

LITERATURE IN THE MARKETPLACE

*Nineteenth-century British publishing and
reading practices*

EDITED BY

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CHAPTER I

Introduction: publishing history as hypertext

John O. Jordan and Robert L. Patten

One difficulty, said Stephen, in esthetic discussion is to know whether words are being used according to the literary tradition or according to the tradition of the marketplace.

James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

A few years ago David Simpson called for a “Return to ‘History’” in the practice of literary criticism. Specifically, he professed a need for scholars to address “the small and intransigent details that are least susceptible to hermeneutic instability”: such matters as costs and formats, size of imprints, and relations among authors, editors, and printers.¹ However comforting it might be to find a bedrock of “fact” on which to construct not only a new literary criticism but also a new history of the manufacture, transmission, and reception of books, that foundation will not be located easily. At every point along the continuum from manuscript through printing and binding to circulation, the “small and intransigent details” differ according to the nature of the story or argument being constructed, exist in varying relationships with other parts of the production process, and in many cases simply are absent as records or as foci of academic concern.

Moreover, our theories of book production range widely and are at many points contradictory. Authorial agency, publishers’ incentives, technological developments, cultural and legal formations, and marketplace incentives all figure in various ways depending on the era, country, and text: and hence no comprehensive paradigm of a print culture has yet been promulgated. Indeed, publishing history, “literary sociology,” the history of the book, or the “sociology of texts,” as the field is variously denominated, “lacks binding theoretical coherence,” to quote John Sutherland, and is characterized by what Robert Darnton calls “interdisciplinarity run riot.”²

In wrestling with the multiplicity of approaches to writing about nineteenth-century British book publication, the papers printed here testify to a subject still in its formative phase, rich with local insights and potential for further investigation but inconsistent even in conceiving of the subject itself, much less in agreeing on appropriate methods for treating its cooperating parts.

Histories of the British book trade have of course been written many times. In the past half century, the field has been conceived in at least five ways – ways that are to some extent chronological in development but that overlap and interpenetrate at every phase. Some of the earliest studies of publishing and readership in this period aimed at providing a conspectus of the conditions under which a print culture flourishes. Thus, Marjorie Plant (1939) provided a still-valuable economic history of publishing; Q. D. Leavis (1932), Amy Cruse (1935), and Margaret Dalziel (1957) addressed the issue of readership and its impact on texts; and Richard Altick (1957) gathered together data on modes of publication, costs, circulation, and other aspects of text reception and the sociology of the common reader that documented “the growth of the mass reading public in England.” A specialized but influential study of a particular decade was provided by Kathleen Tillotson (1954) in her introductory chapter to *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties*.³

Roughly simultaneously, scholars in the field of bibliography embarked on an intensive effort to codify the principles by which books were to be described and copytexts determined. The meticulous examination of the material aspects of manuscripts and books and the inferences that can be drawn from those physical objects about the integrity and authenticity of the text owe much to the labors of Ronald B. McKerrow (1927, 1929), W. W. Greg (1942, 1950, 1956), and Fredson Bowers (1949, 1964) – who established their editorial principles largely on the basis of Renaissance dramatic texts – and to their successors and revisers, Philip Gaskell (1972, 1978), G. Thomas Tanselle (1987, 1989, 1990), Jerome McGann (1983, 1985), and Peter Shillingsburg (1986, 1992).⁴

Authorized histories of publishing houses have contributed to our knowledge of editorial practices, finance, and marketing. Arthur Waugh (1930) composed an avuncular history of Chapman and Hall; Emily Symonds (1932) wrote admiringly about the John Murrays; Frank Mumby (1934) traced the history of Routledge;

Charles Morgan (1944) honored Macmillans; Simon Nowell-Smith (1958) provided a sound and learned history of Cassell; Royal Gettmann (1960) made provisional sense of the Bentley archives; Asa Briggs (1974) edited a collection of essays commemorating the house of Longman; and Peter Sutcliffe (1978) published during its quincentenary an “informal history” of Oxford University Press. Though some of these studies were little more than lists of the distinguished authors whose works passed through the press, most printed original correspondence and records and thus provided scholars with some of the “intransigent details” of publishing. Nevertheless, as Gaye Tuchman complains, official house biographies “make one think that publishing concerned simply art,” and that to consider publishing as a culture industry, with all that such a perspective implies about its commercial motives, would depreciate the publishers’ products into mere commodities.⁵ Under the editorship of Michael L. Turner, the journal *Publishing History* has initiated exploration of “the social, economic, organizational and literary history of book, newspaper and magazine publishing.” Ancillary studies have clarified the nature of women’s romances (Dorothy Blakey, 1939), the rise of fiction bureaus (Frank Singleton, 1950; Michael L. Turner, 1975), the legal dimensions of copyright and trade (Simon Nowell-Smith, 1968; Mark Rose, 1993), the disputes over copyright and pricing (James J. Barnes, 1964, 1974), the influence of literary agents (James Hepburn, 1968), the power of circulating libraries (Guinevere L. Griest, 1970), and the modern context of manufacturing and selling (Robin Myers, 1973; F. A. Mumby and Ian Norrie, 1982). One subset of publishing history has been the study of nineteenth-century periodicals, which were much more closely involved in the publication and dissemination of literature and reading practices than their usual separation from such studies has indicated. Miriam Thrall (1934) has written a standard history of *Fraser’s*; Spencer Eddy (1970) surveyed the *Cornhill*; Walter Houghton (1966–89) and his associates have provided us with essential information about thirty-five nineteenth-century periodicals; and scholarly quarterlies constitute a forum for articles on newspapers and magazines.⁶

Authors’ dealings with printers, publishers, and booksellers were an inevitable part of their careers. In the transition between full-blown New Criticism and the current proliferation of cultural studies, authors’ commercial relationships received their own

specialized attention. John Gross (1969) composed an influential (and gender-specific) account of the rise and fall of the nineteenth-century man of letters, including prose writers, journalists, and reviewers. In some cases (William Wordsworth, Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Wilkie Collins, George Eliot, Anthony Trollope, Mary Ward, Margaret Oliphant, George Meredith, George Gissing, Thomas Hardy, Walter Besant, Arnold Bennett), information about a writer's contractual, financial, textual, and social interaction with publishers emerged in notes to editions of correspondence or in passages within a more comprehensive biography; in others, whole books were devoted to one writer (Patten on Dickens, 1978; Hagen on Tennyson, 1979). What such studies have in common is the conviction that the author's career was importantly shaped by the marketplace in all its dimensions and that "genius" alone cannot account for the production or content of an oeuvre. What they lack is a complete sense of reciprocity: technology, ideology, politics, commerce, and various cultural forces may have been greatly responsible for the shape of texts and the nature of receptions. Nigel Cross's recent investigation of Grub Street documents the exacting circumstances under which writers often labored, the marginality of authorship, and its susceptibility to outside forces.⁷

Contemporary scholars have added to these predecessors a sense of the complexity of the issues, coupled with inventiveness and originality in reconceiving and reworking older disciplines. The relationship of illustrations to texts, neglected (except for Blake) before John Harvey's pioneering work (1971), has now been extensively studied in books and articles on particular authors and artists and in monographs on book design, print and image technology, and the cross-fertilization of visual, theatrical, and print modes on one another (Ruari McLean, 1963; Percy Muir, 1971; Martin Meisel, 1983; Richard Altick, 1985).⁸ Cultural studies have in manifold ways demonstrated that topics and ways of seeing were shared alike by journalist, novelist, poet, and reader (Richard Stein, 1987; Rowland McMaster, 1990; Richard Altick, 1991).⁹ Literary critics have discerned wide-ranging and extremely complex intertextual commentary circulating among nineteenth-century writers and scientists as well as novelists (Gillian Beer, 1983; Jerome Meckier, 1987).¹⁰ The variety of ways in which market forces operate have been outlined by John Sutherland (1976),

revised from a more Marxist perspective by N. N. Feltes (1986), reconceived in terms of textual implications by Peter Shillingsburg (1992) and of social history and historical sociology by Peter Keating (1989), and analyzed for its differential effects on male and female authors by Gaye Tuchman (1989).¹¹ Gender and class issues have been explored by Louis James (1963), Vineta Colby (1970), Martha Vicinus (1974), Elaine Showalter (1977), Janice Radway (1984), Mary Poovey (1984), and Regenia Gagnier (1986).¹² Even textual bibliography has undergone extensive revision as the very notion of a stable or an urtext has been challenged. The object on which bibliographers practice their craft – that is, the book – and the goal of “textual criticism,” which is “to determine the text of what we are to read,” have been questioned.¹³ Was not the manuscript more than a mere stage preparatory to print; was it not also separately conceived and executed object with its own integrity and authenticity, and was not the first printed issue, whether in serial part or magazine, at least as important a document as the “definitive” book edition? Does textual bibliography have as its only domain the production of a text, or might its modes of analysis yield other kinds of cultural information?¹⁴

Simon Eliot opens this book with a survey of the broad patterns of production in the nineteenth century. He documents the general increase in number of titles, the growing secularization of subjects, and the steady reduction in unit cost. He identifies a “plateau” in the 1860s when book production stabilized after an expansion caused by revolutions in manufacture and distribution (1830–55) and preceding a second surge in output (1875–1914) fueled by mechanical improvements, enlarged markets, increased professional opportunities, and mass-circulation publications. He thus suggests that whatever paradigms we might propose for treating the century as a whole need to be adjusted to at least three periods when different combinations of physical, legal, and human conditions differently affected the marketplace.

Even within one author’s career, changing markets provided opportunities and constraints for a writer’s new and previously issued works. Wordsworth offers an instructive example. In “Wordsworth in the *Keepsake*, 1829,” Peter Manning studies the clash between the “dignity of literature” and entrepreneurial opportunism, and explores the surprising complicity between Romantic idealism and the commercial world to which those ideals were

apparently opposed. Manning analyzes the broader cultural significance of that curious, early nineteenth-century form of commodity publication, the fashionable literary annual. Despite objections to the florid style, effeminized audience, and crass commercialism of these flossy compilations, Wordsworth and his contemporaries were induced by handsome contributors' fees to offer previously issued and new works to these seasonal "coffee-table" books. Such outlets redefined the nature of literary production and by their success encouraged rival publishers and editors to bid high for "names" with which to promote luxury consumer objects for predominantly female buyers. Wordsworth's language of men speaking to men became, through the medium of the *Keepsake*, regendered.

Stephen Gill asks a related question in the expanded context of Wordsworth's production throughout the century: which Wordsworth was being promoted and read? Drawing extensively upon previously unpublished manuscripts, Gill focuses on efforts by the poet's sons and publishers to maintain copyright control in the decades after 1850, when gradually the corpus entered the public domain. Rival firms and anthologists eager to print material out of copyright and to skew it to a particular topographical, religious, or other theme appropriated the Wordsworth canon. Others seeking access to unpublished material posed an insoluble problem for the poet's heirs: did they authorize competing publications, thereby exercising some control over the material and reaping some financial reward, or did they refuse such requests, thereby contributing to the proliferation of incomplete, corrupt, and partial representations of their father's work? The textual complexities that resulted from the progressive lapsing of copyright, and the versions of Wordsworth's writings that were issued, insured that readers of different editions got radically different impressions of the poet's philosophy and achievement. Paradoxically, in Wordsworth's case the improved provisions of the 1842 copyright act contributed to deterioration of textual authenticity and to multiplication of unrepresentative and misleading editions.

Pickwick Papers has often been identified as the work that ushered in the Victorian era. Dickens's partly accidental exploitation of the advantages of the serialized commodity set an example that other novelists and publishers were quick to emulate. Playfully but profoundly meditating on "Sam Weller's valentine," Hillis Miller explores the relationship between the performative or efficacious

in writing and commodifications of language and graphic art in seasonal products like valentines. Using the modifications of speech act theory developed by such critics as Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man, Miller asks how “promises” and avowals of love might be said to function in commercial products, in verbal marriage proposals, in legal evidence, and in serial parts. He provides a capsule history of valentines from the Middle Ages through to the early Victorian period, including their involvement in authenticating gestures (signatures, patents, copyright, delivery) and the difficulties in controlling a response. He concludes by demonstrating the self-conscious, ironic, and performative nature of Dickensian language which critiques the early Victorian ideology and conventions of love and marriage, the subject of bourgeois fiction.

What Dickens promised to the readers of his serial parts has usually been described as suspense and topicality: consumers were guaranteed a continuing, exciting story that at many points made overt or covert allusion to their own times. Robert L. Patten reverses that thesis, arguing in “Serialized retrospection in *The Pickwick Papers*” that *Pickwick* gains forward momentum through retrospection. Each part looks backward to an earlier era, the prior month, and previous fiction; the novel’s trajectory goes from death to death and toward the stasis of familiar romantic endings, and is propelled by the reiterated disruptions of those traditional closures. Readers consumed these serial parts, he suggests, because they became familiar with and simultaneously remembered a rhythm of appetency and satiation that dominates the text and their own cycle of desires.

Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund, in “Textual/sexual pleasure and serial publication,” press this thesis even further. Adopting a gendered approach based on recent work in feminist narratology, they posit two rhythms in serial reading: a goal-oriented “male” narrative structure characterized by rising tension, climax, and release, and a “female” pattern marked by anticipation, delay, periodicity, and the issuing forth of new life and relationships at the culmination of the process. Periodical fiction thus appealed to both sexes, diversifying an audience that in other publications was often directed either to male or to female readers.

The chapters on Wordsworth and Dickens conceptualize in different ways relationships between production and consumption. Kelly Mays, in her discussion of “The disease of reading and

Victorian periodicals,” attempts to situate some of the key issues that underlie debates about reading practices in the second half of the nineteenth century. Mays is concerned with the politics of reading, with the ways in which readers are constructed and used in social and cultural projects. From the French Revolution forward, she maintains (following Thomas Laqueur), readers were enjoined to pursue “rational recreation” so that they might be fit to seize the opportunities of an industrial society. Readers were also involved in the project of constructing an English polity, a national integrity. Reading practices came to be divided between the exercise of the mind and the stimulation of the body and sensations, with the consequence, much deplored by Victorian reviewers, that lower-class, popular, and female literature stimulated a hunger for more, for indiscriminate sensation, and for perpetual snacking, that is, desultory and interruptible reading. She therefore addresses questions of praxis also raised by Miller, Patten, and by Hughes and Lund. In attending to the disciplinary pedagogics inculcated by the journals, Mays foregrounds another important medium through which “readers” were constructed and instructed.

Not all readers were amenable to instruction, at least of the kinds the quarterlies advocated. Two contributors examine other kinds of resistance and susceptibility to print and images. Jonathan Rose, in “How historians study reader response” maintains that readers’ responses to publications should be evaluated not only in quantifiable terms such as circulation and sales but also by the ways they – especially the lower working classes – incorporated fictional prototypes in their own self-representations and self-authorized scenarios of progress. He turns to empirical data for his evidence – library records, reader surveys, and working-class autobiographies – to show how Dickens (preeminently) provided working people with the examples, inspiration, and conventions to narrate their own lives. Gerard Curtis, looking at “Dickens in the visual market,” studies the exchange between the visual and the literary within the formats Victorian publishers employed. He instances migrations of visual materials into texts and vice versa, and suggests how intricately the commodities hawked in serial advertisements interpenetrate the processes of seeing, being seen, and being represented articulated by Dickens’s works.¹⁵ Curtis concludes with a close examination of the *Nickleby* portrait of the author, which acts as guarantor of the text in ways complementary

to signatures on valentines and books and to the canonization of middle-class reading habits that Mays uncovers. Rose and Curtis demonstrate noncanonical kinds of reading that substantiate the hierarchization and heterogeneity of Victorian practice.

But what about female readers and writers? Were their opportunities for self-construction and self-expression, their ways of reading and their subjects of interest different from, and more constricted and subverted than, those for males? (Both Manning and Mays address these issues.) Are not the many instances of female writers adopting male pseudonyms clear evidence that the marketplace was more open to men, especially, as Gaye Tuchman points out, in the later decades of the century, when “high art” became a male preserve? Virginia Woolf maintained in *A Room of One’s Own* that “Currer Bell, George Eliot, George Sand . . . sought ineffectively to veil themselves by using the name of a man.”¹⁶ In “Male pseudonyms and female authority in Victorian England,” Catherine Judd proposes revisions of that assumption. Rather than considering female writers’ adoption of male pseudonyms as a strategy of concealment or disguise, Judd argues that “Currer Bell” and “George Eliot” enabled a complex process of gender differentiation wherein Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot could preserve a space for the female self empowered by the Romantic ideal of creative privacy while projecting a male persona that could be both culturally valorized and ironized. Coupled with the “feminization” of serial reading proposed by Hughes and Lund and the “feminization” of audience that Manning shows was achieved by the *Keepsakes* and other annuals, Judd’s study of the advantages to female writers of cross-dressed pseudonymity requires rethinking the simplistic paradigms of gendered texts and audiences that earlier generations of Victorianists promulgated.

The effects of format have been a topic considered from various vantage points throughout these chapters. Does format affect readership? Are the ideologies informing the mode of production necessarily replicated by the texts so presented? Does a different format change the nature of the text, its character, style, and substance, or does it determine a different audience? We think of generic conventions as governing the look, feel, structures, and rhetorical strategies of texts: novels appear in volumes, for instance. What changes when a three-decker is serialized in a newspaper or magazine for a foreign market, or when a long poem, such as *In*

Memoriam, is excerpted and rearranged for anthologies such as Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*?

The three remaining chapters approach these questions in different ways. Maura Ives interrogates the assumptions that have governed standard bibliographical practice. Using George Meredith as an example, she instances significant but unobserved variants between the earliest published versions of his texts, often in evanescent serializations, and their "official" publication in volumes carefully described according to professional conventions. Fully notating the context in which these writings first appeared, she argues, might bring out much more than variant readings: it could lead to revaluations of the "voice," audience, and authority Meredith achieved, and alter our assessments of his significance and impact.

A complementary case is made by Laurel Brake for the periodical versions of Walter Pater's *Renaissance*, a set of essays profoundly shaped by the economic and ideological agendas of the two very different magazines in which the chapters were first published. The editorial policies, aesthetic program, and political biases of the *Westminster Review* during the 1860s partly determined the nature of the more radical and subversive essays that Pater published anonymously there, two of them in the guise of (unpaid) reviews of other books. The *Fortnightly Review* commissioned and paid for signed articles; the four that Pater contributed to it were more discreet and conventional analyses of Renaissance artists. When the pieces were recirculated in book form, the disparities between the two kinds of journalism were blurred if never entirely erased. What was fundamentally unsettling and unattributable in the "wicked" *Westminster* became more scholarly and acceptable when combined with the *Fortnightly* articles in a signed, respectable volume.

Elizabeth Morrison presents yet another perspective on the complex relationship between book and serial publication. In the final chapter, she opens up the horizon to the antipodes, studying the Australian newspaper press as publisher of both indigenous (colonial) and imported (British and American) fiction. In a survey complementary to Simon Eliot's, she demonstrates the unslaked appetite of the colonial market for stories from home and abroad. Australian newspapers usually serialized texts from American and British publishers before the first home volume edition; the resulting publicity contributed to the "hype" of best-sellers and the

growth of fiction bureaus, notably Tillotson's. If in Australia the availability of works by overseas writers damped the demand for local products, it also helped to forge a more diversified and more intertextually and interculturally literate colonial audience than we have hitherto predicated.

Fissures, then, confront us at every point, fissures that relate to the different directions in which new historicists, Marxists, deconstructionists, poststructuralists, and feminists have been traveling. One such gap opened in August 1991 at the University of California, Santa Cruz when the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing (SHARP) was formally founded. Objections were raised to defining the project's orientation by the word "history," for it seemed to some that "history" so announced was tantamount to particular theories of history, the *Annales* school, Robert Escarpit's "sociology of authorship," or studies in the connections between printing and the dissemination of ideas to which Roger Chartier and Robert Darnton have made distinguished contributions.¹⁷ "History," desirable for its place in a catchy acronym, might be thought to preclude theories of authorship prominent in gender studies and in deconstruction, theories of reader reception, and whatever might emerge in the near future from thinking about publishing as a more than commercial, or even as a commercial, enterprise.¹⁸ Some wanted to concentrate on gathering statistics, data, those "small and intransigent details least susceptible to hermeneutic instability," at least until basic histories of the book, such as that for Britain announced by Cambridge University Press, are completed. Others believed that any such effort, already acting out of unvoiced theoretical and conceptual presuppositions, precluded thinking about the nature of the subject, about marketplaces, authorship, publishing, literacy, and reading. To entertain such contraries and to foster exploration of their points of divergence and intersection, as this book does, also seemed to SHARP the best course to pursue at present.¹⁹

What will be needed in the future is not more of the linear paradigms of production that commence with the writer's idea and proceed straightforwardly through composition to publication and reception, but conceptions of the activity of producing and consuming books that decenter the principal elements and make them interactive and interdependent; publishing history, in other words, as hypertext.²⁰ Readers ignore, support, modify, and

imprison authors; publishers serve as producers, gatekeepers, flood dams, censors, merchants, and onlie begetters.²¹ Applying to the production of books M. H. Abrams's influential taxonomy of the four principal aesthetic orientations, we can see that viewed as a manufacturing process literary production both participates in and goes beyond those aesthetic principles. Nineteenth-century publishing practices do not privilege imitation, although realism and reproduction of the natural or unique through mechanical means were important constituents of the arts of the period. Audiences are not publishers' only target, although rising literacy, segmenting readership, the constructions of reading practices, and the vast economic, political, and educational projects put reading matter of all kinds, consumed in manifold ways, near the center of Victorian life. Cultivation of expressive rhetorics was often condemned, although feeling, sentiment, genius, inspiration, interiority, and energy, both natural and supernatural, were frequently the expressed motives for producing and the canonical qualities for evaluating imaginative works. Nor did Victorian writers, publishers, printers, reviewers, and readers necessarily conceive texts to be internally coherent and self-constituted objects.

Four other principles, these chapters imply, are likely to figure in any new paradigm of publishing history. First, the principle of mediation. Increasingly through the century, the direct connections between author and publisher, publisher and printing house, and press and audience were moderated by the interposition of other agencies: literary agents, fiction bureaus, and the Society of Authors between author and publisher; technologies between publisher and printing house; distribution and evaluation systems between press and audience. How these mediating agencies altered the nature, pace, and results of publishing will be part of any comprehensive history.

Second, publishing history, however much it starts with physical products, will in the end have to incorporate intangibles: ideological and social formations that privileged print culture, events that lent themselves to verbal formulation and dissemination (news, legislation, gossip, controversy), and particular conjunctions of time, place, and person that stimulated print production, conjunctions such as Kathleen Tillotson, Carl Dawson, and Richard Stein evoke.²²

Third, future historians will have to cope with the ambiguities