredith's *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* (1859) and George Moore's *A Modern Lover* (1883).

While allowing readers to borrow rather than buy helped widen the audience for fiction, Mudie's also paradoxically helped to ensure that fiction *had* to be borrowed rather than bought by cementing the Victorian publishing industry's 73-year-long dedication to the expensive three-volume novel. The "triple-decker" or "three-decker" was the prime instance of Victorian publishers' tendency to turn innovations into orthodoxies: in this case, the innovation was the 1821 publication of Scott's *Kenilworth* in three volumes at the price of 10s. 6d. per volume, or one-and-a-half guineas (31s. 6d.) for the whole. While Scott and his publisher chose this format only because it suited, and ensured the profitability of, this particular novel, format and price alike remained the standard ones for fiction until the 1890s. So much an institution did the three-decker become that publishing contracts assumed that every novel would conform to the format; the publisher Bentley informed an author in 1883 that a novel consisted of 920 pages with twenty-one and a half lines on each page and nine and a half words in each line (Gettmann 1960: 232). Though publishers occasionally produced one- or two-volume novels, early and mid-Victorian authors found it difficult to get short manuscripts accepted or to get adequate payment for them, and thus tended, like publishers, to accept that a novel was by definition three volumes long.

Though Mudie's profited from this format, given that borrowers had to pay for three subscriptions if they wanted to take out all three volumes of a given novel simultaneously, the dominance of the three-decker was ensured largely because it rendered fiction an economically safer venture for publishers and authors: publishers were ensured a profit on a relatively small edition; often sold the bulk of an edition before publication day (thanks to the practice whereby Mudie's and other libraries and booksellers "subscribed" for a certain number of copies of a novel before its release); and thus could afford to pay authors a sizable sum upfront. As John Sutherland notes, such a system was good insofar as it required many fewer sales than it would today to render a novel "a reasonable source of income to author and publisher" and thus "encouraged [publishers] to take risks because . . . [they] had a kind of built-in insurance against loss" (1976: 16). It also encouraged authors and publishers to produce as many novels as possible, since they depended on relatively small profits from many novels rather than on huge profits from any one.

Several other factors conspired to keep the price of new novels high. Prime among these were taxes on paper and on print advertisements. Though both taxes were reduced in the 1830s, they remained a considerable expense until they were finally abolished outright: the tax on advertisements in 1853, that on paper in 1861. The cost of advertising itself, which might range anywhere from £20 to £300 per novel, remained an important budget item. Before the arrival of the railways in the 1830s and of cheaper rates for parcel post in 1852, another major expense was the cost of conveying books to readers and booksellers outside London, the center of Victorian publishing. An equally important, if more amorphous, factor was middle- and upper-class readers' deeply ingrained prejudice against "cheapness" -- for such readers, owning expensive books or subscribing to Mudie's brought a kind of respectability and prestige that could not be gained through the purchase of "cheap" novels.

For all of these reasons, the expensive three-volume novel produced in relatively small editions of 750–1,000 remained the standard from 1821 to the 1890s; but Victorian publishers and authors found three ways (besides the circulating library) to reduce the price of new fiction and to expand its audience, while maintaining its respectability. The first of these, part-publication, was yet another accidental innovation-turned-tradition. In this case, the innovators were Chapman & Hall, who in 1836 (only six years after establishing their business) hit upon the idea of issuing a monthly series of sporting plates accompanied by text written by the young journalist Charles Dickens. Though the novice publishers didn't necessarily envision the ultimate product as a novel, that's precisely what they got in *The Pickwick Papers*. And since, by the end of its run in November 1837, the novel had reached a circulation of 40,000 and paid its publishers a total of £14,000, its long-term result was yet another Victorian institution: thereafter, all but two of Dickens's major novels, four of Thackeray's, and many of Trollope's were initially published just as *Pickwick* had been – in twenty monthly parts, each costing 1s. and consisting of thirty-two pages of text accompanied by two illustrations. Thus the total cost of a novel, if bought in parts, was only £1.

Dickens also helped popularize a second means of bringing fiction to more readers at a lower cost: serialization in magazines. Magazine serialization of new fiction began in the 1830s, and by the 1840s serials were a common feature of half-crown monthlies, but the real take-off of this format came in the 1850s and 1860s with the founding of weekly magazines such as Dickens's *Household Words* (1850–9) and *All the Year Round* (est. 1859), and of monthlies such as *Macmillan's* (est. 1859) and Smith, Elder's prestigious *Cornhill* (1860–1975), first edited by Thackeray. Designed for family reading, such magazines offered one or two illustrated serials by the best-known authors, plus a wealth of other material, for the same 1s. price previously demanded for a novel "part" alone. As a result, such magazines reached as many as 100,000 readers and became the initial publishing venue for many of the major works of Collins and Trollope, George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell.

Third and finally, two new kinds of reprint series appeared. The first of these – collected editions of popular novelists' previously published works – began with Smith, Elder's publication, in 1844, of the collected works of G. P. R. James at a mere 8s. per volume. This formula was imitated and cheapened in the next few years, the most famous such series being Chapman & Hall's cheap editions of Dickens and Bulwer Lytton (both published in parts at 1½d. each and thus at around 2s. 6d. to 4s. per novel). The second type of series, usually called "libraries," reprinted the works of several different authors. The earliest successful venture of this kind was Bentley's "Standard Novels," launched in 1831, and in the 1840s such series proliferated in ever-cheapening forms: in 1847, Bentley reduced his "Standard Novels" from 6s. to 5s. per volume and in 1849 to 3s. 6d. or even 2s. 6d.; in 1852 he supplemented that series with a new shilling-a-volume "Railway Library" designed to compete with the phenomenally successful series of the same name launched in 1848 by Routledge, a newcomer in the field of publishing.

These new or revived publishing formats reinforced rather than undercut the three-volume system. For serialization in parts or in a magazine was almost always followed up by publication of the three-volume "library" edition and in due course by various one-volume "cheap" editions, each format reaching a distinct group of readers. Thus, even after *Great Expectations* sold well enough as an *All the Year Round* serial to dramatically boost the weekly's flagging sales, Chapman & Hall immediately sold off their 3,750-copy library edition and went on to produce five more editions in the following year (Sutherland 1976: 38).

Such formats had a range of effects. For one, the tendency to publish a single author or even a single novel in many different, often overlapping formats guaranteed that the work of the most popular Victorian authors had a unique kind of omnipresence. From January 1860 to July 1867, for example, readers were offered an installment of one new Trollope novel or another in some form every month, while the movement from serialization to ever-cheaper volume editions meant that both the old and new works of a popular novelist were constantly before the public, giving him "a kind of total and continual existence for the readers of his age" (Sutherland 1976: 37). If such omnipresence helped tighten the already (theoretically) close relationship between author and reader, so, too, did serialization, insofar as it allowed readers to communicate their responses to a novel as it unfolded – if only by choosing whether or not to buy the next installment. Such responses were very much attended to, on occasion actively shaping the direction that particular novels took – especially in the case of those writers who, like Dickens, not only published but wrote their novels in installments, keeping only one or two stages ahead of the publisher. The prominence of Sam Weller in *Pickwick Papers*, for example, can be attributed to the increase in sales that followed his introduction in Part 4, while the rehabilitation of Miss Mowcher at the end of *David Copperfield* (1849–50) resulted from readers' negative comments about the way Dickens had portrayed her in early installments. For readers, serialization made the reading of particular novels a collective experience of national and even international proportions – ensuring that a fictional event like the death of Little Nell was experienced nearly simultaneously by thousands of widely dispersed readers.

The combination of serialization and three-volume publication also did much to give the Victorian novel its distinct shape. On the one hand, the length of the three-decker encouraged prolixity. As Gissing observed, the need to fill out three volumes, as much as the insistence upon moral certainty, inspired early and mid-Victorian novelists to write "with profusion and detail . . . to tell everything, & leave nothing to be divined" (quoted in Gettmann 1960: 254). On the other hand, serialization required that such prolixity be complemented by tightness of construction when it came to the parts. More generally, the system required Victorian novelists to think in terms both of multiple small parts and of a very large whole in a way unique in literary history.

The innovations in format and pricing that led to the proliferation and cheapening of both novels and periodicals were made possible by a host of technological developments, including the mechanization of paper-making (after 1807) and of printing

(after 1814), and the various refinements that improved the quality and lowered the cost of the illustrations accompanying every Victorian serial. Perhaps most important of all was the development of stereotyping, which ensured that publishers did not have to pay to have a given work set up in type every time they wished to reprint it. This made it possible to print more copies if and only if demand warranted it (rather than risking a huge initial print run) and to print the same text in a variety of different formats (serial installments, library and cheap editions, etc.) without resetting type. Equally vital were technological developments unrelated to the book production process itself. By far the most important of these was the railway, which by the 1850s provided a reliable, fast, and cheap book transport and distribution system. Thanks to the periods of leisure forced on railway passengers and to the establishment of W. H. Smith bookstalls in most stations, the railways also helped spawn all the cheap series (often, fittingly enough, called "Railway Libraries") that began to appear in the late 1840s and 1850s.

Law, as well as technology, played a part. As previously noted, the cheapening of magazines and books in the mid-Victorian period was enabled, in part, by the repeal of taxes on paper and advertising. From the point of view of both authors and publishers, however, developments in copyright law were even more crucial. Domestically, the most important events were the passage, in 1814, of an act that set the term of copyright at twenty-eight years or the remainder of the author's life, and, in 1842, of another act that extended the term to the author's life plus seven years or a total of forty-two years, whichever was longer. Internationally, the situation was much more problematic. For most of the century, nothing either barred American or European publishers from reprinting a British novel or required them to compensate the novel's author or publisher. While a combination of legislative acts and treaties secured British authors some right to copyright protection on the continent at midcentury, British authors enjoyed no US copyright protection until century's end. An 1854 Act of Parliament exacerbated the unfairness of this situation by enabling American authors to secure British copyrights for their work by simply being present in Britain or any of its dependencies at the time of publication. Before 1854, however, American authors had as few rights in Britain as British authors had in America, and British publishers greatly profited from this situation. In 1852, for example, British publishers realized a fortune by selling over a million copies of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* without paying its author a penny.

However uneven its protection, copyright was obviously of fundamental importance to the publishing enterprise since it secured to both authors and publishers the economic benefits of their investments. Nevertheless, many Victorian novelists continued the long-standing practice of selling their copyrights to a publisher for a fixed sum. While some did so because they couldn't afford to wait for potential profits, others chose this type of contract because they felt, as Trollope did, that "a lump sum down was more pleasant than a deferred annuity" and that such an arrangement gave the publisher more incentive to promote the work (1980: 109). Still others agreed with Gaskell that the very simplicity of this kind of contract ensured good relations

between author and publisher; in her words, "short agreements make long friends" (quoted in Gettmann 1960: 79). Such contracts did not directly reward the author for sales, however, and on occasion a publisher made a great deal of money on a work for which the author had been paid very little. At the same time, high sales on one novel usually ensured that its author could demand a higher price for the copyright of his or her next work, and it was in this manner that Trollope's price per novel increased, over time, from £100 to £3,000.

The number of authors who chose to sell their copyrights declined as the century progressed and as the long-term value of copyrights became more obvious. As a result, novelists increasingly opted for one of three other types of contract. The first of these entailed leasing a copyright to a publisher for a certain time period or for certain specified editions. George Eliot, for example, turned down Smith, Elder's offer of £10,000 for the copyright of *Romola* in favor of a £7,000 contract that returned the copyright to her after six years. A second type of contract required that publisher and author split any profits that accrued after the deduction of costs and a 5-10 percent publisher's commission. Since profits were usually split equally or with the advantage going to the author, this arrangement was theoretically the most fair, yet it was one that many authors mistrusted because of the ease with which a publisher could "pad" accounts. Third was publication on commission, a type of arrangement favored, on the one hand, by established authors certain of success and, on the other, by publishers unwilling to risk money on unknown authors. Such a contract required the author to pay the entire cost of production and promotion; granted the publisher a certain percentage (usually 10 percent) of gross receipts; and guaranteed any remaining profits to the author. In 1871, Thomas Hardy published his first novel, *Desperate Remedies*, on these terms, eventually losing £15 of the £75 advanced to Tinsley. But if Hardy's is the classic case of an unknown author losing financially by such a bargain, the case of Mrs. Henry Wood demonstrates how a novelist or her heirs could benefit. After her death in 1887, her son arranged with Bentley to produce a cheap edition of her works on commission. The publisher lost £2,700 on the venture; Wood's heirs realized over £35,845 (Gettmann 1960: 115).

As Mrs. Henry Wood's case demonstrates, women as well as men could find fortune and fame as novelists in the Victorian period. Though the number of women able to achieve success may have declined as the century progressed, writing fiction remained the nineteenth-century woman's surest route into the literary profession. Thus, of the nineteenth-century women writers listed in the *Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, one-third are described as "novelists" and 50 percent as "children's writers"; only 14 percent are labeled "poets" and a mere 3 percent specialists in such fields as philosophy, history, or economics. The same source suggests men were much more evenly distributed across the literary field, 25 percent being poets, 14 percent novelists, 14 percent critics and essayists, 11 percent children's writers, and 8 percent philosophers (Cross 1985: 167). Such figures imply that women's tendency to write fiction was as much a matter of necessity as of choice, a reflection of the way assumptions about femininity circumscribed the kinds of experience and expertise to which

women could lay claim. The novelist-heroine of Emily Morse Symonds's *A Writer of Books* (1898) becomes "depress[ed]" when she compares herself to male novelists: for while "They had drunk deep of the cup of life, and wrote of that they did know; . . . she, a girl, . . . had gained all her knowledge at second-hand" (Symonds 1999: 32). Getting knowledge of certain kinds only, if at all, at "second-hand" did much to determine the kinds of fiction women wrote. The historical romances that dominated the literary marketplace in the 1830s, for example, were written almost wholly by men, women finding "writing about battles and skirmishes both difficult and uncongenial" because they "could not draw on a vast supply of manly knowledge acquired on the playing fields and in the club-rooms" (Cross 1985: 179).

Women's lack of access to "club-rooms" also made it difficult for them to forge the intimate relationships with publishers enjoyed by male writers. For clubs of various kinds played a vital role in the publishing world. At one end of the spectrum were formal, exclusive, and expensive clubs. These included clubs composed largely of "men of letters" – the Athenaeum (founded in 1824 by, among others, Walter Scott), the Literary Union Club (founded in 1831 and later transformed into the Clarence), and the Garrick (1831) – and clubs organized on more general, often political, lines. Thackeray, for example, frequented the Garrick and Reform clubs, introducing publisher George Smith into the latter, while Harrison Ainsworth ensured Bentley's election to the Conservative (Sutherland 1976: 85). At the other end of the spectrum were the many small, convivial groups who met together periodically at particular taverns. Charles Lever noted the importance of these groups and gatherings when he described the negative effects of living abroad: "You would scarcely believe," he wrote, "how much I have sacrificed in not being a regular author of the Guild of Letters – dining at the Athenaeum – getting drunk at the Garrick" (quoted in Sutherland 1976, pp. 85–6).

For a variety of reasons, then, the Victorian world of publishing was, in practice, less a fully democratic "republic of letters" than a "guild" whose membership reflected the gender and class inequities of Victorian society at large. While at least some middle-class women overcame the odds, working-class people were almost wholly excluded. Analyzing a sample of 840 nineteenth-century British authors, Richard Altick found that "10.6% were born into the nobility and gentry, 86.3% into the middle class, and only 3.1% into the working class" (1962: 394).

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As we have seen, the early and mid-Victorian novel was the product of a sense of community and of shared interests and ideals among publishers, circulating librarians, booksellers, authors, and readers. That sense was guaranteed both by similarities in background and experience and by widespread acceptance of certain ideas about fiction and life. Not least among these was a remarkable degree of faith in the virtues of entrepreneurial capitalism and free trade, particularly in creating a (theoretically)

meritocratic system in which individual industry, talent, and good conduct inevitably met with appropriate acclaim and financial reward. This faith led the government to strengthen copyright protections and to repeal taxes that inhibited literary free trade and led readers, writers, and publishers both to equate popularity, economic success, and literary quality and to value novels that themselves reinforced that faith by ultimately meting out to their characters the appropriate rewards and punishments.

In the eighties and nineties a number of forces combined to threaten that sense of community and consensus. Radical changes in the practice and the ethos of publishers, authors, and readers, and in the form and content of the novel, both resulted from and caused that breakdown. For contemporaries, a key event was the passage of the 1870 Education Act, which they believed vastly increased the size of the novel-reading public. In 1899, Walter Besant estimated that whereas the English-speaking reading public had numbered around 50,000 in 1830 it was, by the 1890s, more like 120 million (Cross 1985: 206). Though such estimates are factually inaccurate, they reflect a view widely promulgated in the 1890s. More importantly, the perceived increase in the size of the reading public was seen to entail an increase in diversity that rendered it impossible any longer to envision that public either as a culturally homogeneous group or as one that shared the same background and values as those seeking to reach it through the written word.

Through a variety of means, the publishing industry worked to capitalize on, and foster, the increase in readership. New three-volume novels were more quickly reprinted in cheap editions; the price of the latter fell lower; and the pace of novel production accelerated as never before, the number of new "adult" novels published per year rising from around 516 in 1874 to 1,315 in 1894 – the equivalent of 3.5 novels per day. The number of "juvenile" novels also increased dramatically as publishers vied for the custom of the Board schools and their students. In 1875, 188 juvenile novels were issued; between 1875 and 1885 an average of 470 were published each year (Keating 1989: 32).

However high such figures, they underestimate the total amount of new fiction being produced in the late Victorian period insofar as they ignore the vast quantities appearing in periodicals, which were themselves being produced in ever-greater quantities at ever-cheaper rates. The number of newspapers produced in the British Isles increased from around 1,609 in 1875 to 2,504 by 1914, while between 1875 and 1903 the number of magazines leapt from 643 to 2,531 (Keating 1989: 34). Three innovations in the late Victorian periodical market were particularly important. First was a new breed of high-quality monthly miscellany, including the influential *English Illustrated* (1883) and *Strand* (1891). Distinguished by their large size and their lavish use of illustrations and – by the mid-1890s – photographs, such magazines were aimed at the suburban middle-class family whose members' diverse needs and interests they fulfilled by offering both juvenile and adult fiction; puzzles and games; and "light" informational articles. This successful formula ensured sales well beyond those of the family magazines of earlier days: the *Strand*, which featured serial novels and Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, reached an estimated worldwide audience of

well over three million people by century's end (Keating 1989: 156). Second, and even more popular in every sense of the word, was a new type of penny weekly, the first and most notorious being *Tit-Bits from All the Most Interesting Books, Periodicals and Newspapers in the World* (1881). As its title suggests, *Tit-Bits* reprinted brief extracts from other publications, but it also, after 1889, included new serial fiction. As Conan Doyle insisted, *Tit-Bits* and its many imitators deliberately aimed at the audience created by the 1870 Education Act, readers "who were not sufficiently educated to study the deepest and thickest volumes" (quoted in McDonald 1997: 145). By the close of the 1890s, *Tit-Bits* enjoyed sales of over a million per week in Britain alone. Third was the increase in newspaper publication of both serials and short fiction made possible by the arrival of syndication – the system whereby a central agency or "fiction bureau" purchased the serial rights to a fictional work which it then sold to provincial newspapers throughout the country.

These developments had many and profound effects. On the one hand, the expansion of the audience and the multiplication of publication venues could afford authors more opportunities, more money, and an unprecedented kind of celebrity. (All the more so since the new magazines often featured stories about authors.) Since contracts with fiction bureaus, for example, were not only lucrative in themselves, but also covered only serial rights, novelists could negotiate separately for other forms of publication and thereby increase the overall amount they received for a given novel. Also, since both the new-style periodicals and the fiction bureaus sought out short fiction as well as serials, novelists could now supplement the income derived from novel-writing by writing less labor-intensive short stories.

Two other developments enabled novelists to capitalize more effectively on their "bestseller" status. (The 1890s invented the term "bestseller," which denoted both the popular novel and the author who could be counted on to produce one.) The first of these developments was the royalty contract, which guaranteed the author a fixed percentage of the sale price of a book published in volume form. A type of contract virtually unknown in Britain before the 1880s, the royalty contract became quite common thereafter. Second was the 1891 passage of a US International Copyright Act that enabled British novelists to contract for American as well as British editions of their work. At least some emerging young writers found the new opportunities available in the 1890s distinctly exhilarating; as one of them, H. G. Wells, remembered in his 1934 autobiography, "there was [more] opportunity, more public, more publicity, more publishers and more patronage" (quoted in Keating 1989: 31).

These innovations also had their potential downsides. To some, the proliferation of novels and authors created a competition so intense that it resembled a Darwinian struggle for survival. Publishers were no less subject to that struggle than novels and novelists, thanks to the emergence of a host of new competitors – men such as William Heinemann and John Lane who were as young, enterprising, and brashly innovative as the heads of the older houses had been when they started out earlier in the century. By century's end, both Bentley and Tinsley had succumbed to the competition, while Chapman & Hall survived mainly on the profits they continued to realize from

Dickens's novels -- so much so that when Arthur Waugh became head of the firm in 1902 he was warned that "If it wasn't for Dickens . . . we might as well put up the shutters to-morrow" (Waugh 1930: 102).

Such competition required publishers to devote ever-larger sums to devising ever-more splashy types of publicity and encouraged authors to promote themselves by granting interviews and getting into the gossip columns. Novelists were thus led to become avid participants in a cult of celebrity that was encouraged by, and itself encouraged, the illustrated magazines; periodicals devoted specifically to literary news and gossip, including the *Bookman* (founded 1891) and *The Times's Literature* (1897); books such as *The Art of Authorship* (1890) and *Homes and Haunts of Famous Authors* (1906); and bestselling novels about novelists and the publishing world, such as Besant's *All in a Garden Fair* (1883), Rudyard Kipling's *The Light that Failed* (1890), Gissing's *New Grub Street* (1891), and Marie Corelli's *The Sorrows of Satan* (1895).

The diversification of publishing vehicles and contract types made the business aspect of the novelist's job both more important and more complex. Though the late Victorian novelist still had the option of simplifying her business dealings by selling her copyright, she was more than ever likely to pay dearly for that decision. If, for example, the then-unknown Rider Haggard had stuck with his original decision to sell *King Solomon's Mines* (1886) outright for £100, he would have sacrificed the additional £650 he made in the first year through a royalty agreement, not to mention the royalties he received for years thereafter (Keating 1989: 16).

Although publishing as an industry and authorship as a profession were by the 1880s more lucrative, more complex, more respectable, and in certain ways more "modern" than ever before, this new publishing world was one in which the various branches of the trade began to see themselves more as competitors than as allies. Symptomatic of this mood was the creation of organizations representing each publishing-related profession -- the Society of Authors (founded by Walter Besant in 1884), the Associated Booksellers of Great Britain and Ireland (1895), and the Publishers' Association (1896). Such organizations testified to the increased prominence and respectability of these professions, but they also demonstrated the increasingly antagonistic character of relations among the industry's various players. For while the primary goal of the Society of Authors was to lobby for better copyright protection (a goal as beneficial to publishers as to authors), the Society represented itself as helping authors win what was conceived as a battle with publishers who would, if they could, always profit at the author's expense.

Also reflecting the increasing complexity of the business of authorship and the increasing hostility between authors and publishers was the rise to prominence of the publisher's reader and the literary agent. Strictly speaking, neither of these professional intermediaries was an entirely new phenomenon in the eighties and nineties. Publishers had employed men and women to read, evaluate, and even revise manuscripts since the late eighteenth century; Dickens had, in fact, met his future "agent" John Forster when the latter was employed by Chapman & Hall as a reader. Yet the publisher's reader became a more powerful and prominent figure in the final decades

of the century as unsolicited manuscripts multiplied and as publishers' readers lifted the veil of anonymity that had traditionally protected them in order to cultivate intense personal and professional relationships with individual novelists – as Chapman & Hall's George Meredith did with the young Hardy in the late 1860s and as Edward Garnett did with Joseph Conrad in the 1890s. As such relationships suggest, while readers were employed by the publisher and while they helped to make the relationship between publisher and novelist less direct than it might once have been, their work did not necessarily imply any antagonism between the interests of the two.

In these terms, the case of the literary agent was very different. Again, this was not because literary agency was an entirely new phenomenon. Not a few early and mid-Victorian novelists had asked trusted friends to intervene in, or even take full responsibility for, negotiations with publishers, as Dickens did with Forster and George Eliot with G. H. Lewes. What was new in the late Victorian period was, first, the appearance of professional agents – men like A. P. Watt and J. B. Pinker, who made careers and fortunes out of representing many authors in exchange for a fixed percentage of the profits – and, second, the fact that so many novelists now employed agents. By 1893, A. P. Watt's long list of clients included Besant, Conan Doyle, Haggard, Hardy, Collins, and Kipling. Publishers, for their part, saw literary agency not as one among many symptoms of the increasingly antagonistic relations between themselves and authors, but as a major cause – destroying, Heinemann insisted, the “free and intimate intercourse between author and publisher” (quoted in Hepburn 1968: 80).

Whether or not the rise of literary agency destroyed the “free and intimate intercourse between author and publisher,” it did, in practice, sever the business aspects of the novelist's craft from the creative. In this way, literary agency facilitated the development of an opposition between “business” and “art,” between economic and literary value, that would have made little sense to earlier generations. Thus, while some late Victorian novelists agreed with Trollope that the literary marketplace rewarded the writer who, in the words of Gissing's Jasper Milvain, “thinks first and foremost of the markets,” they strongly disagreed with Trollope's conviction that writing for the market meant writing well. Indeed, Gissing's *New Grub Street* largely reverses mid-Victorian logic by portraying Milvain's tradesmanlike attitude as a sign of his *lack* of artistic and moral integrity, and the ultimate popularity and financial success of his work as an equally sure sign that its “literary value” is, in the words of one character, “Equal to that of the contents of a mouldy nut” (ch. 14, 181). In *New Grub Street*, true artists like Edwin Reardon and Harold Biffen “never as[k themselves] what [they] should get for [a] book” but do the work “for its own sake” (ch. 15, 202). Yet their idealism dooms them to poverty and early death.

Such attitudes were often accompanied by an altogether new sense of estrangement from ordinary readers. Where mid-Victorian novelists had highly valued those readers' responses, late Victorian novelists like Gissing had little faith in the discriminating powers of “the reading multitude” (ch. 27, 376), the “quarter-educated” products of

"the Board schools" (ch. 33, 460). As a result, such writers prided themselves on appealing not to the masses, but to those few who could be counted on to share similar backgrounds, experiences, and values – what Edmund Gosse called, in a letter to Hardy, "your own confrères," "the serious male public" (quoted in McDonald 1997: 7).

This hostility toward "the reading multitude" also expressed itself in rebellion against the traditional rules governing fictional propriety and in a conviction that the novelist who followed such rules, like the novelist who wrote for money, would inevitably – as Hardy wrote – "belie his literary conscience" (1967: 130). That Gosse described the ideal audience as a *male* public was no accident. For, just as the reticence of early and mid-Victorian fiction was justified with reference to the (imagined) needs and susceptibilities of *female* readers, so those late Victorian writers who advocated greater openness saw themselves as championing literary "virility." Such, for example, were the claims made on behalf of the Rabelais Club, founded in 1880 by Besant and drawing to its fold Hardy, Meredith, and Robert Louis Stevenson. Dedicated, in Hardy's words, to promoting "virility in literature," the club was named for an author believed to exemplify that manly frankness (Keating 1989: 266).

These authors tended to reserve their greatest hostility for Mudie – the man whom they saw as the greatest "profiteer" of the literary trade and as the representative of the feminized "reading multitude" – and for the three-decker, the literary form Mudie's library did so much to sustain. Despite the fact that *New Grub Street* was published in three volumes, it portrays the three-decker as "A triple-headed monster, sucking the blood of English novelists" (ch. 15, 203). The same argument and the same virulent language appear in *Literature at Nurse; or Circulating Morals* (1885), a pamphlet by George Moore, whose novels had been excluded from both Mudie's and W. H. Smith's on moral grounds. *Literature at Nurse* attributes the qualitative decline (or devolution) of English fiction to Mudie's "feminine" concern with morals and "tradesmanlike" interest in profit:

the character for strength, virility, and purpose, which our literature has always held . . . is being gradually obliterated to suit the commercial views of a narrow minded tradesman . . . literature is now rocked to an ignoble rest in the motherly arms of the librarian . . . in and out of his voluminous skirts run a motley and monstrous progeny, a callow, a whining, a puking brood of bastard bantlings. (Moore 1978: 18)

As this suggests, the three-decker increasingly came to be seen as a novel not just of a certain length, but of a certain kind – one that was old-fashioned not only because it had dominated since Scott's day, but also because its form and content enforced traditional attitudes and reflected the dominance of "business" over "art." Not surprisingly, then, a novel of only one or two volumes seemed to many artistically, morally, and socially radical – embodying the choice of "art" over "business," the fidelity to ambiguous "truth" rather than the specious certainty that came of adhering to traditional beliefs, values, and fictional formulas. Gissing told a friend in 1885, "It is fine

to see how the old three-vol. tradition is being broken through . . . Far more artistic, I think, is the . . . method, of merely suggesting . . . — hinting, surmising” (quoted in Gettmann 1960: 254).

Gissing's confidence that the “old three-vol. tradition” was dying in 1885 turned out to be justified. Yet its death, like its long life, was ultimately the result of economic rather than artistic imperatives. The very pace of novel production had created various problems for the circulating libraries. If one multiplies the number of novels published per year by the three volumes that comprised each, one can begin to appreciate the basic storage problem confronting Mudie in the final decades of the century. Where, after all, was Mudie to keep all these volumes, particularly if he wanted to offer borrowers non-fiction and older, as well as newer, fiction? A partial solution to the storage problem — and much of Mudie's income — came from selling extra copies of novels as their popularity waned. Such sales had been possible and profitable, however, only while Mudie's remaindered library editions did not have to compete with cheaper editions — while, that is, there was sufficient lag-time between publication of library and cheaper editions. That lag-time decreased greatly as the century progressed, while a host of factors conspired to exacerbate Mudie's problems: the cost of the library edition remained high, while the cost of cheaper editions fell; the pace of novel production ensured that any one novel's window of popularity grew ever narrower; and the number of Mudie's patrons declined as the result of competition from the free libraries founded in accordance with the 1850 Public Libraries Act. Ironically, then, even as Moore attacked Mudie and the three-decker, Mudie was himself coming to see the three-volume novel as an economic hindrance. Such complaints turned into action after Charles Mudie's son, Arthur, took control of the business. In 1894, he announced that Mudie's would cease dealing with any publisher who did not drastically reduce the price of library editions and wait one year before publishing cheap editions. Since producing three-volume novels on such terms would, as he recognized, spell economic disaster for publishers, his edict ensured the swift demise of the three-decker: the year Mudie issued his decree, British publishers produced 184 three-deckers; in 1895, fifty-two; in 1897, four (Feather 1988: 155).

Though Moore and others had once envisioned the three-decker's demise as an answer to the artistic novelist's prayers, its ultimate effect was to increase competition. It did so, in part, by making the individual author more directly dependent on the patronage of the public and on the advertising and cultivation of celebrity so essential to gaining and sustaining that patronage. Effectively, it widened the gap between the “bestseller” and the novel(ist) with small public appeal.

Not all writers agreed with Moore or Hardy about the meaning and effects of such developments: the breakdown of the sense of community and consensus that had characterized the world of early and mid-Victorian publishing divided late Victorian novelists from one another as much as it divided novelists from publishers, librarians, and readers. In 1895, for example, Edmund Gosse defended publishers and booksellers against the Society of Authors, arguing that literature's real enemy was the “greedy,” Milvain-like novelist who sought only money and “celebrity” (quoted in McDonald

1997: 15). For some, Besant's Society itself encouraged that mercenary approach to art by implying "that the end of literature was the making of money" (quoted in McDonald 1997: 33). Other writers, however, saw the situation quite differently, Arnold Bennett, for one, attacking the Gosse-like "tendency to disdain the public, and to appeal only to artists" (quoted in McDonald 1997: 93).

The many novels about novelists published in this period bring to life these competing views. While, for example, *New Grub Street* depicts the popular novelist as an inauthentic, inartistic, and rather heartless panderer to popular ignorance and prejudice, Marie Corelli's *Sorrows of Satan* (1895) attacks the presumptions of self-styled literary artists like Gissing himself. For Corelli represents a fictional novelist who views "the public [as] an 'ass'" as literally selling his soul to the devil (Corelli 1996: ch. 15, 139), while making her hero the popular female novelist Mavis Clare. *Sorrows* thereby envisions popularity as both the result and sign not of pandering to the audience but of elevating it, which Mavis Clare does by writing novels that uphold the traditional values and beliefs undermined by self-styled "artists" like Gissing. Taking direct aim at such artists, Corelli has the novel's "fallen woman" declare, "my vices have been encouraged and fostered . . . by most of the literary teachers of my time" (ch. 36, 334), while Mavis Clare's novels alone "give me back my self-respect, and make me see humanity in a nobler light" (ch. 17, 162). Like most early and mid-Victorian novelists, in other words, Corelli envisions popularity as a sign both of literary merit and of moral conscientiousness.

In some sense, then, the divisions within the late Victorian publishing world boiled down to a conflict between those who continued to uphold the beliefs and values that had shaped the ethos and practice of the early and mid-Victorian publishing world and those who instead embraced very different ideas and ideals. The fact that the latter closely resemble our own views of business and art, literary and economic value, popularity and artistry, makes it very tempting for us to see them as somehow true or noble in a way that Corelli's are not. But both visions are no more and no less than visions – two of the many conceptualizations of the literary marketplace that struggled for dominance in the late Victorian period. While that struggle produced literary masterpieces such as *New Grub Street* and *Jude the Obscure*, equally masterly novels such as *David Copperfield* and *Middlemarch* were instead the products of a publishing world organized around a quite Corelli-like vision of the business of fiction.

See also EDUCATION, LITERACY, AND THE VICTORIAN READER; MONEY, THE ECONOMY, AND SOCIAL CLASS; TECHNOLOGY AND INFORMATION: ACCELERATING DEVELOPMENTS.

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