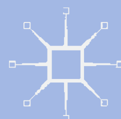
Victorian Fiction Beyond the Canon

Edited by
Daragh Downes and Trish Ferguson

Palgrave Studies in
Nineteenth-Century Writing and Culture
General Editor: Joseph Bristow



Palgrave Studies in Nineteenth-Century Writing and Culture

Series Editor

Joseph Bristow
Department of English
University of California – Los Angeles
Los Angeles, California, USA

Aim of the series

Palgrave Studies in Nineteenth-Century Writing and Culture is a new monograph series that aims to represent the most innovative research on literary works that were produced in the English-speaking world from the time of the Napoleonic Wars to the fin de siécle. Attentive to the historical continuities between 'Romantic' and 'Victorian', the series will feature studies that help scholarship to reassess the meaning of these terms during a century marked by diverse cultural, literary, and political movements. The main aim of the series is to look at the increasing influence of types of historicism on our understanding of literary forms and genres. It reflects the shift from critical theory to cultural history that has affected not only the period 1800-1900 but also every field within the discipline of English literature. All titles in the series seek to offer fresh critical perspectives and challenging readings of both canonical and non-canonical writings of this era. Editorial Board: Hilary Fraser, Birkbeck College, University of London, UK Josephine McDonagh, Kings College, London, UK Yopie Prins, University of Michigan, USA Lindsay Smith, University of Sussex, UK Margaret Stetz, University of Delaware, USA Jenny Bourne Taylor, University of Sussex, UK

More information about this series at
http://www.springer.com/series/14607

Daragh Downes • Trish Ferguson
Editors

Victorian Fiction Beyond the Canon

With an Afterword by John Sutherland

palgrave
macmillan

Editors
Daragh Downes
School of English
Trinity College
Dublin, Ireland

Trish Ferguson
Department of English
Liverpool Hope University
Liverpool, UK

ISBN 978-1-137-51822-4 ISBN 978-1-137-51823-1 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-51823-1

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016956120

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2016
The author(s) has/have asserted their right(s) to be identified as the author(s) of this work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.
This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.
The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use
The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made.

Cover illustration: © Courtesy of the Board of Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Macmillan Publishers Ltd.
The registered company address is: The Campus, 4 Crinan Street, London, N1 9XW, United Kingdom

Acknowledgements

The editors would like to acknowledge the generous support of Liverpool Hope University, Trinity College Dublin and the British Association for Victorian Studies, which made possible the 'Lesser Victorians' conference held in September 2013 in Trinity College Dublin, where the idea for this collection of essays first took shape.

Thanks are also due to The Board of Trinity College Dublin, The University of Dublin, who kindly gave permission for the use of a detail from 'Dickens Surrounded by his Characters' by J. B. Brown (published in Frederic Kitton's 1889–90 book *Charles Dickens by Pen and Pencil)* for the cover image.

We would also like to thank Ben Doyle, Tomas René and Eva Hodgkin at Palgrave Macmillan for their tireless support and assistance in producing this volume.

Contents

1 Introduction: Exploring the Hinterland of Victorian Fiction 1
Daragh Downes, Trish Ferguson

2 Prize Novelists and Condensed Novels: Thackeray and Bret Harte 17
Michael Slater

3 Before *New Grub Street*: Thomas Miller and the Contingencies of Authorship 31
Adam Abraham

4 Emboldening the Weak: The Early Fiction of James Anthony Froude 45
Ciaran Brady

5 George Borrow: The Scholar, The Gipsy, The Priest 71
Monika Mazurek

6 Sensation Fiction as Social Activism: Charles Reade's *It Is Never Too Late to Mend* and Felicia Skene's *Hidden Depths* 87
Elizabeth Andrews

7 Sheer Luck, Holmes? Clues Towards Canon Formation in Victorian Detective Fiction 105
Daragh Downes

8 Politics of the Strange and Unusual: Mesmerism and the Medical Professional in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's 'Dr.Carrick' (1878) 125
Samantha J. M. Aliu

9 Silas K. Hocking, *Her Benny*, and the Poetics of the Prolific 143
Christopher Pittard

10 Henry Hawley Smart's *The Great Tontine* and the Art of Book-Making 163
Trish Ferguson

11 Double Standards: Reading the Revolutionary Doppelgänger in *The Prophet's Mantle* 181
Matthew Ingleby

12 Richard Marsh and the Realist Gothic: Pursuing Traces of an Evasive Author in His *Fin-de-Siècle* Popular Fiction 201
Ailise Bulfin

13 Dat Cura Commodum or A Portrait of a Deviant Mind: Arthur Griffiths's *The Rome Express*, John Milne's 'The Express Series' and Late-Victorian Detective Fiction 219
Paul Raphael Rooney

14 Afterword from the Hinterland 239
John Sutherland

Bibliography 249

Index 265

List of Figures

Fig. 10.1	'Who are the Ten Greatest Living Englishmen?', *Pall Mall Gazette* (19 January 1885), p. 6	174
Fig. 13.1	John Milne Express Novels. Advertisement. *Pall Mall Gazette*, 2 August 1899, p. 3	229
Fig. 13.2	Unknown artist. *The Express Series*. London: John Milne; 1899 (Image reproduced courtesy of The Board of Trinity College Dublin)	230

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Exploring the Hinterland of Victorian Fiction

Daragh Downes and Trish Ferguson

'Sun destroys/the interest of what's happening in the shade'
Philip Larkin, 'The Whitsun Weddings'

In 1886, when Sir John Lubbock drew up a list of 'The Best Hundred Books' for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, he was quick to clarify that the list represented not the hundred best books per se, 'but, which is very different [...] those which on the whole are perhaps best worth reading'.[1] His suggestion that the literary canon he was offering represented a collective view, rather than any claim on his part as to intrinsic literary merit, did nothing to temper the controversy that ensued. Readers of the *Pall Mall Gazette* were quick to denounce Lubbock's list, John Ruskin famously denouncing the 'rubbish and poison' of his selection.[2] Ever alert to a commercially advantageous debate, W. T. Stead invited high-profile public figures, including the

D. Downes (✉)
School of English, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland
e-mail: downesda@tcd.ie

T. Ferguson
English Department, Liverpool Hope University, Liverpool, UK
e-mail: fergust@hope.ac.uk

© The Author(s) 2016

D. Downes, T. Ferguson (eds.), *Victorian Fiction Beyond the Canon*, Palgrave Studies in Nineteenth-Century Writing and Culture, DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-51823-1_1

Prince of Wales and William Gladstone, to enter the fray with their own recommended reading. As responses were published as 'The Hundred Best Books by the Hundred Best Judges' and as the debate moved beyond the *Pall Mall Gazette* and through the pages of the national press, the question implicitly shifted from 'What are the best books?' to 'Who, if anyone, has the right to determine such a question?' While earlier efforts to offer a literary canon—such as James Pykroft's *A Course of English Reading* (1844)—had been received with equanimity, Lubbock's prescribed list had been offered to a readership alert to Walter Pater's aestheticist reconceptualisation of criticism, which advocated moving away from according an agreed value to a work of art, or a consensus about what was 'best worth reading', in an increasingly diversified literary marketplace.[3] While Matthew Arnold attempted to establish a cultural hierarchy determined by the elite, Pater urged each of his readers 'to know one's own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly.'[4] However, this is an injunction that, in modern scholarship, is still more often quoted than applied.

Pater's insistence that one evaluate works of art on their own merits, rather than blindly accepting a selected canon formulated by the social and cultural elite, is no less fraught with difficulties to readers of Victorian fiction now than it was to those in the late nineteenth century, in large part simply on account of the vast scale of literature available. As Franco Moretti has pointed out, even if we set today's canon of nineteenth-century long-form fiction at the generous figure of 200, this is only about 0.5 per cent of novels published in the century. John Sutherland, in his pioneering *Stanford Companion to Victorian Fiction* (1989), estimates the number of fiction titles published between 1837 and 1901 at a staggering 60,000-plus.[5] That this puts the set known as 'Victorian fiction' hopelessly beyond the scope of even the most avid individual reader hardly needs belabouring. To be an expert in Victorian fiction is—there is no getting around it—to be an *expert* in a mortifyingly small sample of Victorian fictions. To make broad critical pronouncements about 'Victorian fiction', and even many of its subgenres, is to take troublingly strong resort to synecdoche and extrapolation.

Thanks to large-scale digitisation, many neglected Victorian texts are now becoming amply available for the first time. Digital platforms such as the HaithiTrust and initiatives such as the British Library's programme to digitise its collection of nineteenth-century books mean that it has never been easier to access these hitherto neglected fictions. Such unprecedented availability provides scholars with the raw materials for exploring key issues such as the role played by print culture in Victorian literary production,

contemporary reviews and subsequent evaluations of Victorian fiction. At the same time, however, it enforces—or should enforce—an unprecedented cognitive humility on the individual scholar, leading each of us to ask searching questions not only as to the ideological dynamics of canon formation but also as to our own critical protocols. With such a wealth of resources made suddenly available, the simple question is: where to start? And for the individual reader keen to fulfil Pater's desideratum of discriminating and realising the individual work 'distinctly', the vastness of this literary treasury only sharpens the quandary. The problem is exquisitely difficult: how to strike a balance between the intimacy of individual aesthetico-critical response and the exciting opportunities opened up by an unprecedented collective recovery campaign.

Perhaps the most obvious starting-point in looking beyond the canon of Victorian fiction is to seek out those books which enjoyed great popularity during the era but have since lost favour and fallen out of circulation. What leads a bestseller to become so ignored by posterity? Efforts to define the 'popular' are, however, fraught with problems. Positivistic research will only get us so far. Whether we look at 'Best Books' lists, bestseller lists, sales, number of editions, or what was stocked in public libraries, the radical evolution of literary publishing over the nineteenth century, coupled with a dramatic rise in the literate reading public, means that it is often very difficult to assess sales or circulation figures of literary fiction over the course of the nineteenth century in any secure way. Even the attempt to assess the popularity of Victorian fiction quantitatively in terms of sales, or authorial income, is not nearly as straightforward as it might seem. Novelists could make much more through serialisation, which could bring in an estimated five times the amount of single-volume sales, but it would be inaccurate to merely translate sales of issues of a periodical into figures of readers of a novel published therein. Nor is it easy to measure popularity through sales of single volumes, given that at the midpoint of the Victorian era so many readers accessed their fiction through the library. Lists of texts stocked by public libraries do of course provide an insight into texts that were popular with the general reading public, but it is by no means always possible to assess numbers of borrowings at any given time.[6] And even if we could, one borrower does not necessarily equate to one reader.

To attempt to assess popularity in terms of the number of editions of a literary text published is also problematic. The nineteenth-century vogue for publishing affordable reprints was a widespread practice adopted by a broad range of publishing houses that could be seen to establish a literary canon

based on steady sales. However, while the 'Cheap Classics' series might seem a reliable indicator of what Victorians read and deemed 'canonical', sales of 'classics' may, as Jonathan Rose notes, reflect an emerging trend to acquire books as commodities to reflect cultural capital.[7] The process is rather self-confirming: publication of these 'classics' was in part related to the emergence of 'Best Books' lists, which provided an easy and attainable list for reading—or perhaps merely for display. Moreover, the trend for 'Best Books' lists, which originated with a lecture delivered by Sir John Lubbock at the Workingmen's College in London, was part of an effort to influence and elevate working-class culture, thus merely reflecting elite ideological positions about literary value that did not necessarily match what books were actually enjoyed by the masses.[8]

Clearly, any endeavour to assess the popularity of now neglected Victorian fiction is fraught with problems, but even if it were possible to do so based on sales, circulating figures, availability in public libraries or number of imprints published, this would be no guarantee of literary merit. Circulation figures of a periodical often reflected the success of a serial novel published therein. By the same token, a fiction published in a given issue may have had its circulation greatly boosted by dint not of its own popularity but of the inclusion elsewhere in that same issue of a more popular fiction. Furthermore, achieving resonance with the fickle reading public could be as tricky a business as lifting mercury with a fork: as Dickens on one occasion consoled Charles Lever, 'not quite to succeed in such a strange knack, or lottery, is a very different thing from having cause to be struck in one's self-respect and just courage.'[9] Some novels enjoyed great popularity when first published, because they touched on particular cultural interests or anxieties, but once the frame of reference which gave them value for their contemporaries was no longer relevant, they quickly lost their currency. Other novels that were undoubtedly of literary merit were neglected at the time of their publication because of the conservatism of editors or readers. With a vastly expanding readership from the mid-nineteenth century, which was in part controlled by risk-averse circulating libraries and conservative editors concerned with family readerships of their publications, some novels may have been deemed too radical in their treatment of religion, sexuality or class, particularly if those views came from an unestablished author. While Hardy, against his artistic inclination, wrote his debut novel *Desperate Remedies* (1870) to capitalise on the popularity of sensation fiction, by the 1890s he had the economic freedom to write *Jude the Obscure*, a potentially

unpublishable novel in its day that now enjoys an undisputed place in the Victorian canon.[10]

Merely to seek out forgotten bestsellers on the sole basis of their commercial success would be a highly reductive approach to reassessing the Victorian canon, and one that would have been derided by writers of the era, many of whom saw themselves as above and beyond any vulgar ambition to feature on bestseller lists. Indeed, such 'popularity' could be understood as a measure of failure. Drawing on Andreas Huyssen's observance of the 'great divide' between elite and mass culture, Aaron Jaffe notes that '[i]n the case of modernism […] the hero is the elite modernist art product staving off the forms of mass consumption,' a trend that began as a response to the unprecedented commercialism of the literary marketplace in the late nineteenth century.[11] Writers committed to the principles of the 'art for art's sake' movement often saw themselves as solely concerned with artistry and elevated above what Jasper Milvain in Gissing's *New Grub Street* memorably calls 'good, coarse, marketable stuff for the world's vulgar'.[12] While writers responding to Walter Besant's article 'On the Rewards of Literature' noted the difference between writing as a labour of love and writing out of financial necessity, this did not translate into a simple cultural division between proponents of aestheticism or creators of 'art', untainted by commercial interests, and writers of popular fiction, as might be expected.[13] Ouida refused to join the Society of Authors when it was formed to protect the financial interests of writers because she thought it commercialised art, reflecting higher aspirations than are usually associated with writers of popular fiction.[14] Thus, while it is true to say that writers seeking commercial success often followed particular trends—hence the formulaic nature of so much genre fiction such as the sensation novel or the detective story—it would be critically naïve to make assumptions based on a writer's choice of genre.

While mindful of texts that have fallen from the heights of success to the depths of oblivion, we should also spare a thought for all those fictions that failed to come to publication in the first place. How many interesting or worthy works never saw the light of day beyond MS form? How many sensitive, diffident writers living from hand to mouth could not manage to take up even temporary residence on New Grub Street? How many threw in the towel after a spate of rejection letters? How many fell victim to survival not of the best but of the fittest? And what role was played in all this by *luck* (a category apt to make rather nervous the professional literary historian whose very stock in trade is the demonstrable

nexus between cause and effect)? These are the unknown unknowns of Victorian literature, and they should haunt all of us working in the field and make us examine our own ideological investment in Smilesian notions of meritocracy and success.

***

The essays in *Victorian Fiction Beyond the Canon* explore a sample of neglected texts—several selected for 'trans-canonical' reasons—that have been subjected, in many cases for the first time, to critical scrutiny. In doing so, these essays do not assume *a priori* any differentiation between commercially successful, 'popular' fiction and 'artistic' or 'literary' fiction. Each essay will argue for the re-evaluation of forgotten Victorian fictional texts, on the grounds that their neglect by posterity violates an intrinsic historico-cultural and/or literary interest. Contributors have chosen to examine texts for a variety of reasons, including success in the literary marketplace, cultural impact or relationship to 'major' works. Some essays in this volume examine the work of those deemed 'hack' novelists whose work, it is felt, merits critical study. Others look at 'minor' works by major authors. Others still have turned their attention to bestsellers that are now critically neglected, while novels that were neutralised by editorial or publishing house policy, or buried by reactionary critics or the vagaries of public taste, have also been given renewed critical attention.

This collection of essays emerged as a collaborative endeavour to interrogate the Victorian canon. It is not, however, premised on uncontrolled counter-canonical revisionism. The vexed and vexing issue of literary quality is addressed throughout the volume. Inevitably, there will be many cases in which texts have fallen out of currency for good reason, such as the fact that they offer little more than a commodified reiteration of received genre formulae. With each author/text examined in this volume, we wanted to look at the reasons for the neglect, and encouraged our contributors, where appropriate, to take into critical consideration the question of a text's aesthetic merit.

The volume opens with an essay by world-renowned Victorian scholar Michael Slater that entertainingly revisits two little-known exercises in parody by two well-known authors: William Makepeace Thackeray's 'Punch's Prize Novelists' of 1847 and the American writer Bret Harte's 'Condensed Novels' of 1867, 1871 and 1902. Both series included light-hearted but devastating burlesques of several fiction writers whom the twentieth century was to honour with canonical status (including Disraeli, Fenimore Cooper, Dickens and Kipling); but, in tune with the theme of

this volume, Slater focuses his attention instead on the parodies of such lesser-known figures as Charles Lever, G. P. R. James, Catherine ('Mrs') Gore and Marie Corelli. The very spread of targets in 'Punch's Prize Novelists' and 'Condensed Novels' offers a strong reminder of just how different and more multitudinous the Victorian fiction landscape would have looked to the contemporary reader than it does to us today. Slater, accordingly, closes his essay by pointing to some welcome recent evidence that Victorianist scholarship is slowly coming around to the realisation that the long-held distinction between 'major' and 'minor' Victorian writing begs at least as many questions as it answers.

While Charles Dickens and Anthony Trollope both proved that a prolific literary output did not have to mean compromising on literary merit, both acquired positions within the publishing industry that gave them a measure of control over their literary careers that was not enjoyed by all talented authors. With the popularity of the serial novel placing pressure on authors to write to deadline for a rapidly expanding readership clamouring for more fiction with which to fill their leisure hours, writers began to reflect on the changing nature of their profession. Thomas Miller, a working-class poet, wrote the novel *Godfrey Malvern; or, The Life of an Author* in order to scrutinise the nature of professional authorship at a time when a number of prolific writers were deemed 'hack' novelists. While Louis James writes that 'although Miller's life was a tragic example of aspirations crushed by Victorian Grub Street he merits a minor but significant place in literary history', it is, in fact, Miller's analysis of his troubled position in the literary marketplace that is of interest to Adam Abraham in the second essay of this collection.[15] Rather than viewing Miller as worthy of attention *in spite of* his insecure position in the literary marketplace, Abraham argues that it is Miller's authentic scrutiny of the conditions of literary publishing that make *Godfrey Malvern* a valuable account of authorship. Examining Miller's novel in light of Mary Poovey's contention that 'writing, and specifically the representation of writing, became a contested site' in the Victorian era, Abraham explores how the uncertainty of the publishing industry is adopted as a central motif of Miller's narrative.[16] Thus, Abraham demonstrates how Godfrey Malvern reflects the conditions of literary production in the Victorian era, and the construction of authorship itself.

Best known for his *magnum opus*, *History of England (1850–1870)*, James Anthony Froude has long been neglected as a writer of fiction. When his novels have been paid any critical attention they have been variously dismissed as

improbable, sentimental and self-pitying, with many biographers examining his novels on account of their interest as semi-autobiographical sources. In a thorough and expansive study of his novels, Froude's most recent biographer, Ciaran Brady, redresses the limited approach taken to his fiction. He demonstrates that Froude's fiction is not only deeply engaged with theological and ethical debates of the 1840s, but that the aspects of his work most criticised—namely the fragmentary structure of his plots and reliance on coincidence and undependable narrators—are devices central to Froude's exploration of human behaviour and morality, and 'place Froude among the several experimentalist novelists of the 1840s'.

In an account of the critical fortunes of *Lavengro* (1851) and *The Romany Rye* (1857), Monika Mazurek notes that the very novels which ruined Borrow's career mid-century gave him currency in the *fin de siècle* when he attained cult status with a new generation of readers for whom he played out 'the fantasy of a libertarian disengagement from modern life'.[17] Mazurek argues that the fragmentary structure of Borrow's novels, their failure to live up to readers' expectations of what an autobiography would look like and his 'self-styled pose of an outsider by choice rather than by necessity' endeared him to Modernist readers while alienating Victorian readers. Thus, Mazurek's analysis suggests Borrow's current neglect is in part on account of his anachronistic popularity, and that a recovery project might even accord him a place in Modernist rather than Victorian Studies.

Elizabeth Andrews argues for a broadening of scholarly and popular interest in the sensation novel, one that goes beyond the usual iconic texts by Wilkie Collins, Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Ellen Price Wood. She presents Charles Reade's *It Is Never Too Late to Mend* (1856) and Felicia Skene's *Hidden Depths* (1866) as arresting instances of how the sensation novel can effectively mingle commercial considerations with a strong social reform agenda. The latter dimension, as Andrews shows, finds expression in Reade and Skene's shared thematisation of institutional secrecy and corruption. Andrews suggests that the anomaly between the considerable commercial success enjoyed by both novels at the time of their publication and their failure to find critical or popular favour ever since can be explained by Reade and Skene's shared repertoire of weaknesses: didactic heavy-handedness, ideological blind-spots (in point of race and gender) and a tendency to over-complicate their plots.

Daragh Downes's essay takes its rise from Franco Moretti's claim that what gave Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories the edge over all rivals was the device of the fully functionalised clue. By way of part-

homage to and part-critique of Moretti, Downes develops an explanation for Conan Doyle's nonpareil success that shares Moretti's focus on readerly epistemology but shifts the accent away from the clue per se to the reader's relationship to the detective figure. From this, Downes offers a narratological and characterological anatomy of a range of 'rival' Victorian detective fictions that ascribes their 'posterity fail' to their authors' misunderstanding of the very specific hermeneutic dynamics necessary for canonical longevity. The final part of Downes's essay is given over to consideration of four pre-Holmes 'near misses' which adumbrate in intriguing ways the breakthrough which Conan Doyle is to achieve: William E. Burton's 'The Secret Cell' (1837), Dickens's 'Hunted Down' (1859), Anna Katherine Green's *The Leavenworth Case* (1878) and Metta Fuller Victor's *The Dead Letter* (1865–6).

Samantha J. M. Aliu argues that the neglect of Mary Elizabeth Braddon's short stories treating of psychology, medicine and science risks severely limiting our appreciation of the strongly feminist critical impulses behind her long career as a prolific fiction writer. Choosing one such story, 'Dr. Carrick', which was published in the 1878 Extra Summer Number of the Dickens-founded magazine *All The Year Round*, Aliu mounts a close reading of it against the double backdrop of ambivalent contemporary attitudes towards the therapeutic practice of mesmerism and the unprecedented social and cultural prestige of the medical practitioner. As Aliu shows in some detail, the mesmeric doctor/patient relationship at the heart of the story allows Braddon to problematise issues of class, gender and professional status in a way that is quite subversive for its time. On Aliu's reading, the eponymous doctor becomes a focus of Braddon's skepticism about the culturally dominant ideal of the 'morally excellent man of science' which Darwinian ethics had helped to construct.

Silas Hocking has been dismissed as a hack writer who churned out money-making pot-boilers that, according to the *Daily Mail*, demonstrated 'no art, no imagination, no sense of proportion… no appreciation of the value of words, no skill in character drawing, no anything in fact'.[18] Christopher Pittard takes the contrary view, arguing that Hocking was, in fact, painstakingly attendant to language. Focusing on *Her Benny* (1878), Pittard contends that Hocking's resistance to metaphor and his use of plain language, which met with such an adverse response, was in fact a means of mediating between the craft of the novelist and a strand of Methodism which sees fiction as suspiciously close to falsehood. Pittard demonstrates that *Her Benny* enacts a tension between ephemerality and

endurance, thus reflecting Hocking's consciousness of the literary marketplace and perceptions of his work as pulp fiction.

Through a detailed study of *The Great Tontine* (1881), Trish Ferguson argues for a critical reassessment of the work of Henry Hawley Smart, whose thirty-seven novels have been dismissed in one fell swoop in an *ODNB* entry, as 'entertainment rather than literature'.[19] While this reductive Victorian distinction between high and low culture has been challenged in recent critical studies of popular literary genres, this reassessment has not been applied to Smart, who remains a marginal note in literary history. Ferguson argues that *The Great Tontine*, which culminates in a financial competition in which the winner takes all, is at the same time a reflection on gambling in the competitive literary marketplace of the mid-nineteenth century. It was on account of his strategic reading of the literary marketplace, Ferguson suggests, that Smart renovated the hackneyed form of the sensation novel, bringing in elements of popular romance novels of the 1880s. It is on account of his innovative hybridisation of contemporary popular genres, Ferguson contends, rather than his adoption of one of the now privileged genres that have recently enjoyed currency in Victorian Studies, (such as sensation fiction, imperial gothic or 'new women' fiction), that Smart's fiction is now critically neglected.

Edith Nesbit is best known as, first, an Edwardian children's writer and, second, a late-Victorian socialist activist (she was a founder member of the Fabian society in 1884). In his essay, Matthew Ingleby explores *The Prophet's Mantle*, an intriguing novel which Nesbit published with her husband Hubert Bland under the *nom de plume* Fabian Bland in 1885 and which takes on a theme that posterity almost exclusively associates with the name of Joseph Conrad: anarchist London. Ingleby centres his case for renewed attention to *The Prophet's Mantle* on its strikingly non-alarmist approach to the politics of London-based exile anarchists like Peter Kropotkin (whom Nesbit knew and who inspired the novel). Nesbit and Bland's use of the *Doppelgänger* motif is read as a vehicle for their ecumenical, foot-in-both-camps negotiation with a revolutionary movement towards which they, as political gradualists, felt more than a little ambivalent. The performativity and even theatricality of political activism forms a key element of Ingleby's analysis of the *Doppelgänger* figure. Along the way, Ingleby also draws strong lines of contour between *The Prophet's Mantle* and other—more canonical—texts treating of double identity: Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* and Robert Louis Stevenson's

Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde (published in 1886, the year after *The Prophet's Mantle*).

The name of Richard Marsh is all but synonymous these days with his bestselling 1897 gothic novel, *The Beetle*. Building upon recent breakthroughs in research into Marsh's life, in particular the uncovering of his eighteen-month imprisonment for fraud in Maidstone Jail in 1884, Ailise Bulfin reads lesser-known works such as *The Devil's Diamond* (1893), *The Goddess* (1900) and *The Joss* (1901), under the sign not of gothic but of realism. In doing so, Bulfin argues that the 'the incongruous moments of realism which jar with their gothic modality' encode autobiographical themes that were all too close to home for an author who had changed his name in the mid-1880s from Bernard Heldmann to Richard Marsh and launched himself as a writer of popular fiction for adults. Themes of fraud and debt, as well as what Bulfin calls 'the threat of social precariousness and downward mobility' thus become intelligible in a new way to today's reader visiting these texts in the light of recent revelations.

In a study of the railway murder mystery, *The Rome Express* (1896), Paul Raphael Rooney argues that Arthur Griffiths's specialist knowledge of the French police force and procedural matters in the field of criminology and detection lend a currency and authenticity to *The Rome Express* that could not be rivalled by contemporary crime writers. Furthermore, through an in-depth account of the publishing history of *The Rome Express*, Rooney examines why Griffiths's novel prompted its publisher, John Milne, to launch 'The Express Series', focusing on the volumes' materiality and the marketing of the volumes, which, it is suggested, indicate a particular attempt to court the new readers of the rising late-Victorian middle class. Rooney argues that *The Rome Express*, along with 'The Express Series', which the novel's popularity engendered, can be regarded as emblematic of a particular moment in the late-Victorian popular fiction marketplace, as new reader demographics emerged and fiction attuned to their tastes came to the fore in the contemporary literary scene.

* * *

Victorian Fiction Beyond the Canon has its origins in a conference titled 'Lesser Victorians', which the editors organised at Trinity College, Dublin in September 2013. The aim of this conference was to seek out lost treasures buried in the vast repositories of Victorian fiction. For the present volume, the centre of focus shifted away somewhat from this endeavour to a more radical effort to examine the process of canonisation itself from the nineteenth century to the present day. As such, the essays in this vol-

ume propose a radical re-visioning of our approach to Victorian literature with a number of test cases. Recent efforts to re-evaluate the canon, and recover and champion the work of neglected writers of Victorian fiction have, for understandable reasons, tended to privilege particular subgenres, such as sensation fiction, gothic fiction and detective fiction. While these subgenres have been the focus of intense and fruitful critical interest in recent years, others have remained relatively neglected. One often gets the impression that scholarly attention is driven not so much by the rich peculiarities of the Victorian era as by the resonance of that era's productions with certain cultural and ideological priorities of the present day. Had *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* been the Surtees-like sporting novel it was originally meant to be, for instance, literary history would surely be quite different, and this subgenre of fiction may well have enjoyed more notice in current critical studies of the Victorian novel. As it stands, Whyte-Melville and Henry Hawley Smart, although extremely popular writers in their day, are now unknown—and Robert Surtees all but unread. They do not 'speak' to us. Our wish with this volume is to deepen the legacy of pioneering scholars like Amy Cruse, F. Alan Walbank, Margaret Maison, Louis James, Alison Adburgham and, perhaps most especially, Richard D. Altick, all of whom did so much in the twentieth century to throw light on neglected works within Victorian fiction.[20] For all the invaluable work that more recent years have witnessed, from researchers quietly seeking out the more obscure byways of Victorian fiction, Victorian Studies as a whole remains a surprisingly conservative field.[21] This is due in part to the expediencies of curriculum setting and in part to the exigencies of academic publishing and the need for citation-indexed 'impact'. Too often, selection of primary texts proceeds in self-confirming, 'keyword'-driven fashion, the scholar's already established research interests filtering out non-congruent texts and non-congruent elements within texts. It is all too easy to close oneself off with a sort of studied professional incuriosity from the very possibility of unplanned or 'random' encounters with the truly surprising, anomalous, outlier text. Victorianist selection bias in favour of texts, and text-elements, *with which one can do things* increases the risk of blocking the alterity of the Victorian era, of remaking it in our own image and according to our own tastes, prejudices—and professional needs. Thus do neglected Victorian texts fall victim all over again to market logic. *Victorian Fiction Beyond the Canon* offers itself as one further corrective to this unhappy tendency.

Despite the at times heroic efforts of publishers such as Virago, Broadview, Valancourt and Victorian Secrets to champion neglected Victorian works, the unspoken assumption of too much publishing and curriculum setting remains that posterity is an equitable court of justice. *Victorian Fiction Beyond the Canon* adopts a more pluralistic approach to literature that seeks to offer a judicious interrogation of canonicity and the purported wisdom of posterity. The essays in this volume negotiate their way between risk-averse conservatism and facile revisionism; scope of reading and depth of reading; individual text and wider context; attention to the Victorian literary marketplace and awareness of its vicissitudes. In accounting for often surprising trends in the production and reception of fictional texts across the Victorian era and in re-evaluating the received meta-narratives of Victorian literary history, our contributors drop the dangerous assumption that posterity is fair—without replacing it with the equally dangerous assumption that it is unfair.

Given the vast scale of reading material available from the Victorian era, it is impossible in an edited volume to do more than offer a sample of critical essays on neglected writers and works. A cursory survey of the chapter titles will immediately reveal the absence of numerous novelists who could have been included in the study, such as (to name a mere few) Harrison Ainsworth, Rhoda Broughton, James Payn, Mrs Henry Wood, R. M. Ballantyne, R. D. Blackmore, Mrs Humphry Ward or Charlotte Yonge. In a spirit of humility and excitement, we offer scholarship on a case-by-case basis, whose ultimate goal in promoting noteworthy texts is to see them *re-socialised* so that more and more members of the broader reading public might actually be minded to engage with them. It is, we hope, the beginning of a new relationship with old texts.

Notes

1. Sir John Lubbock, ‘The Choice of Books’, *Pall Mall Gazette* (15 February, 1886), p. 1.
2. ‘The Best Hundred Books by the Best Hundred Judges’, *Pall Mall Gazette* (19 January, 1886), p. 2.
3. James Pykroft, *A Course of English Reading, Adapted to Every Taste and Capacity: With Anecdotes of Men of Genius* (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1845).
4. Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, edited by Jane Garnett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Walter Pater, *Studies in the History of the*

Renaissance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 3. Pater here playing on Arnold's injunction in 'The Function of Criticism' to 'see the object as in itself it really is'.

5. Franco Moretti, 'The Slaughterhouse of Literature', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 61.1, (2000), pp. 207–227, 207; John Sutherland, *The Stanford Companion to Victorian Fiction*, 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. xi.
6. For lists of the most popular books stocked by public libraries toward the end of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century, see Simon Eliot, *A Measure of Popularity: Public Library Holdings of Twenty-Four Popular Authors 1883–1912.* History of the Book – On Demand Series (HOBODS) (Oxford and Brixton, 1992).
7. Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 128.
8. Walter Montague Gattie, 'What English People Read', *Fortnightly Review*, 46.273 (September, 1889), pp. 307–321.
9. Letter from Charles Dickens to Charles Lever (15 October, 1860), *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, 3 vols. edited by Walter Dexter (London: Nonesuch Press, 1938), vol. 3, p. 187.
10. Thomas Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy*, edited by Michael Millgate (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 64.
11. Aaron Jaffe, 'Orlando Pimpernel', in Aaron Jaffe and Jonathon E. Goldman (eds.) *Modernist Star Maps: Celebrity, Modernity, Culture* (Farnham: Ashgate, 1988), pp. 37–54, p. 51.
12. George Gissing, *New Grub Street* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1891), vol. 1, p. 17.
13. 'Sir Walter Besant on The Rewards of Literature by a Few who have Gained them', *New Century Review*, 34 (October, 1899), pp. 251–260.
14. Robert A. Colby, 'Harnessing Pegasus: Walter Besant, 'The Author' and the Profession of Authorship', *Victorian Periodicals Review* 23.3 (1990), pp. 111–120, p. 115.
15. Louis James, 'Miller, Thomas (1807–1874)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
16. Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (London: Virago, 1988), p. 105.
17. Ian Duncan, 'Wild England: George Borrow's Nomadology', *Victorian Studies*, 41.3 Victorian Ethnographies (1998), pp. 381–403, p. 382.
18. 'Silas the Seller', *Daily Mail* (20 January, 1908), cited by Hocking in *My Book of Memory* (London: Cassell and Co., 1923), p. 224.
19. Thomas Seccombe, 'Smart, Henry Hawley (1833–1893)', rev. James Lunt, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

20. See Amy Cruse, *The Victorians and their Books* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1935); F. Alan Walbank, *Queens of the Circulating Library: Selections from Victorian Lady Novelists, 1850–1900* (London: Evans Bros., 1950); Margaret M. Maison, *Search Our Soul, Eustace: A Survey of the Religious Novel in the Victorian Age* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1961); Louis James, *Fiction for the Working Man, 1830–1850: a Study of the Literature Produced for the Working Classes in Early Victorian Urban England* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1963); Alison Adburgham, *Silver Fork Society: Fashionable Life and Literature from 1814 to 1840* (London: Constable, 1983); Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800–1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957).
21. One thinks for instance of the remarkably capacious explorations by John Sutherland in his *Longman/Stanford Companion to Victorian Fiction* (Harlow: Longman, 1988, [2nd ed. 2009] and Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989 [2nd ed. 2009]) or of the rich yield of essays collected in Beth Palmer and Adelene Buckland (eds.), *A Return to the Common Reader: Print Culture and the Novel, 1850–1900* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011).

CHAPTER 2

Prize Novelists and Condensed Novels: Thackeray and Bret Harte

Michael Slater

Thackeray began publishing his masterpiece *Vanity Fair* in monthly numbers in January 1847. His original sub-title for the novel had been 'Pen and Pencil Sketches of English Society' (changed to 'A Novel without a Hero' when published in volume form in 1848). The monthly number sub-title deliberately echoed the titles used by the very prolific, and hugely popular, fashionable novelist Mrs Gore (1799–1861), who had been a major best-seller since the 1820s. She was the author of, among many other works, *The Fair of Mayfair* (1832) and *The Sketch Book of Fashion* (1833) and was doyenne of the 'silver fork' novelists, so-called in allusion to the high-society settings of their stories. This genre of fiction had already been briefly parodied by Dickens in the eighth monthly number of *Nicholas Nickleby* (in the novel about 'the Lady Flabella' that Kate Nickleby has to read to her fashionable employer Mrs Wititterley). At the beginning of the sixth chapter of *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray apologises for the humdrum nature of his story and characters (a mere 'stockbroker's family in Russell-square'), and concedes that he might have treated his subject in many different, and more exciting, ways—'the supremely genteel' (Mrs Gore again), 'the facetious' (a sideswipe at Dickens) or 'the terrible'

M. Slater (✉)
Institute of English Studies, University of London, London, UK
e-mail: michael.slater6@virgin.net

© The Author(s) 2016

D. Downes, T. Ferguson (eds.), *Victorian Fiction Beyond the Canon*, Palgrave Studies in Nineteenth-Century Writing and Culture, DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-51823-1_2

(meaning the hugely popular and sensational crime novel, the so-called 'Newgate' novel, much deplored by the *bien pensant* as both immoral and corrupting).[1] Later on, at the beginning of chapter 30, Thackeray alludes comically to another hugely popular genre of fiction, the military novel, the most famous exponent of which was the Irish novelist Charles Lever (1806–1872).[2] *Vanity Fair*, with its Bunyanesque title and challenging final sub-title, 'A Novel without A Hero', was intended to present the reader with a more complex and comprehensive—and therefore truer—picture of real life than the various genres of popular fiction that it burlesques.

Thackeray was developing his critique of contemporary popular fiction on two fronts, in fact. Contemporaneously with the writing and publication of the early monthly numbers of *Vanity Fair*, he was publishing, in the new comic weekly journal *Punch*, a series of devastating parodies of a number of the most popular novelists of the day under the title 'Punch's Prize Novelists'. Among his victims were a number of those 'minor' Victorians who, as a class, are the subject of this volume. Writing to Albany Fonblanque on 21 January 1847, Thackeray says:

> I am going to do a series of novels by the most popular authors for *Punch* and Bulwer [Lytton] is actually done, the blocks designed, and the story in progress. It is George de Barnwell. He will quote Plato, speak in Big Phrases, and let out his Nunky's, etc. … Numbers of others will follow – Cooper, James, Dickens, Lever &c. but they will all be good natured – and I cant afford to give up my plan. It is my bread and butter indeed for next year.[3]

Barnwell was the anti-hero of an old play by George Lillo called *George Barnwell, or the London Merchant* (1731). A London apprentice, he is seduced by a prostitute, murders his uncle for his money and ends up, deeply penitent, on a prison gallows. The play had enjoyed immense popularity during the 18th century but was now seen as distinctly old-fashioned (Dickens has some fun with it in *Great Expectations*). Thackeray mischievously makes Barnwell the protagonist of a mini-novel parodying Bulwer Lytton's hugely popular novels *Paul Clifford* (1830) and *Eugene Aram* (1832). Bulwer depicts his heroes, respectively a highwayman and a murderer, in a sympathetic—indeed heroic—light and has them speaking in elevated language. His books belong, like Harrison Ainsworth's best-selling *Rookwood* (1831), which treats the highwayman Dick Turpin in similar fashion but without the high-flown language, to the hugely popular

genre that came to be called 'the Newgate novel',[4] the kind of novel from which Dickens was so anxious to distance his *Oliver Twist* (1837–38). Thackeray had already fiercely satirised what he considered to be this pernicious genre of literature in his preposterously over-the-top 'Newgate' novel *Catherine*, serialised in *Fraser's Magazine* 1839–40. This was based on the particularly gruesome story of a London landlady called Catherine Hayes who, with her lover, plotted the murder of her husband and the dismemberment of his body, a history recorded in all its gory detail in the Newgate Calendar (Hayes was burned alive, for 'petty treason', at Tyburn in 1726).

Thackeray had, in fact, had plenty of practice for writing his 'Prize Novelists' during the 1830s, when he was reviewing new fiction for various journals including the *Morning Chronicle*. As Gordon Ray showed in his *Thackeray: The Uses of Adversity* (1955), he had already written in these journals lengthy, often very entertaining, critiques of the popular novelists he was to parody in *Punch*, such as Mrs Gore, whom he calls 'this parent of a thousand volumes',[5] and Disraeli, the 'superb coxcombry' of whose *Coningsby* (1844) he ironically praises as 'splendid, gold-laced, refulgent'.[6] He has particular fun with Disraeli's concept of 'Mosaic Arabs' (i.e., Jews) to which race, as Disraeli's super-hero Sidonia instructs the young English aristocrat Coningsby, all the greatest men in history have belonged. 'Sidonia', Thackeray slyly comments, 'is, if we mistake not, no other than our author Mr Benjamin Disraeli himself'.[7] *Coningsby* was, in fact, the first of a trilogy of novels written to advance the cause of Disraeli's 'Young England' party, a pro-aristocratic splinter group of Tories opposed to the policies of Sir Robert Peel. Thackeray very much disliked the vogue for what was called 'novels with a purpose', whether the cause to advance which the novel was written was political, religious or social in nature. In 1845, reviewing a novel by Lever attacking absentee Irish landlords, Thackeray wrote:

> If we want instruction, we prefer to take it from fact rather than from fiction. We like to hear sermons from his reverence at church; to get our notions of trade, crime, politics, and other national statistics, from the proper papers and figures; but when, out of the gilt pages of a pretty picture book, a comic moralist rushes forward, and takes occasion to tell us that society is diseased, the laws unjust, the rich ruthless, the poor martyrs, the world lop-sided, and *vice versa*, persons who wish to lead an easy life are inclined to remonstrate against this literary ambuscadoe.[8]