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Readership and Non-Canonical Victorian Popular Fiction 1860-1900: Materiality, Textuality, and Narrative.

PhD Thesis

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December 2013
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Abstract

Scholars of print media are increasingly realising significant headway in the recovery of the history of reading. The study of Victorian fiction has also expanded beyond a core body of canonical texts to encompass a more diverse range of novels. This dissertation looks to map the circulation of the popular novel in the mid and late Victorian periods in order to illuminate the practices and experiences of the common reader during the 1860s and the 1880s/1890s. In addition, the material that will inform this discussion is drawn not from the critical mainstream but instead seeks to cast a fresh light on specific works of lesser-known nineteenth-century fiction. The aim is both to redefine understudied writers like Fergus Hume and Anna Katharine Green and reorient attention toward minor novelists like Arthur Griffiths and Charles Warren Adams. The methodological foundation of this study draws on bibliography, theories of textuality and coding, and analysis of evidence of readers’ responses.

To this end, the ways in which periodical coding and visual/verbal co-texts conditioned consumption of serial fiction in the nineteenth-century press will be considered in the context of four specific publications. The reading practices elicited by the circulating library three-decker and its one-volume illustrated reprint along with the dynamics of situational reading by railway travellers will also be examined. The study will then theorise audience engagement with these narratives by endeavouring to reconstruct reader horizons while using ideas of textuality to ascertain the sort of gratification readers would have derived from the appropriative text. The aesthetic, intertextual, and generic links that emerged from the circulation of a novel as part of a publisher’s series gave rise to a different sort of reading experience that will be recreated by exploring a collection’s branding, materiality, and configuration. Contemporary transpositions of the popular novel to the stage in turn precipitated an oscillatory class of engagement with narrative. This project concludes by looking to chart how the repetition tempered by variation that characterises adaptation would have resonated with audiences.
Acknowledgements

The work of bringing this project to completion has left me indebted to a great many people. First and foremost, I need to express my immense gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Elizabeth Tilley, for her generosity, affability, and unfailing encouragement and support.

I must also thank the Easter Week Scholarship Scheme run by the Department of Education and Skills who provided me with funding for my four years of doctoral study. Travel bursaries from the College of Arts, Social Sciences, and Celtic Studies here at NUI, Galway assisted with conference attendance and research trips across the course of my PhD. This financial support proved tremendously helpful. In addition, a write up bursary from the university’s Graduate Studies Office aided greatly in the final months of my research.

The assistance of the staff of the university’s James Hardiman Library was invaluable over the course of this project. In particular, I must thank the people from the Inter-Library Loans department who succeeded in procuring for me a wide array of references, many of which were on the obscure side. A material cultures-based project of this sort is heavily reliant on archival material. The team at the James Hardiman’s Special Collections Room offered valuable input. This research also necessitated a number of visits to the British Library at St. Pancras; the staff at the Rare Books, Humanities, and Manuscripts rooms offered a wealth of insight and guidance. I also had cause to visit the British Library’s Newspaper Archive at Colindale on a number of occasions where the team were equally obliging and informative.

The English Department at NUI, Galway was a wonderful place to spend four years of doctoral research. I have to thank the Head of Discipline, Professor Sean Ryder for his support and for allowing me the opportunity to teach during my time here. Also, Dr Muireann O’Cinneide, Dr Adrian Paterson, and Dr Richard Pearson were all very generous. The support of my peers was invaluable during the past four years. Much of this research was aired in its formative states at the English Department PhD Student Group and I am very
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Fred Stutzman afforded me the Freedom to write. Eagle-eyed proofreaders, Meaghan, Rosemary, Kathleen, Rebecca, and Anna generously helped me polish the dissertation in its final stages.

Family and friends were instrumental in maintaining momentum over the course of my PhD. Thank you to Mark and Paul for ensuring that research did not cause me to become a complete recluse and making certain I remained connected with life outside of the university. Last but certainly not least, my doctoral studies would have been impossible without the assistance and encouragement of my parents. I dedicate this project to them.
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Part 1. Historical Readers, Coding, and Notable Reading Sites
The spread of a light reading habit in the Victorian period was contingent on access to printed matter together with the time and capacity to consume said products. To endeavour to chart the parameters of the popular fiction market in the nineteenth century is to grapple with questions to which history cannot always provide definitive answers. The Victorian middle and lower middle class encompassed a very broad and catholic spread of constituencies. Nevertheless, there are specific clusters that represented notable consumers of this particular variety of print. These demographics included the expanding ranks of the black-coated amongst the lower middle class, white collar workers in newer sectors like insurance and accountancy, together with the growing numbers of reasonably well-remunerated female workers like telegraph clerks and teachers. Sally Mitchell notes that where census returns classified 357,000 people as middle class in 1851, there were 647,000 in the same category thirty years later and that is not including the numbers of the lower middle class, which grew even more dramatically (“Reading Class” 329). The increase in real incomes from the 1860s to the 1890s meant there were a greater number of people in possession of the necessary disposable income to purchase print products (Eliot “From Few and Expensive to Many and Cheap” 292).

The range of material from which readers could select their light reading expanded as publisher output grew. Quantitative studies by pioneering book historians like Simon Eliot and later Alexis Weedon attest to increased book production. Eliot’s figures derived from the Publishers’ Circular indicate that the quantity of books that were published annually, on the whole, grew across the nineteenth century (“Some Trends in British Book Production” 28). Eliot also pinpoints steadily increasing amounts of prose fiction; it progressively became the most sizeable category of book published (“Some Trends in British Book Production” 37-38). Weedon’s assessment, which is grounded in figures accumulated from the Nineteenth-Century Short Title Catalogue, also attests to an upward curve. The rise of commercial circulating libraries, the proliferation
of inexpensively priced reprints, along with the eventual reduction in the price of new fiction in the final decades of the century meant books were within reach of a far greater number of people. In addition, the 1860s onwards was the post-abolition of taxes on knowledge era, which facilitated the advent of reasonably priced respectable periodicals with appeal to those outside a select learned serious-minded market. The temporal cycles to which industrial capitalism gave rise also delimited a space for reading in the lives of nineteenth-century people. Changing residential patterns meant growing numbers of workers commuted aboard public transport, which demarcated a period amenable to the consumption of print products. New working routines also encoded leisure time in the weekly timetable and the annual calendar that could be allocated to reading.

1. Literature Review

Robert Darnton famously observed in the opening of his now classic essay that “reading has a history. But how can we recover it?” (“First Steps Toward a History of Reading” 155). His paper articulated a number of the core principles that continue to ground scholarly efforts to illuminate the reading experiences of audiences of the past. Darnton makes the distinction between a comparatively more accessible external history, which charts the texts read by specific individuals in particular locations and time periods, and a more camouflaged internal history of individuals’ reasons for reading and the processes by which they read (157). Darnton stresses the insight one can garner into a particular experience of reading if one situates the reader in the space where s/he would have engaged with text. It is my contention that any study of a particular act of reading risks remaining at an abstract level unless one factors in the influence of these conditions. To this end, the “where” and the “when” of the reading experiences that I consider will be crucial questions. My study will also take a number of cues from Darnton’s five-pronged solution to shedding light on the “why” and the “how” of reading. Nineteenth-century representations of reading across a number of media will be examined. The evidence available in readers’ recorded accounts of their reading will be probed. The principle that the
reader is an active agent in the construction of the meaning of a text together with the theory that this act of interpretation is influenced by the materiality of the text will serve as a joint buttress for my analysis.

The avenues that Darnton proposes we follow in charting the history of reading suggest a surfeit of possibility but as Eliot has observed “the evidence for reading is obscure, hidden, scattered and fragmentary. Its discovery is often a matter of serendipity” (“The RED; or, what are we to do about the history of reading”). Limitations also exist to what we can infer from the evidence we possess. Eliot advances three caveats with regards to this process of interpretation. Two are of particular importance to what I am setting out to explore. It is his contention that “to own, buy, borrow or steal a book is no proof of wishing to read it, let alone proof of having read it” and “any reading recorded in an historically recoverable way is, almost by definition, an exceptional recording of an uncharacteristic event by an untypical person” (“The RED; or, what are we to do about the history of reading”). The latter will temper any conclusions that I infer from nineteenth-century readers’ narratives detailing their reading.

Visual representations of individuals engaged in the act of reading are a potentially revelatory window into the practices of historical readers that I intend to pursue. Alberto Manguel opens his A History of Reading, which without question is one of the more distinctive entries in the field, with a parade of pictorial depictions of readers. Part autobiography, part reflective treatise, and part chronological survey of readers from antiquity to the present, this study affords the historian of reading ample food for thought. Manguel’s observation that reading is, as he terms it, “cumulative” (19) is a principle that should be afforded significant weight in the study of reader engagement with the popular text. In addition, his reflections on readers’ awareness of the likelihood that their environment will to a certain extent evaluate them according to the print object they are seen to possess (214) is a factor that also needs to be incorporated into the study of readers’ choices.

Every research field has its noteworthy forerunners and Amy Cruse’s The Victorians and their Books is a characteristic example. A visionary study that in some respects was ahead of its time in its use of real readers’ testimonies and examination of important institutions of reading, its lackadaisical citation means that it today
reads like a map of an era’s readerships that is frustratingly light on coordinates. Nevertheless, one does glean a very evocative sense of the spirit of the period from Cruse’s panorama-style survey that begins at the start of Victoria’s reign and ends in the year of Jubilee. The framing device of the imaginary upper middle class family of Edward and Caroline whose diets of reading Cruse seeks to plot affords an intriguing window into key middle class sites like the drawing room table and the bookcase that housed print objects. My study sets out to unpack the reading habits and tastes of the bourgeois constituency that Cruse maps sketchily via the lens of Matthew Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy* Philistines classification. Arnold defined this group as “that great body which, as we know, ‘has done all the great things that have been done in all departments,’ and which is to be conceived as chiefly moving between its two cardinal points of Mr. Bazley [“the happy mean of the middle class” (80) according to Arnold] and the Rev. W. Cattle, [who typifies “the excess of the middle class” (81) in Arnold’s view] but inclining, in the mass, rather towards the latter than the former. “ (97)

Margaret Dalziel’s *Popular Fiction 100 Years Ago* was another noteworthy early entry in this field. Training her attention on the strata of printed matter targeted primarily at audiences several rungs down the socio-economic scale from the Philistines, Dalziel’s interest is in the years of the Victorian era directly preceding the period when my study commences. A well-realised portrait of the primary sectors of the inexpensive fiction landscape of the 1840s and 1850s, such as serial fiction circulating in lurid and purified periodicals, the part-issue novel, and cheap volume fiction, emerges from this study. She also traces the principal formulaic character types, conventions, and concerns prevalent in cheap fiction circulating during these years. Thought-provoking if not entirely unproblematic observations do temper the largely informational bent of Dalziel’s survey. For instance, her discussion of the early years of railway fiction highlights the classist distinction that could underlie the varying degrees of tolerance of consumption of inexpensively priced recreational reading by affluent and less affluent constituencies (83).

Any attempt to procure an insight into the reading practices of the Victorians owes a considerable debt to Richard D. Altick’s seminal *The English Common Reader*, which charts the development of the mass reading public in nineteenth-century
England. Altick observes “the three great requisites of a mass reading public—literacy, leisure, and a little pocket money—became the possession of more and more people [during the 1860 to 1890 period]” (306). My study will concentrate on these decades. While Altick does employ a number of individual reading histories to great illustrative effect, he stresses that many of those common readers who left behind records of their cultural activities were atypical in that they would later ascend to stations far above their humble beginnings (244-5). The acquisition of a similarly intimate familiarity with the reading histories of “the million” represents a challenge not easily surmounted owing to the fact that such experiences went largely undocumented. Altick examines the significance of several key nineteenth-century scenes of reading like the Mechanics Institutes, the public libraries, and the railways. My research is particularly interested in readers and railway reading matter and I intend to look at a number of examples of material intended for this sphere that managed to transcend its original classification. Altick pinpoints a definite tension between the common reader’s need/desire for amusement, which s/he sought to satisfy with light reading matter, and the aspiration that a wider distribution of literacy and enhanced access to print would lead to the development of an enlightened and serious-minded reading public (369-70). My particular concern is with this Victorian light reading but I also want to consider a specific late Victorian publisher’s series which endeavoured to meet this appetite for genre fare while also offering readers a smattering of classic (and out of copyright) texts. Altick offered a thought-provoking context-based discussion of materiality at a point when the field of book history had yet to be even demarcated; later studies of print objects would offer a more theoretical meditation on its relationship to the reading process.

The linguistic content of a reader’s encounter with print represents merely one determinant of the experience. Jerome McGann’s inquiry into the nature of textuality emphasises the need to “turn our attention to much more than formal or linguistic features [...] we must attend to textual materials [like] typefaces, bindings, book prices, page format, and all those textual phenomena usually regarded as (at best) peripheral” (The Textual Condition 13). McGann regards the text as “a laced network of linguistic and bibliographical codes” (15) where “every literary work that descends to us operates through the deployment of a double helix of [these]
perceptual codes” (77). McGann calls attention to two particularly notable manifestations of the signifying power of the bibliographical in the realm of the nineteenth-century novel. He stresses that one cannot overlook the illustrations that commonly accompanied fiction in this period as such texts are “works of composite art” (80). He also observes that nineteenth-century books are “coded for meaning [according to particular] circulatory conventions” (81) such as seriality. To this end, my study of reading will pay particular attention to the ways in which nineteenth-century readers’ engagement with fiction were also shaped by these two strains of bibliographical coding. Gérard Genette’s idea of the paratext or threshold, which he explains offers “the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back,” (Paratexts 2) also represents a critical area of enquiry when theorizing readers’ encounters with print. The reception of inexpensively priced popular fiction is framed in a singular way by the capacity for signification of those components that constitute the outermost realm of the publisher’s peritext (namely cover illustrations and title pages). Accordingly, I also wish to examine how these elements condition readers’ experiences of specific authors’ works.

The leading voices of the broad church that is reception theory have proposed a number of important ways of thinking about readers and reading. Wolfgang Iser argues that “central to the reading of every literary work is the interaction between its structure and its recipient” (“Interaction between Text and Reader” 391). Iser’s delineation of this recipient is situated in the concept of the implied reader wherein “the potential meaning [is prestructured] by the text, and the reader [actualizes] this potential through the reading process” (The Implied Reader xii). He then conceives of the operation of this same process via the idea of the wandering viewpoint (The Act of Reading 112). While Iser’s ideas do offer a somewhat compelling way of thinking about the reader, a certain abstraction and indeed narrowness pervades the construction that one derives from this theory. Iser’s account of the reading process includes solely the response inviting structures that exist at the level of the linguistic. Is a reader compelled to arrive exclusively at the prestructured meaning irrespective of his/her history and identity?

Stanley Fish advances a more nuanced theorization of the process by which meaning is constructed. He argues that the pre-existing specific strategies that an
individual reader employs when s/he engages with a text are shaped by that reader’s affiliation with a distinct interpretive community. His/her membership predisposes him/her to read a certain way and arrive at a discrete class of meaning (13-14).

Aside from his concluding remarks, which are organized around the principle that “the only ‘proof’ of membership is fellowship” (173), Fish’s theory cannot be said to elucidate the internal collective dynamics of the interpretive community. No reader reads in a vacuum. What form does one’s engagement with one’s peers take? While Fish’s theory offers a compelling interpretation of the operation of readers’ predilections, his theory does not illuminate to any great extent how readers have arrived at a predisposition to interpret in particular ways. If one is of an intertextual persuasion, one is inclined to believe that a reader’s reading history will shape his/her approach to a new text.

Hans R. Jauss’s concept of the horizon of expectations ostensibly offers a very strong template for reconstructing both the pre-reading mindset and the mental processes that structure the action of reading. Jauss posits that one can analyse the literary experience of the reader [if one examines] the reception and influence of a work within the objectifiable system of expectations that arises for each work in the historical moment of its appearance, from a pre-understanding of the genre, from the form and themes of already familiar works, and from the opposition between poetic and practical language (22).

The Literary (with a capital L) orientation of Jauss’s theory is evident in the sorts of conclusions he suggests extrapolating from a comparison between an individual text and the recreated horizons. A text’s artistic quality is directly proportionate to the degree of aesthetic distance it demands the reader traverse between his/her horizon and the tenor of what s/he encounters within the pages of the work. Although value judgements of this sort are routinely employed in the argument against the critical study of popular literature, I intend to demonstrate that the principles of Jauss’s methodology also have the potential to facilitate the study of reader engagement with light fiction. The efforts of Iser, Fish, and Jauss to theorize reading were for the most part ahistorical; others have pursued a more contextually specific approach.

Patrick Brantlinger charts the critical debates generated by the expansion in the numbers of people in nineteenth-century England who were proficient readers with comparatively ready access to fiction. He maps the uneasiness called forth by
this relative democratisation of print where “novels and novel-reading were viewed, especially by novelists themselves, as both causes and symptoms of the rotting of minds and the decay of culture and society” (The Reading Lesson 24). This malaise manifested in efforts to codify appropriate reading for historically subjugated groups and in periodic mediations on the perceived adverse effects of new sorts of reading matter, like sensation fiction, viewed in certain quarters as potentially noxious. Brantlinger maintains that the rapidity which came to characterise many readers’ practice in the closing decades of the century, which was fostered by an upsurge in the number of novels published annually, led to a perceived diminution in the value of reading and the cultural standing of the novel (22-23). Brantlinger emphasises in his introduction that one will only ascertain a sense of actual readers’ experience when one pursues jointly the sociology of the common reader and rhetorical analysis of authors’ readerly conscription (16). Yet his own study is heavily author-centric and illuminates to a far greater degree how reading was theorised (by individuals other than the common reader) rather than the actual practices of said readers.

By contrast, Mary Hammond’s socio-historical study, rooted in Bourdieu’s theories of cultural taste, succeeds in advancing our understanding of late nineteenth-century reading to a far greater degree. Hammond trains her attention in particular on the new generations of readers of the 1880s and 90s who were possessed of fresh opportunities for reading. A much wider choice of fiction came on stream (4) and new spaces for engaging with culture opened up (9). Hammond warns against rigid facile categorisations of particular schools of readers observing that “a given reader might read across genres and mediums and often against the marketing grain” (12). Implied readers only constituted a certain proportion of a text’s readership. One’s reading choices are only partly a product of personal preferences or aspirations; Hammond’s study demonstrates very convincingly the considerable sway held in this era by external gatekeepers like railway bookstall proprietors. Her core thesis stresses that an individual’s encounters with print cannot be defined in homogenous static terms as a single reader might embody a variety of incarnations across a number of different spaces as his/her needs, raisons d’êtres, and concentration capabilities shifted according to the situation (72). It was entirely possible to self-consciously consume light reading material in full knowledge
of its superficiality, if it were deemed to befit the needs of a particular situation (78-80). The concept of reading spaces underpins Hammond’s study as she demonstrates the extent to which a nineteenth-century reader’s purchasing, borrowing, and reading choices in particular contexts like the railways and the public library constituted a socio-cultural signifier and a site of self-fashioning (12-13). I would like to consider the circulation and reception of a number of specific examples of railway reading. Hammond rightly stresses that a history of reading must explore these social spaces where individuals acquired and consumed their reading material (17). In addition, she correctly emphasises that there are limitations to what research into this history can yield; her study notes “we can never know everything about what a given reader read, where and why s/he bought it, what s/he thought s/he was getting, what s/he thought of the book once it had been read (or even whether it was read)” (22).

The mushrooming quantities of printed matter, swelling reader numbers, and the increasing levels of time spent on reading by these readers, represented a source of anxiety for many nineteenth-century cultural commentators. Kelly J. Mays offers a comprehensive and thoughtful review of the reflections on and problematization of these changes as advanced by observers writing for the periodical press. The theorisations of reading and reader behaviour presented in the periodical press can reveal a great deal about audience encounters with print commodities. Mays examines the consensus amongst a body of writers that unwholesome, gluttonous, and superficial reading practices had taken root amongst the expanded reading nation, which had come to encompass previously marginalized and print-deprived groups. These proto-literary critics now sought to refine the image of the proficient reader who they contended should be defined by his dissimilarity to the omnivorous mechanistic common reader. Efforts were also put in train to situate the practice of skilled reading or “study” on a formal institutional footing. The scenario that Mays delineates to such great effect in essence typifies the conventional Marxist pattern of a cultural elite responding to change by redefining standards and esteem indicators in order to safeguard its own position.

Jennifer Phegley concentrates her attention on one such school of nineteenth-century reader whose engagement with print was habitually painted in an especially
poor light. Cultural commentators would commonly figure the reading practices of the nineteenth-century woman reader of England and America as flawed and in critical need of modification. Phegley’s study sets out to illuminate the existence of a counter strain of ideology in opposition to “the mid-nineteenth-century critical anxiety about women readers”, which had positioned them as especially susceptible to the “unprecedented abundance of literary material” (1). Phegley argues that the class of publication that she terms “the family literary magazine” would “defend women from the highly publicized accusation that they were uncritical readers whose reading practices threatened the sanctity of the family and the cultural reputation of the nation” by “empower[ing them] to make their own decisions about what and how to read” (2). This freshly honed sense of perception qualified the woman reader to ascend to her assigned position as the cultural and moral beacon of the middle class home. In essence, Phegley is concerned with the models of implied reader constructed within the pages of the shilling monthly. This species of reader makes for a comparatively more recoverable entity for the historian of reading and it must be acknowledged that Phegley realises a relatively well-rounded portrait of the distinct models of readerly identity fostered by the four publications with which she concerns herself. However, the “actual” reader remains almost entirely off stage in the profile of shilling monthly audiences that Phegley fashions. In addition, her study is in essence founded on the unsteady principle that the nineteenth century reader read the sort of material targeted at his/her demographic whereas other scholars have demonstrated the reality to have been far less straightforward.

Kate Flint’s wide-ranging and meticulously researched study of the female reader of the nineteenth-century demonstrates that the traces that remain of women’s actual reading activity call into question many of the generalisations and prescriptions circulated in that period (The Woman Reader 187). In addition, Flint draws on primary sources to highlight that there was no guarantee that women’s reading, especially that of the younger or the less well off woman reader, remained within the realm of print that was gendered female (155). Although the title of her study employs the singular form, Flint emphasises the erroneousness of generalisations grounded in an abstract and homogenised construction of a
monolithic woman reader. She stresses that there is no fixity or heterogeneity to the term as “each [individual] is constituted by a complicated set of material, ideological, and psychoanalytic forces” (42). Flint’s sampling of an eclectic selection of nineteenth-century women’s autobiographies in order to procure an insight into authentic readers’ experiences makes for one of her study’s finest and most illuminating chapters. One’s family as potent influence on the shaping of one’s reading identity emerges as a predominant motif across these memoirs. Flint rightly registers a caveat with regard to the evidence one extracts from these reading histories noting that their rationale commonly lay more in “the construction of an autobiographical self” than in the provision of “quasi-objective accounts of reading practice” (15). The ideology underlying the composition of the memoir needs to be interrogated before one moves to appraise the testimony provided (190). Flint also looks to contemporary advice manuals aimed at the middle class young woman, which endeavoured to codify reading practice. Her study correctly diagnoses that there was almost certainly a gulf between actual readers’ practice and the guidelines stipulated in such works (116). I would echo Flint’s assessment that the utility of these sources to efforts in constructing a history of reading lies in the insight they afford into the circulation of ideology. The opportunities for the historian of reading in similarly mediated/constructed sources such as visual and fictionalised depictions of readers also emerge especially strikingly from Flint. Moreover, her study exemplifies the window one can secure into the practices of historical readers if one turns to the textual traces they left behind.

Janice Radway’s ethnographic investigation of the romance reading habits of a group of late twentieth-century American women represented one of the earliest attempts to investigate reading empirically. This study offers a deeply compelling case for extending one’s attention beyond the implied reader and considering the experiences of actual readers. However, if one is researching readerships that are long since departed, it is fundamentally impossible to replicate the strategies Radway pursues and interview the actual readers. Yet this is not to say that Radway’s work cannot inform the research of those of us who are dependent on the text’s network of linguistic and bibliographical codes and the surviving documented narratives of readers’ practice. If charting the history of reading from a literary studies
perspective, one must also factor into one’s commentary that the act of reading is commonly implicated in so much more than the mere mental process of engagement with print. The evidence Radway gathers about the Smihtton women suggests the activity is just as closely implicated in a reader’s relationship with his/her environment. Furthermore, it becomes especially apparent in Radway’s discussion of the Smihtton women that even if a reader reads as a solitary pursuit, s/he is not reading in a vacuum as his/her choice of material and interpretive strategies are shaped by those with whom s/he shares a communal bond.

Stephen Colclough succeeds in bringing to life a number of specific historical reading communities in his study of readership in England during the 1695 to 1870 period. Ten readers from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are front and centre in Consuming Texts. The study’s first four chapters make judicious use of an impressive range of sources like reading diaries, marginalia, and commonplace books to shed comprehensive light on the practices of these distinctive individuals from the pre-Victorian period. The discussion of how late eighteenth-century circulating libraries facilitated sociable reading practices represents an especially thought-provoking riposte to the hegemonic image of the solitary reader. However, as Colclough himself acknowledges, the potential for and indeed the yield to be procured from engaging in this style of study diminishes as one’s focus moves to the middle decades of the nineteenth century (27). Moreover, the merits of pursuing marginalia when researching the consumption of the absorbing plot-driven narratives that predominate in Victorian crime fiction are open to question, as arguably it is the especially singular breed of reader who will pause his/her engagement to annotate the text. Colclough’s (disappointingly brief) final section in his last chapter, where he realises a very evocative portrait of the texts in the advertising hoardings that confronted browsers and consumers at the mid-nineteenth-century railway bookstall is most relevant to my research. I intend to investigate further the factors that shaped readers’ selections of texts at these sites.

Unearthing the traces left behind by real readers potentially yields revelatory results and Jonathan Rose accomplishes something remarkable in his paradigm shifting socio-historical study of the reading habits of the modern British working classes. In a rigorous investigation of the cultural lives of common readers, which is
underpinned by a definite left-wing ideological foundation, Rose’s *The Intellectual Lives of the British Working Classes* demonstrates the progress one can achieve in illuminating the practices of historical readers if one seeks out what remains of actual readers’ reading experiences. He posits that memoirs, where they can be shown to be historically accurate, make for a potentially fertile source of information on the history of reading. Historians of nineteenth-century reading commonly regard 1870 as a key date in the road to mass literacy in Britain but many of the individual histories that Rose exposes serve as a prescient reminder that the advances in reading made by working class autodidacts must not be overlooked. Rose’s highlighting of the existence of nineteenth-century working class readers whose reading extended far beyond the lurid, inexpensive, and shallow reading matter aimed at poorer audiences and would reach literary and classical heights serves to cast serious doubt on the notion that a work’s audience can be delimited solely to its implied readership. Along with stressing that there is a clear catholicity to the reading habits of the common reader (371), Rose emphasises that there is a definite uniqueness to each individual’s reading history with those of the British working class reader consisting of “a unique jumble of ephemera, junk, and some classics” (367).

However, if one acknowledges, as Rose does, that the ordinary individuals who record their reading experiences are by definition exceptional (2) and these experiences unique, is it not somewhat problematic to extrapolate conclusions (as Rose also does) about the reading habits of the class as a whole based on the preferences and practices exemplified by said individuals? There are other dimensions to Rose’s study that are decidedly less problematic. He writes of the street second-hand bookstalls that were present in most nineteenth-century urban centres and served as a potentially very important source of material for the reader with minimal quantities of disposable income (120). These represent a commonly overlooked site in the history of reading. In addition, Rose reminds us that in attempting to answer the “why” of reading, it needs to be remembered that the selection of reading matter may sometimes have been less a political choice and determined more by circumstance, as common readers read the texts that were within their reach (372). His analysis of the “how” of reading makes for a compelling
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insight into the ways readers read against the grain as he demonstrates that there was potential for even the most conservative of material to be read in an unorthodox way (39). Rose may have highlighted the paucity of attention to the actual reader in Altick’s pioneering study (“Rereading the English Common Reader” 48) but the present generation of scholars have revisited The Common Reader in light of this.

Beth Palmer and Adelene Buckland note in the introduction to their edited collection on nineteenth-century readers that the study of the consumption of print has advanced comparatively more slowly than related efforts to investigate the production and dissemination of such texts. They rightly attribute this lack of progress to the relative sparsity of records that the majority of actual readers’ acts of reading leave behind (“Introduction” A Return to the Common Reader 3). They observe that “the privacy and isolation of so many acts of reading, the paucity of written evidence left behind by all readerships [...] and the partiality of individual readers’ accounts contributed to make the reader one of the least developed areas of research in the wider field of book history” (2-3). The editors situate their collection as part of the recent scholarly effort to graduate from both homogenous and monolithic conceptions of the Victorian common reading public and “broad identity-based definitions of the reader founded on class or gender” (5). A case study-based focus on micro-sized readerships instead predominates in the “Scenes of Reading” part of the collection where contributors endeavour to reconstruct the reading experiences of individuals in sites like prisons, convict ships, and the military. Sharon Murphy’s essay on the reading of mid-nineteenth-century British soldiers in particular illustrates the rich possibilities inherent in situational analysis of reading. Almost all of the collection’s ten essays indicate very strikingly that the appetites of the various sub-categories of common reader were allied in that all demonstrated a particular hunger for fiction. It is my intention to also explore the web of consumption where this thirst for narrative intersected with and found satiation in performance media.

Palmer and Buckland’s collection concentrated on a particular subfield of the history of reading. The three-volume collection edited for Palgrave Macmillan by Shafquat Towheed, W.R. Owens, Rosalind Crone, and Katie Halsey casts a far wider net and trains its focus on the field in its entirety. It offers a comprehensive profile
of the present state of scholarship while pinpointing the directions in which the discipline is proceeding. Eliot’s foreword to the anthology highlights the obstacles faced by research in this area, noting that for the most part regular quotidian reading leaves little trace and is not encoded in readers’ memories with any level of comprehensiveness. Those reading experiences that readers perceive as extraordinary are instead recorded and this sort of consumption has come to represent the principal focus of literary studies (xv-xvi). Eliot’s observation that this sort of transcendental reading is frequently not what readers seek, as one may instead read for “confirmation” (xvi) represents an especially thought provoking idea and serves as a potent counter-argument to those who question the merits of researching popular literature that trades in narrative formulas and stock characters.

Towheed and Owens’s introduction to volume one further emphasises the evidentiary obstacles faced by the historian of reading as a large proportion of the vestiges of the practices that one is seeking to study are out of reach. The solution that they advocate, where one employs the broadest possible criteria in determining what constitutes evidence of reading, represents a particularly sound footing from which to proceed. (2) There is enormous truth to their observation that

if the challenge of finding enough recoverable evidence is considerable in research in contemporary reading, it is doubly so in earlier and more remote historical periods. Historians of reading are limited by what has survived (often accidentally) through the centuries: evidence-based studies are invariably histories of reading based on extant evidence. (2)

In addition, I would echo their assessment that those theoretical models that have historically dominated the study of reading and are situated at a remove from the actual reader leave an abundance of unanswered questions (3). Towheed and Owens are correct in observing that definitive answers are not a realistic aspiration in this field, yet “readers throughout history are not invisible and their traces of reading have not been completely erased” (12).

The second volume, which concentrates on the British Isles from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century, is especially relevant to the study of nineteenth-century popular fiction. Halsey and Owens stress in their editors’ introduction that canonicity plays little part in determining the material that the history of reading considers; the field is concerned with “the texts which were
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*actually read* (3) irrespective of how trivial, ephemeral, or insignificant they may seem from a literary history perspective. This is a core tenet of my particular brand of research. In addition, Halsey and Owens rightly observe that “reading the evidence of reading demands a careful consideration of context – not only what Hans Robert Jauss called ‘the horizon of expectations’ of the reader, but also the physical and material conditions surrounding the act of reading” (10).

Anna Vaninskaya’s essay shines a light on the identity fashioning, habits, and perceived deficiencies in the reading tastes of the new generation of readers created by the extension of elementary education after 1870. Her study juxtaposes the points of view of commentators from the periodical press, which decried the consumption of penny dreadfuls, criticising readers’ perceived misuse of their enhanced literacy, with firsthand accounts from actual readers. What emerges not only serves as a caution against conceptualising the common readers’ diet in monolithic terms (71), but in general reaffirms Rose’s view that the lower-class reader can knowingly consume the most disposable of fiction and use said material as a stepping stone to more literary texts.

Crone charts a very particular sort of text-reader interaction, chronicling how an eighteenth-century newspaper, *The Public Advertiser*, was constructed around advertisements from victims of crime seeking to recover their stolen property. Crone’s essay demonstrates the insight to be procured from an approach that fuses content analysis with reader testimony. This is a strategy I intend to pursue. Her particular case study illustrates the extent to which readers have different investments in the reading process. Andrew Hobbs’s enquiry into sites of public consumption of newspapers in a north of England town in the second half of the nineteenth century makes for a very worthwhile entry in the geographical strain of the study of reading. The communal dynamic of public sites of reading is shown to be a particularly potent force. One especially striking thing to emerge from Hobbs’ study is that the life cycle of an individual issue of a newspaper was not necessarily characterised by ephemerality (124). His essay illustrates that to ignore the “where” of a particular reading experience is to impede the illumination of the particulars of said experience.
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The third volume is concerned exclusively with such methodological questions. I would strongly echo Towheed’s observation in his introduction that “reading does not (and has not) ever existed in isolation from a variety of other different forms of communication, whether in the visual arts, mass media, advertising, merchandise, social networking or the pervasive oral/aural culture of conversation” (2). My project’s interest in stage adaptations of popular fiction and readers’ decoding of visual co-texts reflects my belief that the study of reading is never simply a question of considering an individual work in isolation. In addition, if one also believes that a text’s language is merely one ingredient of the meaning making process, one must also turn one’s attention to the key determinants of the reading context. In Towheed’s opinion, these include “the physical attributes of the text, the space in which it is consumed, the practices or bodily postures adopted by the reader, and the related events which follow” (12).

Rose’s essay in this collection highlights how Altick’s 1957 study delineated previously uncharted and invisible research territory that the present generation of scholars now seeks to map in more minute detail. Rose’s Intellectual Lives had demonstrated the insights one can procure into readers’ practices through the study of reading histories related in autobiographies. This particular Rose essay introduces a caveat with regard to the application of this particular methodology. He observes that “the trawling [of] a large body of autobiographies for references to reading could be used to reconstruct the literary diet of a group of readers, but it could not efficiently focus on responses to a single author” (20). Personal experience has taught me that the isolation of references to individual authors or titles across a mass of memoirs is often a matter of luck and commonly an exercise in futility. However, this does not mean that we should solely conceive of the reader in the abstract; the sort of “theory-spinning in a vacuum” (21) that Rose criticises will not aid in the filling of the blanks in Altick’s map.

Colclough emphasises that a particular reading experience involves reader interaction with both the text and the space within which the text is encountered (“Representing Reading Spaces” 99). Colclough’s essay also models a particularly impressive approach to the analysis of visual representations of reading. The importance of public communal reading spaces in the 1790 to 1850 period when
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general access to print was limited emerges very strongly from Colclough’s discussion. One also gains a very definite sense from the case studies he introduces that there was a communal dimension to reading in this era even in the domestic sphere which conventional thinking might situate as the most individual and private of reading spaces. Flint’s meditative essay on photographic representations of books and reading does lead one to reflect on what one is seeking to ascertain in analysing imagery of reading. She acknowledges that these images commonly constitute stylised representations where the codex is a prop (158). Rather, Flint contends that “the presence of books within photographs may constitute important evidence not so much about the consumption and ingestion of named, identifiable texts but about prevalent attitudes towards the practice of reading, and the spaces in which it is conducted” (164).

The methodological strategy that James Secord sets forth in his prodigious monograph on *The Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844) succeeds admirably in unearthing the finer workings of a print phenomenon. With reference to this 1844 work, Secord realises what my study aspires toward in that he recovers from the shadows a text that history had sidelined. The range of personal journals and correspondence, visual imagery, journalistic pieces, and archival records upon which Secord draws is outstanding but it is difficult to envisage replicating the depth of enquiry that Secord realises in the context of works that did not register on a comparable scale. While the model of percolation and circulation that his study traces is compelling, Secord’s equation of the cognitive action of processing a new work with forgetting strikes a discordant note in an otherwise cogent enquiry.

The idea of pan-constituency cultural consumption is also very much to the fore in Crone’s study of narratives of violence in the urban popular culture of Victorian London. Crone articulates a revisionist perspective that looks to challenge the socio-historical idea of the “civilising process”, which underlined the nineteenth-century rise of transformative sanitising societal developments like the cult of respectability, by reasserting the prevalence of especially gory subject matter in the popular entertainments of the nineteenth century. Focusing on the 1820 to 1870 period, Crone chronicles the pervasive impact of prominent cultural phenomena like Sweeney Todd and the Red Barn murder.
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Cross-fertilization and the assimilation of thematic affinities between works in different media are both concerns with which I will engage in the latter sections of this study. Crone’s chapter on the blood-stained stage offers an especially compelling reading of the cultural agency that melodrama afforded its nineteenth-century consumers. Narratives of crime are the focal point of this dissertation. Certain texts from the earlier years of my timeframe feature episodes of a decidedly violent nature but a significant proportion of the later works tend to employ incidents like murders as a catalyst for the story rather than a set piece to be fetishized.

A possible risk of approaching this field from a literary or historical standpoint is that insufficient weight is afforded to the uses other than reading that the individuals under consideration were wont to put the printed matter in their possession. Leah Price’s rich study of Victorian readers and their encounters with their books redresses this balance brilliantly. Price’s meditation on how print artefacts functioned as objects illustrates the intrinsic political subtext to the terms in which one conceptualised the book and the periodical. To imbue the print artefact with a mystique that obscured its status as object and elevated it to the status of a text was regarded as an indication that one possessed cultural capital whereas to esteem the volume solely for its economic or aesthetic value was to reveal vacuity or philistinism and potentially reduce oneself to a mere handler. Similarly, Price highlights Victorian society’s gendering of instances of perceived misuse of print where certain instances of female contact with and employment of the object was figured as inappropriate and/or inferior (56). My study of publisher’s series will not merely probe the lateral connections fostered between companion volumes but also consider the ways in which the display potential the consumer derived from his/her pursuit of the collection impulse figured in the acquisition of such sets of books. Price also charts how engagement in psuedoreading as a means of insulating the self from one’s environment and its inhabitants (be they strangers or familiars) was prevalent across a number of nineteenth-century spheres (47). The theorisation of print matter’s fostering or indeed frustration of communion (be it desirable, unwelcome, or even corrupting [178]) between individuals of different
stations and orientations represents perhaps the more thought-provoking dimension of Price’s analysis.

The methodology for investigating reading as proposed by Margaret Beetham holds a great degree of potential for furthering our insight into the experiences of past readerships. Beetham contends that little progress will be realised in answering questions of reading if we seek to rely solely on the inadequate and oft-unreliable surviving statistical evidence (“In Search of the Historical Reader” 91). She advocates expanding our evidentiary remit to include other print objects (91) stressing the insights to be procured into consumption by looking to the abundant public mediations on reading, which appeared throughout the nineteenth century (92). While Beetham is keen to point out that ample traces of reading experiences remain within reach if we reconfigure our definition of what constitutes evidence to include the textual, she rightly acknowledges that these sources cannot be divorced from their own historicity (92). Beetham founds her proposed methodology on three sound principles. One needs to study reading in an interdisciplinary way, one must reflect on the standpoint from which we as researchers approach the study of reading, (92) and (most importantly, I believe) one must be attentive to “the materiality of the text and the historical specificity of the reader as a complex subject” (94).

William St Clair offers a rigorous and painstakingly researched study of readers and reading matter grounded in economic history and focusing exclusively on the 1790s to the 1830s. St Clair maps the reading nation of the pre-Victorian era by endeavouring to perform what he terms the necessary “spade work of empirical research” (10), which involves the accumulation of quantitative data on production, prices, edition sizes, sales, and circulation.\(^1\) He defines this concept of the reading

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\(^1\) While the insights that St Clair procures from his adept use of quantitative research methodologies are impressive, the primary material with which this study is concerned will not always lend itself to a comparable sort of enquiry. A number of the texts that I am discussing were issued by minor, shorter-lived, or unconventional publishers and concerns, which has meant that data in this vein has not been preserved. Furthermore, in determining my methodological selections for this project, it was necessary to consider the return to be procured from pursuing the archival evidence that was still in existence in light of the sorts of question that my study was endeavouring to illuminate. As my interest lay more in the experiences and processes of consumption rather than in production, I resolved that my efforts were better directed in addressing issues of paratextuality, hypertextuality, and oscillation.
nation as “constituencies of readers of widely different ages, experiences, and horizons of expectations interacting with texts of widely differing degrees of obsolescence” (435). St Clair offers a compelling characterization of a stratified market where “different socio-economic groups read different texts at intervals of different lengths from the time they were very first written” (40). Intellectual property regulations cultivated a cultural lag where a severely restricted (and comparatively obsolete) range of matter represented all that lay within reach of those tranches of readers at the lower end of the socio-economic scale (437).

I would echo strongly two of St Clair’s contentions with regard to studying the history of reading. Firstly, St Clair stresses that “readers have never confined their reading to contemporary texts...[and that] chronological linearity was not the norm” (3). Accordingly, I also intend to devote attention to publisher’s series, which interwove long-published material with newer texts. Secondly, there is a clear need to reorient our approach from one grounded in what St Clair terms a “parade of great names” and “parliament of texts” (2) to a strategy that examines the full range of print that was actually read.

2. Rationalising Selection of Primary Material

John Sutherland has demonstrated that the Victorian era saw the publication of approximately 50,000 novels emanating from the pen of some 3,500 novelists (”The Victorian Novelists” 345-6). The hegemony of the expensive three-volume novel in the mid-Victorian period meant those readers with access to the circulating libraries procured their fiction on loan, which conceivably facilitated a more avid pursuit of reading. The eventual disintegration of the three-decker system witnessed a fall in the standard price of new fiction and the proliferation of cheaper one-volume books. This meant that the growing number of readers in possession of sufficient disposable income to support a regular or semi-regular book buying habit were now able to acquire and consume a comparatively expansive range of works as the borrowing culture had permitted to those who could afford a library
subscription. Accordingly, to persist with the “parade” (2) approach that St Clair has criticized means that we merely acquire a partial impression of the reading landscape. Scholars writing on nineteenth-century crime fiction have been emphatic about the need to extend our focus beyond the present-day critical mainstream. Joseph Kestner has observed that:

Although it might be argued that works like The Moonstone or Bleak House are indispensable for consideration of Victorian detective fiction, there are additional novels which [...] ought to receive consideration: Fergus Hume’s Mystery of a Hansom Cab (1886), H. F. Wood’s The Passenger from Scotland Yard (1888), Arthur Griffith’s The Rome Express (1896), and Israel Zangwill's The Big Bow Mystery (1892) (“Detection and its Designs” 451).

Andrew Radford expanded on these sentiments, noting that:

However, much more research needs to be done on those other Victorian detective writers whose fiction is not yet widely available in critical editions or anthologies, including Arthur Morrison, whose sleuth Martin Hewitt replaced Sherlock Holmes in The Strand Magazine when Conan Doyle contrived to make Holmes ‘disappear’ after his desperate struggle with Moriarty at the Falls of Reichenbach in episode 24, ‘The Final Problem’ (“Victorian Detective Fiction” 1191).

Kestner and Radford were both writing in the 2000s but the sort of call they were expressing was being voiced a number of years earlier with Anne Humphreys remarking in a survey of Victorian detective fiction scholarship in 1996 that the field was characterised by “the exclusion of the majority of such fiction (a good deal written by women) from critical attention in favour of an obsessive return of critical analysis to a handful of canonized texts by three male writers– Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, and Arthur Conan Doyle” (“Who’s Doing It?” 259). For example, the subject matter that forms the basis of Thoms’ discussion of the figure of the detective is characteristic of this brand of canon-centric scholarship.

The writers with which this study will concern itself cannot be described as “lost authors” in the truest sense of the term. For instance, with the exception of one novelist, all are afforded biographical profiles in Sutherland’s magisterial Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction. A few of the works embodied the brief orbit of fleeting prominence of which Sutherland writes in his introduction (ix). The majority warrant categorisation as minor writing of the sort that James Najarian has defined as “never quite entirely forgotten [and
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classified by] a ‘shadowy’ historical presence rather than an entire absence” (571). While a number of the writers achieved a brief spell of commercial success in their careers, the sole remnant of this acclaim today represents merely a footnote or casual aside in a literary history concerned primarily with the canonical. The roots of this obscurity vary from writer to writer but it is often the case that a work’s appeal or style is especially particular to its individual era, which means it lacks the capacity to transcend that has ensured other works have ascended to the ranks of the canonical. Some of this study’s texts fit into the category that Franco Moretti has identified as “rivals” as they produced a similar but not quite identical class of material to the output of the canonical authors (208). The charge of derivativeness is the obvious objection that might arise in the way of efforts to reclaim such works from obscurity. One might answer such romantic ideals of individualised creativity by noting that few writers operate entirely in a vacuum and that those looking to succeed in the popular fiction marketplace will tailor their output in accordance with the appetite of the time. Although the study of Victorian popular culture has expanded greatly in recent years, the direction in which scholarship has proceeded has in essence seen the formation of a parallel canon comprising a relatively fixed group of writers who are effectively viewed as representative of the field as a whole. While this dissertation is a contribution to the on-going efforts to chart the history of reading, it will also endeavour to re-orient critical focus toward a number of commonly overlooked authors and texts.

Mary Elizabeth Braddon will perhaps be the most familiar writer under consideration in this study. Braddon’s critical fortunes have undergone a significant resurgence in recent years with much of this attention focusing on her bestselling novel, Lady Audley’s Secret (1862). Although this novel may have catapulted Braddon to public attention, it was not her first literary endeavour as it was in fact preceded by another novel entitled The Trail of the Serpent (1861). The Trail would languish in obscurity for much of the twentieth century; Braddon’s standing with readers and critics would tumble as much of the lighter literature of the Victorian era was regarded as passé and deserving of oblivion. While The Trail has recently attracted some discussion from a
gender and a disability studies perspective, I would contend that it is the materiality of this novel that makes it such an interesting object of study. One might term The Trail an upwardly mobile text. A penny serial that was initially repackaged as a railway novel, the rise of Braddon’s stock with nineteenth-century readers owing to the success of three-deckers like Lady Audley’s Secret, Aurora Floyd, and Eleanor’s Victory saw The Trail ascend to a place amongst the Queen of the Circulating Libraries’ list of collected works. In addition, the novel’s sources along with its later stage adaptation represent an interesting case study in the fluid boundary between consumption of popular literature and attendance at the theatre.

Where Braddon would endeavour to consolidate her standing on the literary scene by taking on the position of editor/proprietor/lead serial novelist of Belgravia in 1866, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu’s career would begin to advance when he assumed the joint editorship/proprietorship of The Dublin University Magazine from 1861 to 1869 and forged the journal into a vehicle for his own writing. An examination of the sort of serial venue that the editor-novelist fashioned for the circulation of his own output has the makings of a fascinating case study in researching magazine branding and the Victorian periodical press. Le Fanu’s reputation today rests primarily on his 1871-72 short fiction tale of lesbian vampirism, “Carmilla”, and to a lesser extent on his 1864 novel, Uncle Silas. However, if one were to reduce his career solely to these works, this would represent an enormous disservice to his writing. The Wyvern Mystery (1869) is a wonderfully hybridized affair blending historical fiction, melodrama, gothic horror, and even fairytale. Le Fanu realised a modest degree of commercial success and a respectable level of critical success with both Wylder’s Hand (1864) and Uncle Silas. Arguably, these novels must have held a certain appeal for readers whose appetite was conditioned by the contemporary sensation fiction vogue. However, Le Fanu’s relationship to

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2 See Andrew Mangham’s Violent Women and Sensation Fiction and Christine Ferguson’s “Sensational Dependence: Prosthesis and Affect in Dickens and Braddon”
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Wilkie Collins, the leading practitioner of the sensation school, is perhaps best explained via the Moretti “rival” classification.

While a certain idiosyncratic quality characterised the mood of Le Fanu’s work, the tessellated structure and undercurrent of the paranormal in Charles Warren Adams’s *The Notting Hill Mystery* (1862-63) in part situates this novella in Moretti’s category of the “crazy device”. A plot centring on inheritance fraud, a fragmented sororal connection, and a titled foreign villain might seem to suggest that *Notting Hill* was simply an effort to capitalise on the success of Collins’s *The Woman in White*. However, the intense polyvocality and the interweaving of a diverse array of texts such as witness statements, excerpted journal entries, letters, doctor’s case notes, periodical cuttings, and floor plans partly defuses any suggestion of derivativeness that might haunt Adams’s work. However, this singular quality combined with the text’s novella status would in certain respects distinguish *Notting Hill* from the Collins and Braddon mode of sensation fiction. Adams was a jobbing writer whose novels lay long veiled under the pseudonym “Charles Felix”. He merely made periodic forays into fiction writing, which if one excludes *Notting Hill*, yielded admittedly uneven results. Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that Adams has been habitually relegated to the footnote or the aside. This study will endeavour to reverse this trend.

Where a paucity of material may have sealed the ephemerality of Adams’ reputation, the roots of Arthur Griffiths’ eventual obscurity lay in a reverse state of affairs. This army major and prison governor turned man of letters published more than twenty novels from the mid 1870s to the early 1900s ranging from detective fiction to military fiction to romances to novels of prison life. The plurality of Griffiths’ output together with the failure of any of his works to register on a scale comparable to say Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle* (1897) frustrated the development of a concrete writerly identity, which ultimately condemned his near entire body of work to obscurity. Griffiths’ *Fast and Loose* (1885) was issued as the transition from the three-decker to one volume publication was in motion. Furthermore, this novel also illuminates the segmented quality of the reading landscape. English expatriate readers
consumed the novel as a serial in *Home News for India, China, and the Colonies* from 7 December 1883 to 14 November 1884, which was a notable period in this journal’s history. Domestic readerships would regard the text as a new work when it reached them in 1885 in two distinct incarnations. Griffiths went on to achieve his greatest commercial success with the minor bestseller, *The Rome Express* (1896). It had reportedly accumulated sales of 14,000 copies by mid-1899 (“Milne’s Express Series of Novels” 2). The success realised by this novel would inspire the work’s publishing house to launch a publisher’s series named after this Griffiths text and specialising in light fiction.

Where Griffiths may have overextended his talents with his prolific output and forays into multiple genres, Fergus Hume ascended to a singular level of prolificacy with the publication of almost one hundred and forty novels encompassing science fiction and romances as well as stories of detection. Scholars of detective fiction and Victorianists with an interest in popular literature chiefly associate Hume’s name with his bestselling debut novel, *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* (1887). While one is always wary of affording undue credence to publisher sales statistics from this era, figures survive that indicate that *Hansom Cab* sold just shy of 400,000 copies between its first publication and the closing years of the century (Bell 124). Even if one factors in a provision for inflated numbers, there can be little doubt that a work which attracted a volume of readers on this scale warrants enquiry. Furthermore, the adaptation for the stage of *Hansom Cab* and of *Madame Midas* (1888), which can be regarded as a partial sequel to Hume’s bestselling debut, represent a potentially fascinating case study in trans-media consumption.

The conventional narrative of Hume’s career situates the patently melodramatic plot of *Madame Midas* as a failure on the author’s part to capitalise on the attention he garnered with *Hansom Cab*. However, as the work of Michael R. Booth and Juliet John has educated us to no longer automatically view melodrama with critical condescension, I would contend that a reappraisal of *Madame Midas* and its companion novel, *Miss*

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3 See Robin Woolven’s *DNB* entry on Hume
Introduction

*Mephistopheles* (1890), is long overdue. The early 1890s were a turning point in Hume’s career as he shifted toward the production of increasingly disposable fare issuing on average three to five titles per year. It must be acknowledged this later work is on the whole comparatively workaday and that many of these novels may indeed deserve to continue languishing unread in the archive. The longer-term effect of this creative strategy was to reinforce the perception of Hume as a second or third-rate writer and thus overshadow the comparatively better quality works from the early stages of his career.

Hume’s career would be largely defined by his status as “the author of The Mystery of a Hansom Cab”. Anna Katharine Green’s debut novel, *The Leavenworth Case* (1878), secured her a comparable level of attention but the American writer’s more conscientious and restrained style of literary production meant her subsequent output was not entirely overshadowed by her first great success. Yet the limited level of critical attention that Green today receives does not always reflect this as even the more perceptive scholarship, which transcends the usual truisms that situate Green as the mother of the detective story, rarely discusses her twenty plus other works in any great detail.  

Granted, there are Green novelettes like *A Strange Disappearance* (1880) and *XYZ* (1883) that are yellower, comparatively more trivial, affairs; other texts such as *The Mill Mystery* (1886) are richer well-crafted novels that merit critical discussion. While Green was an American who wrote crime fiction set in the United States, many of her novels were also circulated in England. The study of English audiences’ consumption of American popular literature tends to focus on the reception of works like Stowe’s anti-slavery fiction. If one is interested in print culture and the global dissemination of popular literature, the materiality of the reading experience of Green’s English readership represents a particularly interesting case study in transatlantic culture. In some respects, conventional literary history has conditioned us to view the detective fiction subfield of the nineteenth-century popular novel as a realm that is gendered male. While it is

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4 Catherine Ross Nickerson’s *The Web of Iniquity* and Lucy Sussex’s essay on Green in her *Women Writers and Detectives in Nineteenth Century Crime Fiction* are, for the most part, *Leavenworth* centric in their discussion.
true that a significant proportion of the foremost Victorian practitioners of this popular genre were male and it was perhaps more exception than rule for a woman to carve out a career as an illustrious detective novelist, it would represent somewhat of an exaggeration to conceive of this state of affairs as a patriarchal “edging out” comparable to that charted by Tuchman and Fortin in the context of the literary realist novel. As the first decades of the twentieth century passed, Green would suffer a fate similar to Braddon as she came to be viewed as passé and old-fashioned. This perception was partly exacerbated by her heavy and at times verbose style, which unlike the writing of her contemporary Conan Doyle, does not always endear itself to the modern reader attuned to more terse and controlled prose.

The Sherlock Holmes mania of the late nineteenth century was perhaps the highpoint of reader appetite for detective fiction. The popular fiction output of the seventh and final writer in this study best exemplifies the status of rival to Holmes. Arthur Morrison’s Martin Hewitt debuted in March 1894 as the new series detective in The Strand Magazine following Conan Doyle’s decision to do away with his hero in the December 1893 story, “The Adventure of the Final Problem”. As Hewitt first appeared in this particular context, Morrison’s protagonist is not easily removed from the shadow of Conan Doyle’s consulting detective. Regrettably, this proximity would condemn Morrison’s creation to facile comparisons with Holmes and genuine efforts to explore the series were until recently very rare and tended to focus primarily on those first seven stories that appeared in the Strand. 5 Hewitt realised a degree of separation with the literary figure who precipitated his inception when Morrison’s creation migrated in 1895 from the George Newnes publication to Ward, Lock & Bowden’s new Windsor Magazine. Yet that is not to say that we should divorce Hewitt entirely from Holmes as that would severely diminish our capacity to probe the reception of the Morrison stories. Sherlock Holmes was the foremost exponent of the short genre fiction tale circulated in the middlebrow magazine

5 Peter Ridgway Watt and Joseph Green’s The Alternative Sherlock Holmes is a particularly egregious example. John Greenfield’s “Arthur Morrison’s Sherlock Clone” in VPR begins with this premise but then moves on to offer a somewhat compelling reading that is regrettably more than a little heavy on plot summary.
but other writers also demonstrated a comparable level of capability at the form. Innovations in the digital humanities mean a fixation on texts from the critical mainstream can no longer simply be explained away by an inability to access the lesser known texts.

3. Accessing Primary Material: The Periodical and the Book

Digitisation has transformed how we as researchers of the nineteenth century print media engage with our primary material. The British Library Historical Print Editions project, where the national copyright library of the United Kingdom collaborated with Microsoft to digitise parts of its collections that were then sold as print-on-demand facsimile reprints, holds considerable potential for the scholar studying the history of reading and the non-canonical text. It now means that one can potentially access away from the archive the material that previously would have fallen into the category of what Patrick Leary has termed the “offline penumbra” (“Googling the Victorians” 13). Facsimile reproduction means one can obtain considerable insight into how the pages of the text would have appeared to its first readers. For instance, the original pagination is retained. Furthermore, paratextual elements such as title pages are included while peripheral material like bound-in publisher catalogues commonly makes the transition. However, the use of said reprints as part of one’s research does bring to light some issues with this digitisation project. The reprints are characterised by somewhat of a bibliographical blind spot as no publication details are included for the modern codex within which the reprint appears. No information about the textual history of the reprinted work is also offered. The project also bears out Towheed’s observation that digitisation can bring about a degrading of the material evidence of reading (“Reading in the Digital Archive”141) as certain reprints are characterised by a bibliographical recoding where page margins are reduced in size, which in turn decreases the dimensions of the codex. In addition, the quality of paper used in the reprint can often be at odds with the leaves upon which the text is printed in the
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nineteenth-century edition. An inexpensive book is often upgraded to a volume of higher grams per square metre whereas the three-volume novel is commonly reprinted on far less ornate sheets.

It has to be acknowledged that one does significantly reduce one’s capacity to study potential marginalia in using facsimiles of editions derived from the collections of a copyright library. However, if I were to seek out other copies of these texts (many of which are particularly scarce today owing to the fall in the standing of the writers), there is no guarantee that reader annotations would feature or even shed any genuine light on consumption. Accordingly, the reprints project does not entirely supplant the need for archival work, particularly if one’s research is grounded in discussions of materiality.

The work of a number of the writers with which this study is concerned was digitised as part of the project. My bibliographical research was conducted in the British Library reading rooms but I was able to undertake my textual analysis at my home institution. While I was fortunate that the material where my interest lay featured in the project, there is certainly a somewhat perplexing randomness to the selection policy that governed which material was digitised. Sixty five thousand public domain titles from the areas of English literature, history, geography, and politics were included in the project. The grand objective was less about digitising rare out-of-print texts or a particular individual’s body of work than the creation of a digital critical mass of British Library holdings (Algar).

The uniform and spartan cover art used in the reprints lays particular stress upon the name of the archive from which the material is derived. The strength of this British Library branding strategy commonly overshadows or even effaces the authorship of an individual work. The distribution of the project operates somewhat akin to a dog whistle as it functions as a resource for those in search of a particular title or author. Neither synopses nor biographical information features at point of purchase or on the volumes themselves. Furthermore, the policy of selling each volume of a three-decker as an individual book inadvertently reproduces the Victorian situation where the
three-volume novel was priced at such a prohibitively expensive cost that purchase is almost discouraged entirely.

If attempting to procure ready (and inexpensive) access to the text of the lesser-known works, Dover Publications represents a particularly convenient channel. Founded in New York in 1941 by Howard Cirker, this publisher specialises in reprinting out-of-copyright and out-of-print titles (Reiss). One of the firm’s diverse range of specialisms has been nineteenth-century fiction. However, their concern is not with the canonical writing but rather their lists feature more esoteric works from the Victorian era. If one scans the house lists and catalogues that are printed on the covers and in the back of Dover editions, one will be especially struck by the prevalence of Victorian genre fiction. Crime and supernatural novels with distinctive and arresting titles feature heavily. This orientation is of little surprise given that Cirker’s house’s success was predicated on the cheap paperback craze of the post World War II period (Reiss). Therefore, Dover reprints said works less because it deems that Sheridan Le Fanu or Anna Katharine Green merit reprinting and more because these writers’ bodies of work have entered the public domain and carry the air of something that might appeal to the general reader.

Although Dover is a trade publisher seeking to interest the common readership, its production values are still strong. One can have faith in the textual provenance of a reprint as a statement about the selection of copy text is always included. Many of the older editions incorporate introductions; an excellent critical-biographical essay by Michele Slung featured in the 1981 edition of Green’s *The Leavenworth Case*. The 1976 anthology of Morrison’s Hewitt stories edited by E.F. Bleiler included all of the original illustrations with which *Strand* and *Windsor* readers would have engaged and it reproduces this fusion of verbal and the visual in precisely the same layout employed in the periodical press. The Dover editions are a valuable alternative to the myriad of varying qualities of print-on-demand reprints of digitised fiction that now circulate via online booksellers. Frequently bereft of basic critical editing and bibliographical information, some of these reprints are produced with such subpar optical character recognition software that scores of typographical
errors appear in the text. Others like The Hard Press edition of Green’s *The Mill Mystery* and The Dodo Press edition of Griffiths’ *The Rome Express* distort the paragraphing of their texts with unnecessary levels of white space. The reach of the digital has not been limited solely to the codex but the possibilities it has opened up in other realms of print once again do not necessarily afford the scholar unmediated access to nineteenth-century reading matter.

If one belongs to an institution that subscribes to any of the digital repositories of Victorian periodicals that have come on stream since the late 2000s, an abundance of research possibilities exist at one’s fingertips. However, if one is inclined to believe that materiality and consumption are indelibly associated, the digital archive does not render superfluous the need to study the physical copies of the periodicals collected in bound volumes. The words and images that make up the individual items featured on the pages of the periodical merely represented part of the interpretive process of consuming the newspaper or magazine. Therefore, our access to the reading matter is greatly enhanced by the digital archive but such resources potentially situate the “how” of the history reading at a far greater remove. Towheed rightly emphasises that the interfaces of these resources often inhibit browsing through individual issues, which would have been the de facto reading strategy pursued by the original audiences of these periodicals (“Reading in the Digital Archive” 142). While it is true that the bound volumes of magazines and newspapers are themselves a different text to that which would have featured in the reading experience of the majority of nineteenth-century readers, they frequently represent the most tangible incarnation of the objects with which audiences would have engaged. Nevertheless, there is a great degree of potential to be exploited in the tools offered by the digital archive. If one is researching the publication history and reception of the minor novel, full-text and cross-title searching allow one to track the promotion, reviewing, and reporting of a particular writer or work in a specific historical moment. However, the results that such exercises yield are contingent on the OCR document underlying the digital image of the individual periodical page. In addition, contrary to the promotional claims to comprehensiveness often
exuded by such resources, publications that are now lesser known, like the steamship press newspaper, *Home News for India, China, and the Colonies*, continue to remain outside the remit of the digital. Moreover, these assertions potentially give rise to a dangerous fallacy in the history of reading. Towheed has observed of one particular resource:

The plethora of newspapers amassed together and digitized in totality in *19th Century British Library Newspapers* belies the fact that no individual or group of individuals living in the nineteenth century would have even been able to scan the list of titles available in the database, let alone read them comparatively. In presenting undifferentiated data without a hierarchy or additional ancillary information, mass digitization projects partially re-contextualize the reading matter of the nineteenth century (*"Reading in the Digital Archive"*142/3).

The digital has altered the conditions under which we research the nineteenth-century press to such an extent that we have arrived at a point where the implications for the field need to be appraised. James Mussell grounds his meditation on this current state of affairs in McGann’s principles of textuality. He illuminates the construction of these digital resources and demonstrates how their make-up impacts upon how we as researchers process and engage with the contents of these electronic archives. Mussell’s study represents a cogent reminder of the sorts of issues and questions that should shape one’s engagement with these digital resources but can all too easily be afforded insufficient weight when confronted with the prospect of seemingly unmediated access to the output of the nineteenth-century press. Mussell offers a particularly pertinent diagnosis with his observation that the digital object generated by said resources represents “an economy of loss and gain” (61). His opening analogy of translation is especially apposite as this underscores the changes that occur when a periodical makes the journey from shelf to screen. The digital is especially adept at reproducing the linguistic codes of the periodical (13); however, it is impossible as Mussell rightly points out to conceive of the texts of this genre as merely verbal information on a page (31). Mussell demonstrates that the electronic version of the periodical commonly recodes other signifying components of the text. The cropping of margins in order to compress the size of the digitised image of the periodical
page can produce a fundamental alteration in the fabric of the publication (67). Moreover, the elimination of intentionally blank pages for similar space saving reasons interferes with the pagination of the text (90). Mussell calls attention to the fact that a repagination is imposed when one downloads an isolated item as a PDF from the electronic archive (83). Ultimately, Mussell stresses that what he terms the “digital simulacra” is unattainable (14) as although the digital archive may figure its presentation of its contents as unadulterated, digitisation is always “interpretive” (21). These interpretive decisions can sometimes prove questionable. For example, ProQuest’s British Periodicals files The Dublin University Magazine under the title of The University Magazine; the publication only appeared under the latter title for a very brief period at the end of its life.

When one views a particular item in ProQuest’s British Periodicals, one does not automatically learn the name of the library/archive whose collections have been used to create the digital run of a particular periodical. One must proactively seek out this information on the periodical’s homepage in this particular database. Mussell highlights that navigating the archive via the search function, which is commonly the default tool of such electronic repositories, leads one to run the risk of decontextualising individual items (55-57). These digital resources can deprive the user of “the means [of understanding] the meaning of [a specific] article in the context of [a] particular page in [a] particular issue published at [a] particular moment” (133). For example, if one is investigating a serial novel, it is entirely possible to have the database call up all of the weekly or monthly instalments and bypass the print context in which each of the individual parts may have functioned dialogically. It would be almost impossible to overlook this if one were tracing the serialisation in the hard copy volumes of the newspaper or magazine and to so would render obscure the historical reading practices of the nineteenth-century consumer.

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In sum, this study looks to investigate the nineteenth-century readership of those specific works of lesser-known Victorian popular fiction, which form
the basis of this study’s cultural recovery endeavour. I aim to discern the target
readership of these texts and consider the material, textual, and literary
elements that would shape the audiences’ experiences. Where such evidence
can be obtained, I wish also to engage with historical readers’ responses and
recorded experiences. In the case of reading matter where the practices of the
actual contemporary consumers lie beyond our reach, I draw on theories of
textuality to reconstruct the particulars of the internal history of said reading
experiences. Namely, I consider the reading strategies fostered by the
nineteenth-century texts’ bibliographical coding, paratextuality, and
hypertextuality. I also examine the visual-verbal, lateral, and trans-media
dialogues cultivated by the text’s initial modes of publication together with later
transpositions and reconfigurations of such fiction.

Accordingly, chapter one will seek to delineate the syntheses of periodical
coding that constituted specific nineteenth-century magazines and newspapers
featuring fiction by this study’s set of writers in order to ascertain the sort of
experience these titles would have afforded to their consumers. In addition,
the presence that the consumers themselves registered within the periodicals
will be explored. This chapter will also chart the serial reading experience
afforded by the weekly or monthly instalments of these novelists’ work while
also situating these instalments within the intra-publication nexus of print that
would have constituted an individual issue and/or serial run.

Fiction by these writers circulated in its entirety in book format is the
focus of chapter two. I afford particular attention to the composition of the
thresholds of the codex in order to appraise the tone or import registered by
the paratextual elements that served as the reader’s gateway to the text.
Moreover, I employ a wide variety of sources to illuminate the encounters that
historical Victorian readers experienced with their books. Chapter two will
chart the ways in which a book’s bibliographical coding conditioned a particular
sort of engagement with the text while also seeking to gauge the resultant
aesthetic value judgements elicited by the book’s status as object. I then probe
the visual-verbal dialogues set in motion by the inclusion of illustrations in
volumes that were reissues of particular novels. Finally, the impact of place on
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reader selections and practices will be explored in the nineteenth-century situtional reading context of inexpensive popular novels circulated for consumption aboard the train during the mid-and late-Victorian periods.

The three subsequent chapters of the thesis concentrate on facets of readership where one cannot readily retrieve the pursuits and ideologies of historical readers. Accordingly, a more theoretically based sort of enquiry is necessary but I also root this more speculative or hypothetical discussion in a contextual foundation. Chapters three and four aim to reconstruct the frames of reading in which audiences consumed the fiction under consideration. The third chapter conceives of this in a figurative sense and looks at how these texts’ Victorian readers would have processed the narratives of such fiction. Considering specific examples of hypertext-hypotext associations, I analyse how notable entries in audiences’ reading histories informed their engagement with these writers’ work. I also look to chart how the framing of these novelists’ names in the paratextual regions of nineteenth-century editions conditioned readers to conceive of these texts in a particular literary context. This reconstruction of audiences’ horizons of expectations will in turn facilitate a study of gratification that sets out to form an impression of the cultural value judgements arrived at by consumers of this popular fiction.

The fourth chapter surveys frames of a more material sort by tracing these texts’ initial or subsequent circulation as books forming part of a series. This will in part involve a study in branding that seeks to elucidate the various strategies Victorian publishing houses pursued in an effort to situate a particular work or collection in a distinct light. My intention is also to probe the return to be procured from the collection of particular kinds of series on both an aesthetic and a conceptual level.

Not only might a text be refashioned in another species of volume, the Victorian popular novel might also be transposed to another medium. With reference to a number of distinct case studies, the fifth chapter will theorise the trans-media cultural experiences afforded by nineteenth-century dramatizations for the stage of prose fiction texts. Treating both the process
and the product of adaptation, I look to discern how the dramas derived from these novels would have resonated with nineteenth-century audiences.
Chapter 1: Readership and The Periodical Press

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Periodicals are commodities or products [...] the consumer of the periodical is not so much satisfied as stimulated to return at regular intervals to buy the next number of the product. For the reader, of course, the periodical is not only a product to be consumed [...] reading a periodical is itself a productive process and what is produced is meaning (Beetham “Towards a Theory of the Periodical as a Publishing Genre” 21).

The process of making meaning in which the reader engages when consuming the periodical form is contingent on both the linguistic and the bibliographical codes of an individual journal. To this end, the concept of periodical codes as outlined by Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker and supplemented by Matthew Philpotts will guide my enquiry into readers’ engagement with the publications under discussion. This will involve isolating and analysing the temporal, material, compositional, economic, and social codes of each. Moreover, Beetham’s idea of the historical reader, which she defines as the “dynamic, or set of negotiations, going on between the ‘target reader’, the ‘actual purchaser’ and ‘the reader constructed in the text’” (“In Search of the Historical Reader” SPIEL 96) represents one potential avenue through which one can pursue those individuals whose engagement with these publications was shaped by such encoding.

Without question, my discussion of the periodical press is indebted to the pioneering work of a diverse body of scholars beginning with those who formed part of the first wave of efforts to chart that “Golden Stream” delineated by Wolff in 1971.⁶ As Beetham also notes in the above epigraph, the form

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⁶ The pioneering work of the compilers of The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals played a significant role in launching the field. Collections of essays like Laurel Brake, Aled Jones, and Joel Madden, eds. Investigating Victorian Journalism (1990) and Brake, Bill Bell, and David Finkelstein, eds. Nineteenth-Century Media and the Construction of Identities (2000) had a significant part in determining the direction in which the discipline would proceed. Without question, Victorian Periodicals Review constitutes the epicentre of research in this field. Its themed issues have proven especially discipline defining. Notable numbers have included the autumn 1989 special issue on critical theory, the summer 2004 issue examining the nineteenth-century press in India, and the summer 2010 issue focusing on supplements. Gender has proven
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stimulates the purchaser to return at regular intervals to the publication. The serial novel represents an important driving agent in engineering the momentum of periodic consumption by purchasers. Jennifer Hayward rightly observes of serial narrative that “habit [...] is perhaps the most important factor in holding an audience. [...] For producers, the advantage of serialisation is that it essentially creates the demand that it then feeds: the desire to find out ‘what happens next’ can only be satisfied by buying, listening to, or viewing the next instalment” (2-3). Moreover, the implications of cultivating this appetite have proven far-reaching. Brake contends that “the widespread incorporation of the novel into mainstream periodicals of the 1850s and after helped to assure the proliferation and economic viability of the periodical press” (“The Advantage of Fiction” 11).

Although my interest in the four publications under consideration in this chapter originated in their practice of serialising fiction, this literature would not have been read in isolation from the other texts that surrounded the instalment or tale in the individual issue. Accordingly, I would also like to consider the sorts of dialogues cultivated between the weekly or monthly part and the adjacent journalism, poetry, or other fiction that featured during the period of the serial run. In addition, audience engagement with serial narrative in certain species of periodical did not occur solely on a verbal level. The visual co-texts that accompanied specific serials instituted a parallel strain of dialogue between the letterpress and these illustrations. The breed of narratological analysis modelled by Mary Elizabeth Leighton and Lisa Surridge has demonstrated the insights that can be procured into this dialogue if analysis is grounded in

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a core consideration in the study of authorship and readership in the periodical form; one particularly notable early study was Beetham’s *A Magazine of Her Own? Domesticity and Desire in the Woman’s Magazine 1800-1914* (1996). Kate Jackson’s *George Newnes and the New Journalism in Britain* (2001) was one of the more insightful studies of notable personalities of Victorian journalism that also mapped the changing dynamics of the late Victorian press. Studies that mix archival research and critical theory like Andrew King’s 2004 study of *The London Journal* demonstrate the insights one can procure from such a blended approach. Invaluable reference works continue to appear; Brake and Marysa Demoor. Ed. *The Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism* (2009) represented a very comprehensive survey of the insight the discipline currently possesses into the print media of the nineteenth century. Matthew Rubery’s 2009 *The Novelty of Newspapers* has underscored the reductiveness of traditional boundaries between journalistic writing and the novel.
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narrative theory ("The Plot Thickens"). To this end, my discussion of illustration will owe a certain debt to the means of conceptualising the visual-verbal relationship as delineated in their study.

When engaging with the periodical press today, there is a certain artificiality to such encounters in that the complete run of a newspaper or magazine can be accessed, allowing our analysis to circumvent the chronological breaks in reading inherent in the form. In theory, the dynamics of a six-month long serial run can be surveyed over the course of one or two sittings. If endeavouring to reconstruct the reading experiences of a periodical’s contemporary audience, it is vital that the consumption of said print commodities be theorised as objects that functioned as punctuation within the rhythms of readers’ lives. Linda Hughes and Michael Lund stress that

[as] reading time was so long, interpretation of the literature went on during the expansive middle of serial works. Readers and reviewers engaged in provisional assumptions and interpretations about the literary world, which then shaped the evolving understanding of works as they continued to unfold part by part. And a work’s extended duration meant that serials could become entwined with readers’ own sense of lived experience and passing time (The Victorian Serial 8).

Thus, the conditions governing the original audiences’ reading contrast sharply with the concentrated, unrestrained sort of engagement that so often characterises our archival encounters with said material. Accordingly, research into the readership of the periodical press must first navigate the temporal and material recoding instituted in our source material.
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1. The Mid-Victorian Periodical Press

A periodical differs from a book in being calculated for rapid sale and for immediate effect. A book may at first fall dead upon the market, and yet may endure for ages, a wellspring of life to all mankind. [...] A periodical, on the other hand—be it a daily paper, a weekly journal, a monthly magazine, or a quarterly review—is a creature of the day: if each successive number does not attain its object in the short space of existence allotted to it, then it fails for ever—it has no future. The magazines are thrown aside before the month is out. It is necessary, therefore, to the success of a periodical, that it should attain an instant popularity—in other words, that it should be calculated for the appreciation, not of a few, but of the many (E.S. Dallas “Popular Literature-The Periodical Press” Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine January 1859 101).

Dallas sets forth the principal categories of periodical circulating in the mid-Victorian print marketplace. My interest lies in two particular species of magazine: the monthly and the weekly. I would like to consider how both an older established title and a newer more recently initiated publication strove to position themselves to appeal to their respective communities of readers. Serial fiction was habitually the mainstay of such efforts in brand formation.

Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu’s proprietorship and editorship of The Dublin University Magazine7 from 1861 to 1869 would see him serialize much of his literary output from this era within the pages of this two-shilling sixpence monthly. The 1864 serialization of Le Fanu’s most successful novel, Uncle Silas, within the DUM has already received significant attention in the work of W.J. McCormack (1991) and Wayne E. Hall (1999). However, less is known about the serial history of Le Fanu’s other novels from this period.

The relative expense of the DUM by 1860s standards situated it within the upper strata of the magazine market; the choices available to middle class consumers had by this period come to include the new shilling monthlies and respectable weeklies like the two penny All the Year Round and the three penny Once a Week. DUM was of a much older vintage, dating back to 1833, and Wellesley Index has highlighted how the magazine conceived of itself as an Irish answer to Blackwood’s and Fraser’s. (193). To this end, the target readership of Le Fanu’s journal lay in the old established middle class whose disposable income stretched to a monthly outlay of half a crown. The readership of the

7 Hereafter DUM
**Chapter 1**

*DUM* was never particularly sizeable; *Wellesley* notes that monthly circulation peaked at 4,000 in the early 1840s under Charles Lever’s editorship (“The Dublin University...” 201). Even if one considers that multiple readers may have consumed a single copy, audience size would have been modest. Elizabeth Tilley’s analysis of both the surviving advertising in 1850s unbound *DUM* issues and the promotion of the *DUM* within the English periodical press indicates that the magazine was consumed by both an Anglo-Irish readership and an English audience (63-64). Furthermore, the title pages of 1860s bound volumes of the magazine indicate that it was published by both George Herbert in Dublin and Hurst & Blackett in London. As a monthly periodical, the release of the latest issue of the *DUM* would occur on “magazine day”.

A *DUM* issue of the 1860s was one hundred and twenty pages in length, demi octavo, and printed on medium quality paper. The link between the *DUM*, and *Maga* and *Fraser’s* was especially discernible in the 1860s as its typeface and layout were almost identical to the latter two titles. Visual content did not accompany the verbal matter of the magazine in this period and it is worth noting that the 1860s was the highpoint of Victorian illustration. On the one hand, the *DUM* was without a key esteem indicator during this period. On the other hand, this absence of visual content distinguished the *DUM* from the new wave of illustrated periodicals like *Belgravia* that appealed to newer strata of the middle class. Serial fiction was foregrounded during Le Fanu’s tenure. There were typically two serials running at one time and many were of a highly coloured hue. There is a certain element of truth to Thomas F. Boyle’s appraisal of the *DUM* under Le Fanu as something “between a Celtic twilight and the Newgate Calendar, with an interest in faraway places mixed in” (121) but it should be noted that much of the non-fiction material in this period envisaged an implied reader with definite cultural capital. Historical essays, studies of classical civilisations and European mythology, travel writing, and biography all featured regularly.

Le Fanu’s status as editor of the *DUM* enabled the organisation of issues of the journal in such a way that cultivated what Deborah Wynne has termed intertextual reading strategies (19-21) between individual instalments of his
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fiction and the adjacent co-texts. Gilbert Dyce’s *Bella Donna; or the Cross Before the Name* (*DUM* March 1863- December 1863) ran for the first seven issues of *Wylder’s Hand*’s June 1863 to February 1864 serial run. Readers were very likely to observe thematic parallels between *Wylder* and Dyce’s novel about a scheming adventuress’ ruthless pursuit of advancement and vengeance in a gentry setting. Moreover, travel writing featured regularly in the pages of the *DUM* in this era and the first in a two-part series of articles on the Grand Tour appeared in September 1863 as Mark Wylder’s apparent sojourn in continental Europe began to come to the fore in the novel. Similarly, an article entitled “A Digressive Essay on Wills, with Some Remarkable Instances” was included in the November 1863 issue while that month’s serial instalment of Le Fanu’s novel depicted the climax of Lawyer Josiah Larkin’s abuse of Rev. William Wylder through manipulation of the provisions of the terms governing succession and inheritance of the Wylder family estate.

Ghosts and spirits have a discernible presence in *Wylder’s Hand* and the supernatural was an especially prevalent thematic force in the issues of the *DUM* during the 1863-64 serialization. The distinctive talisman-like ring that Mark Wylder received from the magician-like Persian merchant and Uncle Lorne’s haunting of Charles de Cresseron’s chamber dominates the July 1863 number. The previous month’s issue had featured a piece on spirits and enchantment that focused particularly on the pre-Christian druids. Mark Wylder’s peculiar letters and the entry of Jim Dutton, who bears an uncanny physical resemblance to the now dead Wylder, are amongst the most evocative episodes in the September 1863 instalment. Also present in this issue was a discursive essay entitled “Ghosts of the Day”, which explored contemporary experiences and representations of spirits. *DUM* readers who read laterally could potentially secure an insight into the true fate of the novel’s title character. Uncle Lorne’s return in the December 1863 number produces the revelation that it is merely the old man’s physical appearance that is spectral and his re-emergence also results in an eerily accurate allusion to the fact that Wylder’s final fate involves interment. In addition, Lawyer Larkin receives a letter that makes reference to communications that have not yet been
delivered to him, indicating that Wylder’s epistles were mailed as a set and that the correct sequence has been disrupted. Both these developments evoke human appropriation of the supernatural and readers who read the issue laterally would find reinforcement for this idea in the “Fireside Gossip about Ghosts and Fairies” item, which detailed various commonly recounted ghost stories. The serial divisions that Le Fanu adapted for his fiction would also shape the way readers interpreted his novels.

Le Fanu scholars like McCormack (231) and Hall (215) do not rate the literary quality of The Wyvern Mystery (1869) particularly highly. However, Le Fanu succeeded in crafting an engaging serial for the DUM audience during the February to November 1869 run of this particular work. The serial breaks that Le Fanu imposed on the narrative would have proven particularly effective in arousing reader curiosity and ensuring a return to the subsequent month’s issue of the magazine. Particularly evocative conclusions included: the May instalment, which ended with the arrival of a mysterious visitor at Carwell Grange; the July instalment, which finished in the aftermath of Bertha’s attack on Alice; and the September instalment, which closed with Charles’ funeral and the pregnant Alice in a precariously ill condition. There is a distinctly melodramatic flavour to the plot of Wyvern. The narrative hinges on the return of a vengeful ex-lover, the substitution of one infant for another, and a malevolent uncle’s efforts to disinherit his nephew. There was also a theatrical quality to the serial text; the divisions commonly hinge on characters’ entrances and exits. The March, April, and October instalments all open with the characters’ arrivals; the October number actually begins with the birth of Alice and Charles’ son. Threat of enforced departure concludes the October number as Sergeant Archdale attempts to remove Marjory Trevllian’s adopted son from her care. Readers would be haunted by an overwhelming atmosphere of death in the serial’s later numbers. The September number ends with Charles’ death while the October part concludes with the apparent death of Charles and Alice’s son. The September and October instalments open with Alice and Squire Fairfield on their respective deathbeds. The more perceptive readers amongst Le Fanu’s audience would certainly be struck by the cyclical quality to the
journey they underwent in consuming this serial as Wyvern both opens and concludes with Alice travelling from Oulton to Wyvern. Serial narratives like Wyvern necessitated a near yearlong commitment. Publications of more frequent periodicity elicited a different sort of engagement. The DUM was an older miscellany serving an established middle class readership; newer titles had also come on stream in the late 1850s/early 1860s as new strata of the middle class evolved. Certain publications in this wave furnished a more diverse array of serial reading experiences.

Once a Week: An Illustrated Miscellany of Literature, Art, Science, and Popular Information⁸ was a threepenny illustrated weekly that was first issued in July 1859 and published by Bradbury & Evans following the termination of their partnership with Dickens. Wynne highlights how the house envisaged a middlebrow periodical buttressed by a strong serial novel that would appeal to a broad spectrum of the middle class and potentially tempt away some of the All the Year Round readership with the promise of a more alluring blend of the visual and the verbal (29). The additional penny that OAW cost in comparison with Dickens’s journals suggests that a significant proportion of the target readership of OAW was situated at a comparatively higher stratum of the middle class. Advance promotional material would describe the venture as “a novel experiment on the growing demand for periodical Literature” (“New Weekly Illustrated Periodical” 720). This growing demand was particularly strong amongst a demographic that Altick characterises as “a middle-class audience of superior education but relatively little spending money [...] who typically disdained cheap weeklies, with a few exceptions like Household Words, but who could not spare the two shillings or half-crown at which the principal monthly magazines were priced” (The English Common Reader 359). The shilling monthlies that emerged contemporaneously with OAW would realise particular success by capitalising on this gap in the market. The scholarly consensus on OAW generally underscores the extent to which it was outperformed by All the Year Round and eclipsed by the new wave of shilling monthlies. The tendency

⁸Hereafter OAW
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to figure the magazine in these terms has served to limit our understanding of the sort of reading experience the publication afforded.

Irrespective of its provenance, the name under which OAW was circulated embedded the publication’s temporal coding in its title. The connotations it evoked are noteworthy as along with signalling the publication’s periodicity; it also suggests a specific weekly block of time that one might give over to reading. The growth of the Saturday “half-holiday” in the late 1850s and early 1860s had demarcated a new period of leisure time for workers; the release day of new issues of publications like OAW coincided with this point in the week. The periodical seeks to inculcate a serial purchasing habit in its consumers and the synchronicity of these two things lent itself to the initiation of a weekly tradition where the individual or the family unit would read the latest issue of the magazine.

Each issue of OAW consisted of twenty-four to twenty-six dual column pages. The type used was marginally smaller than Household Words or All the Year Round, which together with the not ungenerous margins left a reasonable level of blank space on the pages of OAW. This moderated somewhat the compacted appearance that characterised Dickens’s journals. However, the typeface and page layout with the nominal legend and dual-line page border were almost identical to the earlier Bradbury & Evans’ endeavour, which did allow the magazine to trade on an ocular level on evocation of prior reading experiences of Household Words. Nevertheless, OAW for the most part presented itself as a smarter, more visually alluring venture. The magazine’s masthead employed decorative floral lettering while the illustration accompanying the lead item opening an individual issue occupied a significant proportion of the first page. Lest one overstate the production values of OAW, it should be noted that the paper quality was decidedly mediocre with both text and visual bleeding through the leaf. Fusion of words and illustration was the defining material characteristic of this particular publication. Studies of the magazine produced in the late Victorian era such as Pennell, along with

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9 Shu-Fang Lai speculates that the inspiration for OAW’s title may have emanated from an old idea of Dickens’s (14)
influential modern research into the journal such as William E. Buckler, have afforded a significant degree of attention to the illustrations published in OAW.\(^\text{10}\)

The talents of the pool of illustrators who contributed to Punch lay open to Bradbury & Evans when seeking to procure visual matter for OAW. Overall, the calibre of the personnel working on the new venture was ostensibly quite strong. Present-day scholarly discussion of the journal by Stephen Elwell lays considerable stress on the initial tensions that arose owing to the divergent visions of Bradbury & Evans and the OAW editor, Samuel Lucas, about the shape of the new magazine. However, there has been little effort to elucidate the mix of material that came to comprise the magazine as a result. Moreover, the periodical is not a static form; it shifts and remakes itself according to the exigencies of the marketplace. The regularly repeated narrative of editor-publisher friction has served to obscure the fact that the reorientation of OAW to incorporate more in vogue literary fare was in motion prior to the period when fiction by novelists of celebrity began to feature in the magazine’s pages.

OAW had signalled the parameters within which the publication would fall via its subtitle of “an illustrated miscellany of literature, art, science, and popular information”. The makeup of the periodical upon its July 1859 launch has been rather thoroughly dissected by scholars. The high and serious tone, the scientific pieces, and the serial fiction misfires represent merely the first act of the story. The periodical reoriented itself; the target readership and the grade of reader constructed in the text would adjust as time progressed. Articles on historical topics and anthropological or impressionistic sketches of singular places far and near had come to predominate by 1862-63. This sort of “popular information” had broader general appeal and such journalism was designed to tap into the thirst for knowledge and information that was particularly strong in the mid-Victorian period. As OAW did not have a notable

\(^{10}\)George du Maurier’s contributions to the 7 March 1863-3 October 1863 serialization of Braddon’s Eleanor’s Victory in OAW has given rise to a number of more recent studies such as Simon Cooke, Leighton and Surridge, and Wynne, which have all highlighted the important storytelling function served by du Maurier’s artwork.
personality like Dickens or Thackeray at its helm and star turns by prominent novelists did not occur in the magazine until the spring of 1862, there was an especially pronounced bricolage quality to this particular miscellany. In addition, the intermingling of language and illustration invited a particular set of reading strategies. On a basic level, as a reader browsed a magazine like OAW, we can be fairly certain that the visual content that appeared alongside a particular poem, article, or prose fiction piece exercised a degree of influence over his/her choices of what to read. I am not sure to what extent it is possible to generalise about how the letters and image dynamic functioned as readers engaged with a particular item but illustrated serial fiction, as we shall later see in the context of Charles Warren Adams, did cultivate a distinct means of consuming narrative.

The embellished look that this blend of the visual and the verbal afforded OAW was reflected in the threepenny price. Lucas initially directed the magazine at a very specific predilection within the target readership. OAW in its early incarnation featured the sort of content that would appeal to (to borrow Altick’s term) “an intelligent middlebrow” (Victorian People and Ideas 265-267)—those who were driven by a desire to expand their minds by reading about a wide array of topics. Conversely, the wave of shilling monthlies like the Cornhill that launched directly after OAW succeeded in tapping into a broader sweep of this market with a mix of engaging serial fiction and informative journalism or “tarts and bread-and-cheese” as Thackeray described it (Quoted in Altick “The Literature of an Imminent Democracy” 221). As OAW’s first three serial novels were at odds with prevailing light fiction trends, this magazine’s appeal in these initial years was limited to the constituency of serious minded intelligent middlebrows together with those readers whose budgets did not stretch to a single outlay of a shilling.

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11 Royal A. Gettmann has charted the problems that beleaguered OAW’s maiden serial novel, Reade’s A Good Fight, where differing author-editor outlooks engendered discord that resulted in a premature conclusion of the serial. In addition, Buckler has chronicled the failure of subsequent serials by George Meredith and Shirley Brooks to capture reader imagination. Lai’s largely descriptive study of the OAW serials by Reade, Meredith, and Martineau is a more recent treatment of the serial fiction featured in the magazine.
The real readers of OAW to whom we have access today fall within the intelligent middlebrow category. Reader correspondence was not a regular or established feature in OAW during Lucas’ tenure; however, letters to the editor were occasionally printed and the nature of these epistles is significant. Protracted discordant debate was not regarded as desirable; Lucas registered his unwillingness to allow the columns of OAW to become a forum for extended ongoing dialogue between divergent viewpoints (“The Mechanical Sempstress 448” and “The Lesser Light: We have received several” 28). Rather, the correspondence that did feature reflected the commitment to the dissemination of popular information registered in the journal’s subtitle. Three quarters of a page was given over in the 25 May 1861 issue to a London reader who expounded at length on the workings of military forts on the American frontier (Morton 604). Reprinted correspondence could also supplement articles in previous issues; a 12 November 1864 letter from a Wolverhampton reader offered additional information to an October OAW profile of Rev. Charles Wolfe (Scott 572-73). Letters clarifying inaccuracies in OAW’s own journalism were also published. A 10 January 1863 note desired to make it known that the mount of the famous eighteenth-century horseman, Charles Astley was not white as a 27 December 1862 OAW piece had stated but was in fact a dark bay (Cooper 82). Accordingly, the nature of this correspondence does suggest that the audience of OAW included a cluster of readers who delighted in trivia. In time, the publication did diversify and feature content more attuned to the predominant trends in literature, which would broaden the range of its target readership. Less seriously inclined middle class consumers whose purchasing habits were determined by their appetite for light fiction would as the 1860s progressed find an increasing level of material in OAW to please their tastes.

Genre fiction mini-serials began to take precedence from September 1861 onwards. Augustus William Dubourg’s melodramatic Lilian’s Perplexities (OAW 7 September 1861-5 October 1861) set this reorientation in motion while a Canadian settler romance by Louisa Annie Murray and a pair of sentimental
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novelettes by Isabella Blagden would follow.\textsuperscript{12} Shorter serials imbued \textit{OAW} with a ready supply of fresh material with which to tempt purchasers but it lessened the potential for sustained reader commitment that a full-length serial novel afforded. Novelists of celebrity and sensation fiction began to feature thereafter as longer serials like the bigamy novel, \textit{The Prodigal Son}, by the once successful but now largely forgotten Dutton Cook (\textit{OAW} 19 April 1862-12 July 1862) and the inheritance melodrama, \textit{Verner’s Pride}, by Ellen Wood (\textit{OAW} 28 June 1862-7 February 1863) commenced during the 1862-63 period. The juxtaposition of such genre fiction with the sort of informational journalism that \textit{OAW} habitually featured served to cast the magazine as a hybrid of a popular weekly and a shilling monthly. Buckler calls attention to the fact that the downward trajectory of \textit{OAW} circulation would be temporarily reversed during the second half of 1862 (939).

Hybridity was also perhaps the defining characteristic of one of these serials that appeared during this momentary resurgence in the magazine’s sales. \textit{The Notting Hill Mystery} by the pseudonymous “Charles Felix” or Charles Warren Adams was serialised from 29 November 1862 to 17 January 1863. The plot centred on a charismatic titled foreign villain, an obscured sororal connection, and a plot to defraud a young woman of her inheritance. The kernel of Adams’ narrative was insurance fraud and domestic poisoning and a strain of the paranormal also ran through the text. There were shades of eighteenth-century epistolary fiction to the broad range of documents that comprised the novella’s structure. Much of the first instalment, which established the backstory to the plot, was given over to a sequence of letters between a small cluster of family members. Subsequent numbers were comprised of a more non-traditional array of sources and the friends, landladies, servants, doctors, and neighbours of the couples at the centre of the two cases of suspicious death furnished their recollections of events. This imbued the work with an at times disorientating polyvocality.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{12}Louisa Murray. \textit{The Settlers of Long Arrow}, \textit{OAW} 12 October 1861-21 December 1861. Isabella Blagden, \textit{The Woman I Loved}, \textit{OAW} 18 January 1862-8 March 1862 and \textit{Santa; or a Woman’s Tragedy}, \textit{OAW} 23 August 1862-20 September 1862.}
A verisimilar quality pervaded the piece with the editorial preamble to the first number noting that this was a series of documents that the journal had happened upon. There also was a meta quality to the jigsaw structure employed in *Notting Hill* as the miscellany of documents that comprised each instalment reflected in miniature the makeup of the periodical genre. Ralph Henderson, the insurance investigator frame narrator who had overseen the collation of these documents, was in essence an ersatz editor. *Notting Hill* figuratively placed its reader in the jury box to deliberate on the chain of evidence woven by Henderson. Continued audience engagement was predicated not on the prospect of an eventual dramatic revelation (the first instalment had disclosed the nature of the crime along with the identity of the chief suspect) but on the illumination of how the villain had engineered the chicanery and poisoning necessary for the successful realisation of his scheme. Arguably, *The Notting Hill Mystery* was an especially apt work for *OAW*. It was foregrounded for almost the entirety of its serial run. The novella was essentially a hybrid affair blending prose fiction narrative with the tessellated structure of the periodical form. Moreover, while it was a novella predicated on dialogical reading across a blend of texts, the serial run of Adams’ work in *OAW* also gave rise to several other significant lateral reading ties. The female characters in *Notting Hill* endure a great deal of suffering at the hands of the men in their lives. Much of the poetry that featured contemporaneously in the magazine took as its subject tragic women like Rachael, wife of Jacob, and the Count of Vendel’s daughter who faces a wretched life comparable to the abducted sister in *Notting Hill*. The first instalment of the serial was taken up with the establishment of a backstory to the main plot and this particular issue of *OAW* included a significant number of articles on historical subjects. The particulars of a sea voyage from Australia are the focal point of the fifth part of the serial and this instalment appeared alongside articles on New Zealand census returns and ocean telegraphy. While *Notting Hill* would have represented a more cerebral counterpoint to the melodrama of the Wood novel, there were thematic parallels between *Notting Hill* and Verner’s *Pride* as the plot of both texts centred on wills and inheritance. Adams’ tale also
incorporated an extended engagement with the foibles of the emerging science of toxicology. The inconclusive medical findings in one of the poisoning cases serve to impede the investigation into the true circumstances of the suspicious death. As Adams’ work was serialised in OAW, audience engagement with narrative did not occur solely on a verbal level.

Seven of the eight parts opened with a drawing by George du Maurier that had been engraved in wood by Joseph Swain. The convention of situating each illustration at the very beginning of the weekly instalment meant that each of du Maurier’s creations was inherently proleptic and essentially functioned as a lens through which a reader consumed that part of the serial. Furthermore, the bond between the visual and textual was rendered much more concrete in this novella owing to the use of captions, which indicated the relevant part of the text to which the illustration directly pertained. Accordingly, it was possible that certain readers would preface their consumption of that particular instalment by skipping forward to the page number referenced in order to clarify their interpretation of the image in question. Interestingly, such captioning does not appear to have been a standard practice in OAW at this time as it was not employed in Wood’s Verner’s Pride nor did it feature in the August/September 1862 Isabella Blagden serial that du Maurier had illustrated. Notting Hill was the first work that Adams had published under the pseudonym of “Charles Felix”; accordingly, the illustration that accompanied the 29 November instalment (Figure 1) held significant power to fashion readers’ expectations of the new serial. The opening illustration would have hinted at the fact that issues of surveillance and perception would feature prominently in the plot of Notting Hill. The successive parts of du Maurier’s visual narrative would continue to underscore the centrality of both the spectator’s gaze and processes of interpretation.\footnote{George du Maurier’s letters include a number of indirect references to his work on Notting Hill. The correspondence reveals that du Maurier produced these drawings in November and December and that he did not work on the serial piecemeal and seemed to have access to the complete text (180; 185). This would have stimulated him to conceive of his illustrations as a sequence as opposed to standalone visual entities.} Du Maurier’s illustrations along with the fragmentary structure of the textual narrative would essentially serve to
position the reader as an unseen observer of the events that were unfolding in the central characters’ households.

A number of the illustrations would also have functioned at an interpictorial level. The visual that opened the serial was strongly reminiscent of Millais’ 1850-51 painting, *Ophelia*; the allusion was almost certainly a conscious one as Gertrude Bolton was also a tragic young woman driven to an emotional collapse by the irrational behaviour of the man she loves. The illustration accompanying the concluding part of the serial (Figure 2) was characterised by a different brand of interpictoriality as the scene of Madame R convulsing in pain on the floor of her husband’s laboratory illuminated the reasons for her habitual sleepwalking as captured in the 10 January visual (Figure 3).

The versimilar foreword that preceded the frame narrative noted that “the illustrations are simply added to make the reader’s task more agreeable, but, of course, it is not pretended that they were made simultaneously with the events they represent” (*OAW* “The Notting Hill Mystery” 617). However, du Maurier’s introduction of extradiegetic elements into his images ensured that they functioned on a far more sophisticated level than mere decoration and could furnish the attentive reader with a degree of advance insight into future developments in the novella’s plot. For example, the discernible facial resemblance between client and medium in the 6 December illustration (Figure 4) foreshadows the subsequent revelation in the 17 January instalment that the two women are twin sisters who had been separated since early childhood owing to the abduction of one of the girls by gypsies. Du Maurier carries this off very adeptly as he remains consistent with the physical descriptions that Adams introduces through Henderson’s initial statement which focus on the two women’s contrasting height, colouring, and the apparent age difference. The presence of a white vertical line in the centre of the illustration, which suggests that two different engravers were possibly responsible for producing this image, partly confirms that this likeness was no mere accident of production.

Goldman has categorised Adams’ novella as a melodramatic thriller (116); his assessment of the text is substantiated by the central role occupied by the
villainous Baron R. Du Maurier understood the potency of the unseen. Several characters remark upon the intensity of the mesmerist’s eyes and du Maurier’s visual narrative goes to considerable lengths in the 6 December illustration and 20 December illustration (Figure 5) to shield the reader from the Baron’s gaze. He is pictured in side profile in the latter while in the former the artist positions a specially situated ornament on the mantelpiece of the Andertons’ drawing room to prevent the Baron’s face being reflected in the mirror that hangs above the fireplace. Furthermore, du Maurier’s repetition in the 20 December illustration of the holding of the wrist gesture that the Baron had employed with his medium as part of the mesmeric ritual depicted in the 6 December visual was significant. Such repetition would have enabled a particularly attentive reader to extrapolate that the Baron was manipulating Sarah Newman in a similar fashion. The reader who discerned these types of connections between the various illustrations opened himself or herself up to a more enhanced reading experience.

The sequence of illustrations situated throughout the text essentially operated like slides on a magic lantern and the plot unfolded with the movement of this show across the eight-week serial run. There were shades of phantasmagoria to the sequence; incapacitated persons feature in each visual while the final two illustrations appearing in 10 and 17 January instalments depicted scenes of particular horror (Figures 3 and 2). If all seven illustrations are examined collectively, a distinct thematic quality becomes clear. The visual narrative seems to echo the open-endedness of the textual narrative’s conclusion and hint at the impossibility of truly omniscient surveillance. The visual narrative is book-ended by moments where fissures in the observation process allow terrible events to occur. The 29 November illustration depicts the unwell Gertrude Bolton’s momentary evasion of her anxious relatives’ supervision, which results in her fateful discovery amongst the stories reported in the newspaper that her husband has been killed in a duel with one of her former admirers. This causes her to go into premature labour and die giving birth to her twin daughters. The concluding illustration accompanying the 17 January instalment represents the ultimately fatal outcome of Madame
R/Katherine Bolton’s clandestine sleepwalking at her Russell Place lodging. The 10 January illustration captures perfectly this situation where the weight carried by an individual’s perception is in some way diminished, which in turn facilitates the inappropriate affairs that they witness to proceed without interruption. The maidservant portrayed in the illustration acquires knowledge about the suspicious nocturnal practices of the tenants lodging in her mistress’ house but the improper presence of her young man while she witnesses these events limits her capacity to disclose this information. The focalisation of the visual context and indeed the serial itself situated the reader in a position where s/he could accumulate such knowledge and participate in solving the mystery. In essence, such exercises in interpretation represented the defining characteristic of the reading experience offered to OAW readers by this particular serial.

As a higher-priced journal with a smaller scale circulation, the DUM circulated amongst a limited core constituency of readers. The engaging serial fiction written by its editor broadened the magazine’s appeal situating the publication on a frequency that was partly but not entirely in tune with the prevailing popular fiction trends of the period. The habitual DUM reader’s engagement with said novels was conditioned by elements like the thematic ties fostered between serial narratives and journalistic co-texts together with the mood evoked by the divisions imposed on the story by the monthly breaks.

The periodical’s delineation of a sector of the print marketplace in which it looked to situate itself could hinge on efforts to satisfy a new or previously unmet need for reading. The path charted by OAW in its early years underscores the fluidity of the periodical genre. The magazine’s history illustrates how a publication will make and remake its constituent elements according to the conditions of the contemporary literary climate if it is looking to broaden its appeal beyond an especially select constituency of readers. The sorts of reading strategies invited by the fiction appearing in the publication during this transitional era would comprise a blended visual-verbal and even meta sort of engagement.

Serial fiction played an important role in the efforts pursued by OAW to redefine its identity. As the nineteenth century progressed, the newspaper as
well as the magazine began to feature fiction published in instalments alongside its journalistic content. The objectives that such initiatives were intended to realise could often also form part of similar exercises in reorientation.

2. The Newspaper Serial Novel

It is obviously desirable that the Anglo-Indian community should be furnished with a newspaper prepared in England, expressly for their use, which by judicious selection and condensation, should contain, within a moderate compass, every particular of interest to those for whom it is intended (“To The Readers of the ‘Home News’” The Home News 7 January 1847 24).

*The Home News: A Summary of European Intelligence for India, China, and the Colonies* was a newspaper belonging to what is known today as the steamship press. Peter Putnis has described these periodicals as “a major purveyor of British news, literary material and advertising, [which were] printed in London on the eve of the departure of each steamship mail service, [and] were published especially for colonial readerships” (“The British Transoceanic Steamship Press” 70). Although steamship press publications are certain to have featured in the reading histories of many individuals, these newspapers remain almost entirely overlooked in contemporary scholarship of the nineteenth-century press. Studies concentrating specifically on India and the nineteenth-century press are even bereft of discussion of steamship newspapers.14 Arthur Griffiths’ 1883-1888 editorial tenure at *Home News* was in an era when the newspaper was losing ground to rival news media and saw the publication experiment with the serialisation of fiction within its pages for the first time.

*The Home News* launched in January 1847 as a bimonthly nine-pence publication that was sent to the East via the government-subsidised Indian mail that sailed from Marseilles (“On the 7th January 1847” 15). Messrs Grindlay &

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14 Neither the Julie F. Codell edited collection, *Imperial Co-Histories nor the David Finkelstein and Douglas M. Peers edited* *Negotiating India in Nineteenth Century Media* discuss the steamship press. The 2004 special issue of *VPR* on the nineteenth century press in India also edited by Codell was concerned primarily with those titles that were printed in South Asia.
Company, an Anglo-Indian financial services and logistics firm, produced the newspaper. Geoffrey Tyson, the historian of National & Provincial, the bank that in 1924 assumed ownership of Grindlay, notes that the venture originated in their practice of selling newsheets to publications based in Asia (194). Tyson also asserts that *Home News* circulation reached its highest point of 15,000 copies in 1862 (196).

Beetham has emphasised the ephemerality of the individual periodical; its status is that of a date-stamped commodity (“Towards a Theory of the Periodical as a Publishing Genre” 21). However, the life span of a steamship press newspaper like *Home News* was arguably different. Four weeks might elapse between the date of publication printed on the front page, which indicated the point at which the issue left London, and the arrival of copies in Anglo-Indian readers’ hands. *Home News* had begun life as a nine-pence bimonthly “issued on the 7th and the 24th of each month” (“The Home News” *The Examiner* 15). Therefore, ideas of obsolescence and currency were relative according to one’s location in this early period. Improving connectivity between England and India in the ensuing years meant the periodicity of *Home News* would evolve. By the 1880s, it had developed into a weekly publication issued every Friday. *Home News* and its fellow steamship press titles would have been a firm fixture on the reading landscape of British India by this point. Promotion for the newspaper in this period underscored the journal’s longevity noting that it had been in existence since 1847 (“The Home News” *The Pall Mall Gazette* 16).

*Home News* was a newspaper of both the rail and the sea since the 1870s owing to the reorientation of its distribution via the Overland Mail, which meant the maritime stage of its carriage commenced in Brindisi. The paper’s distribution was allied to the Peninsular and Orient Steamship Navigation Company shipping timetable, which would have situated its dissemination on a fixed and regular footing. The more direct passage to India facilitated by the Suez Canal meant there might now be as little as two and a half weeks of a disparity between the date stamp and the publication’s arrival in the East. Nevertheless, the spell of time necessary for delivery was significant in the
context of a periodical, which was by definition news-centric. Readers in the initial decades of the century would have had little option but to resign themselves to the inevitable time lag along with the possible obsolescence of the stories in Home News. Robert Fortune recounted how the arrival in late 1840s Hong Kong of the P & O steamship upon which he was travelling precipitated a rush to collect the mail (including newspapers) that the vessel was carrying. He went on to describe how “those of our visitors who had been lucky enough to get hold of a ‘Straits Times,’ ‘Home News,’ or ‘Times’ returned on shore to peruse it” (2). Grindlay’s network of distribution in the 1880s included a body of agents dotted across Indian and East Asian cities who administered subscriptions to the newspaper (“Home News for India, China, and the Colonies” 29).

The 1880s was a more technologically advanced era; undersea telegraphic communication cables had connected Britain and India since 1870 (Kubicek 252). While Home News had fallen in price to sixpence per issue and one could procure an annual subscription for thirty-two shillings sixpence inclusive of postage to the East, timeliness is amongst the most valuable currencies in the circulation of news. The resultant potential for far swifter, less expensive transmission of information between London and East Asia meant that the principal telegraphic news agencies like Reuters were acquiring an increasing hegemony over the international flow of information.15 The steamship press progressively lost the advantage it had held over the newspapers printed and produced in the Raj itself. H.G. Keene, who worked in India as an official, would observe “news that was more than a month old was a little faded ere it reached Calcutta—like the noises of the street to a man dozing in his stall at a theatre” (50). A local press may not have entirely satisfied nineteenth-century readers’ needs. Major Gordon Casserly recalled that “evening brought with it the dullest hours of the day. The Calcutta newspaper, which arrived by post every afternoon, was soon read; and the English journals sent to us from regimental

headquarters were a month old” (30). Putnis actually identifies the telegraph’s supersession of the steamship press as the primary cause underlying the decline of this media in the final years of the nineteenth century ("Steamship Newspapers” 599).

When Home News launched, it sought to trade on audience familiarity with a long-standing publication, noting in advance promotion that “in appearance, the Home News will resemble the Spectator” (“The Home News” The Examiner 15). The claim was not an idle one, as discernible similarities in design, typography, format, and organisation of content existed between the two papers. Home News was also printed in folio format and employed a dual column layout. An itemised table of contents appeared at the beginning of an individual issue. Home News had grown from twenty-four to thirty-two pages in length by the 1880s. However, six of its thirty-two pages in this era were comprised entirely of advertising so the augmented issue did not equate to a substantial increase in reading matter. Although a number of these advertisements would employ visuals to illustrate their wares or for branding purposes, the articles of Home News would remain unillustrated. While this meant that the periodical was quite text-heavy, margins of one inch in size did surround the text. Home News was printed on average quality paper, which meant there would have been minimal bleed and an individual copy would have withstood reading by a number of different individuals and circulation in a communal context. In addition, there was a greater typographical generosity to specific sections of an issue like the opening “General Summary”, which was a rundown of notable news stories. This “General Summary” section also printed in upper case the names of the individuals who featured in the respective stories, which would have facilitated the reader who desired to browse and scan. Interestingly, the instalments of the serial fiction introduced by Griffiths would also appear in this larger print, which would have set it apart from the surrounding pieces underscoring that this was an item deemed to be of equivalent significance to the content that was foregrounded in the publication. Furthermore, this more sizeable typography would have rendered the experience of reading the serial a great deal more pleasing to the reader’s eye
in comparison with the smaller type used in many of the newspaper’s other articles.

The news stories that appeared in Home News were subdivided into various categories or “intelligences” as the publication termed them. These comprised the opening “General Summary”, a “Table Talk” synopsis of the key stories of the day, foreign, court and fashionable, clerical and university, legal, money, and shipping together with pages given over to the army and navy gazettes. The prefatory table of contents box modelled on the listing offered at the beginning of an issue of the Spectator organised these headings alphabetically as opposed to sequentially. Therefore, readers could browse or read in a linear way if they so wished, but those in search of a particular variety of news were not compelled to skim through the entire issue and could pursue a targeted reading strategy. Habitual readers of Home News would discern a near unvarying continuity in the constitution and pagination of these subcategories.

How might one characterise these readers? Insofar as it is possible to extrapolate information about the composition of the Home News audience of the 1880s from the columns of advertising printed on the opening and closing pages, the products and services that were being promoted suggest a high proportion of male readers that included a significant body of soldiers. Army supplies agents, military and naval outfitters, saddlers, munitions dealers, and specialist interest army periodicals all publicised their wares in the pages of Home News in this era.

In addition, a host of businesses based in major English cities signalled their capacity to deliver their merchandise to the East. Products specifically related to the Anglo-Indian lifestyle like freezing apparatuses, ice making devices, and patent medicines for heat stroke and fever were promoted. Firms like gentlemen’s and ladies’ clothing companies, furniture retailers, cigarette manufacturers, wine and spirit distributors, stationers, and booksellers and newsagents also advertised in Home News. These businesses were not merely selling consumer goods, they were signalling a capacity to aid potential Anglo-Indian customers to continue in part the lifestyle they had led back in England.
or indeed attain a higher standard of living than might have been possible at home. Beetham has observed that the periodical is distinct from the book as the former “must [...] offer its readers models of identity which they can readily recognise and indeed occupy and which they are prepared to pay for again and again” (“In Search of the Historical Reader” 95). If we consider momentarily the significance of the title employed by Grindlay’s newspaper, it becomes clear that it was not simply a news source as it also offered readers the chance to circumvent their geographical distance from England and preserve their connection with the place that many persisted in seeing as home.

The various categories of “Intelligence” that featured in Home News suggest an effort to satiate such an appetite for information in the broadest possible spectrum of readers. It is possible to single out a number of definite characteristics of the sort of reader constructed by Home News in the 1880s. A wish to remain connected with events in England was paramount. This need was often acute. Sir Joseph Fayrer, an English army surgeon who lived in India, wrote of the Mutiny period recalling how “on the 29th of September [...] A ‘Home News’ of 30th of August reached us to-day- all eager to devour it. We heard that 20,000 troops were on their way out from England” (226). The implied reader possessed a definite interest in politics and international affairs as the political coverage was considerable. Yet s/he was not entirely serious minded as coverage of criminal trials and a society gossip column featured too. S/he may also have been of a commercial frame of mind as developments on the money markets were reported. The implied readership was also military or naval in character as two pages of Home News in the 1880s were allocated to the Army and Navy gazettes, which reported on the latest appointments and promotions in these fields. A Ladies’ Column had featured in Home News during the tenure of Griffiths’ predecessor, T.H.S. Escott. Griffiths ended this particular feature and we can but speculate about his motives. Yet it is worth noting that few products specifically aimed at female consumers appeared in the advertising columns of Home News. However, Flint has demonstrated that nineteenth-century woman readers did not confine their reading to matter specifically gendered female owing to a paucity of reading material or simply
because they deemed those texts intended for them unappealing (The Woman Reader 155). Furthermore, the Home News reader of the period was possessed of a desire to remain au fait with developments in British culture. Reviews of recently published novels and non-fiction works along with rundowns of the current issues of the principal monthly magazines were featured. Even dramas playing on the London stage were sometimes reviewed. To this end, the species of historical reader of Home News that emerges when one considers the dynamic in play between the three types that Beetham singles out is that of a nineteenth-century Briton in Asia seeking to remain connected with Europe, yet who desires that link to be rooted in up-to-date information. That said, I do not believe it possible to theorise reading solely at an individual level as print also enables the formation of communal ties, both literal and figurative.

Home News is the sort of title one can easily imagine present in expatriate clubs and common rooms. Anglo-Indian newspaper reading could also be a communal exercise. Iltudus Prichard, a civil servant, wrote that:

the custom has grown up among us of meeting at one another’s houses in the morning after parade is over, or on our return from our morning walk or ride. In a shady nook in the garden, or in a summerhouse, these social gatherings take place, where from half an hour to an hour, or even longer, those who are very intimate meet round the breakfast-table, for so it must be called, discuss the news, open their letters or newspapers, talk gossip (128).

One might also conceptualise the audience of Home News in terms of Anderson’s idea of an imagined community. The publication essentially offered its readership a customised, constructed worldview and had the capacity to serve as an apparatus that aided in sustaining a reader’s sense of national identity. One is loath to conceive of such things in uncomplicated or monolithic terms and as Brake, Bell, and Finkelstein stress we cannot assume an unquestioning reader assimilation of the models of identity on offer (4). Yet it is plausible that an individual reader would recognise that his/her consumption of Home News would be replicated more or less concurrently by thousands of other fellow Britons with whom s/he may not have been personally acquainted and who may have resided at a significant geographical remove across the
continent of Asia. The question of possible Indian consumption of *Home News* is not an issue with which I have elected to engage here. Yet given *Home News*’ framing of itself as a medium of sustaining Anglicization, one wonders if the prospective education in Englishness to be procured from consuming this title was ever enlisted in the colonizing process. Moreover, in light of Priya Joshi’s underscoring of the appetite for long-form British popular fiction like G.W.M Reynolds amongst nineteenth-century Indian readers, the possibility that the serial novel Griffiths introduced into the newspaper would attract consumers from this audience should not be discounted.

Griffiths had a great deal in common with the Anglo-Indian readers of *Home News*. His early life was spent in India while a significant amount of his adult life was passed serving as a soldier in Nova Scotia and Gibraltar. Therefore, his Anglo-Indian heritage and his personal experience of the expatriate way of life would have furnished him with a degree of insight into the needs and proclivities of the journal’s readership that his predecessors in the *Home News* editor’s chair would not have possessed. One of his earliest editorial decisions suggests that Griffiths was of the opinion that a serial novel was something that would appeal to these readers. Shirley Brooks’ 1867 to 1874 editorship had seen the launch of regular *Home News* literary supplements. The material that had appeared in these supplements would be incorporated into the main part of *Home News for India* by the 1880s. My own archival research into this aspect of the periodical echoes Putnis’ view that the literary supplements accompanying the sister title, *Home News for Australia*, resembled a literary review as opposed to a miscellany that included serial fiction. Therefore, the serialization of Arthur Griffiths’ novel, *Fast and Loose*, in the pages of *Home News* represented a reorientation of the journal and an effort to imbue it with an alternative sort of attraction for readers.

It is likely that Griffiths penned the 30 November 1883 notice which announced that the newspaper’s serialization of *Fast and Loose* would begin imminently. It read:

> In December 7’s *Home News* the first chapters of a new novel by Major Arthur Griffiths [will appear…] to be continued from week to week. The plot will be based upon incidents and episodes of constant occurrence in the world to-day. It will treat various
peculiar aspects of modern life. The characters will be drawn from persons of all classes [...] those in assured positions, those who have fallen to the lowest depths, those in the drawing room, the City, even the convict prison. The elucidation of one of the great problems of the day will be attempted in the story [...] A vein of human interest will run through the whole ("Announcement" Home News 17).

The serial ran from 7 December 1883 to 14 November 1884. The language employed seemed to engage in a conscious effort to situate the novel alongside Dickens’s “large canvas” socio-political serial fiction of the 1850s. Griffiths sketches a diverse and broad panorama of characters all of whom are associated in one way or another with the fictional London banking house of Candalent, Dandy & Waldo.

The success of a serial narrative is predicated on its capacity to secure a commitment from its audience that they will return repeatedly to the medium in which the serial is being circulated. Suspense-laden instalment conclusions are the characteristic means of achieving this loyalty. Griffiths demonstrated great skill in ensuring that the weekly parts of Fast and Loose ended on a particularly dramatic unresolved note or with the partial disclosure of an especially significant revelation. For example, the conclusion of the 29 February 1884 instalment would have proven particularly dramatic as it ended immediately prior to the delivery of the verdict in a criminal trial. This sort of tension is resolved the following week before the cycle begins anew. The 13 June 1884 instalment finished on a particularly tantalizing note with the extent of corruption at the bank coming to light and an omen that further trouble is afoot for the house. Suspense of this sort is unravelled over a greater number of instalments.

The serial fiction narrative is also propelled by the prospect of an ultimate grand revelation that is foreshadowed with growing degrees of intensity. As one might expect with a nineteenth-century novel, this secret centres in Fast and Loose on the hitherto-concealed parentage of one of the central characters. Carlyle famously described the concise instalments demanded by the weekly serial novel mode as “teaspoons” (Schlicke “A Tale of Two Cities” 551). This was a particularly apt designation for the sorts of instalments in which Fast and
Loose appeared; the serial consisted of two chapters published every week over a fifty-week period. I would characterise these individual instalments as situational vignettes centring on a particular zone of Griffiths’ canvas and featuring a specific cluster of characters.

The instalments of *Fast and Loose* habitually appeared on pages twelve to fourteen of *Home News* directly after the society, clerical, university, and legal intelligences. One could almost liken the reading experience that Griffiths afforded to those who were faithful devotees of his serial to a routine letter from a dependable correspondent who each week offered word on the continuing fortunes of a particular subset of people from a body of mutual acquaintances. Griffiths’ prolific career as a novelist was merely in its initial phase when *Fast and Loose* launched. Accordingly, a great deal depended on the arresting notice announcing the serial’s commencement and crucially, the opening instalment. The latter was not short on drama as the initial theft at the bank comes to light and suspicion falls on the chief cashier. The newspaper had become the habitual vehicle for the serial novel from the mid-1870s with the rise of Tillotson’s syndication service (Law 33) and Griffiths and his employers must surely have hoped that the sensation and mystery of *Fast and Loose* would appeal to the common reader’s appetite for fiction.

The apparent loss of the Grindlay papers means that we do not possess the means to appraise quantitatively whether *Fast and Loose* successfully tapped into this appetite and revitalised *Home News* circulation in the process. Nevertheless, it is significant that Griffiths contributed no further serial fiction to the publication, electing instead to disseminate his subsequent work via forums such as the railway bookstall. The dynamics of the print environment had shifted, eclipsing *Home News* to a certain degree. The mode of identity that the publication offered its readers hinged on the fact that although they were at a significant geographical remove from “home”, it was still possible to keep alive a link with this place by appraising oneself of current events there. However, the rate at which the apparatus furnishing this connection functioned also had the effect of emphasising the extent of the remove one stood from “home”. The tolerance for this evidently diminished over time as swifter
alternatives came within reach. Furthermore, the dénouement of *Fast and Loose* had demonstrated (unwittingly one assumes) the dangers of disconnection from the most current stories circulating in the metropolis. The newspaper was amongst the principal sites for the circulation of serial fiction in the late Victorian period. Yet other channels for satisfying one’s appetite for fiction had also evolved as a new species of magazine began to dominate Victorian print culture ushering in a different mode of serial narrative.

3. The Late-Victorian Periodical Press

A more ambitious magazine is that which Messrs. Ward, Lock and Bowden have brought out—*the Windsor*. This is edited anonymously, and contains two serials, together with other fiction, and is obviously an attempt to compete with *The Strand*, which continues to be at the top of the tree (“The New Magazines of the New Year” *The Review of Reviews* January 1895. 62).

Advancements in the technology driving the manufacture of print commodities and the emergence of both new and expanded readerships led to the development of a new generation of popular magazines in the final decades of the century. The original of the species was *The Strand Magazine*. This new breed of magazine engendered new modes of serial and visual narrative, which in turn fostered new sorts of reading strategies. Commercial success inevitably elicits imitators and competitors who endeavour to capitalize on the opening in the market delineated by the innovatory party. Arthur Morrison was one writer who straddled the boundary between *The Strand* and its leading competitor.

*The Windsor Magazine* was a sixpenny illustrated monthly published by Ward, Lock & Bowden; its debut January 1895 issue appeared on 12 December 1894 (“The Biggest and Best Sixpennyworth Ever Issued” 483). Edward G.D. Living’s history of the firm quotes average monthly circulation figures for *Windsor* of between 110,000 to 115,000 copies (74). Barbara Quinn Schmidt highlights that the magazine’s choice of title with its allusion to the royal residence reflects an effort to capitalise on the high regard in which certain quarters of the middle class held the royal family (452). *Windsor* was one of a
number of new titles that took its cues from the format of George Newnes’ *The Strand Magazine* in the hope of also tapping into the lucrative middlebrow appetite that *The Strand* had satisfied with such great success (Reed 98). The Ward, Lock & Bowden publication represented a very conscious imitation; its format, typography, and page layout were almost identical to the Newnes title.

The new magazine’s engagement of Arthur Morrison in his capacity as creator of the series detective, Martin Hewitt, suggests a deliberate effort to poach *Strand* readers as the first seven Hewitt short stories had appeared in the pages of Newnes’ magazine from March to September 1894. *The Windsor Magazine* Marriage Insurance Scheme, which was unveiled along with the launch of the publication, was a novel promotional initiative that equalled any of Newnes’ gimmicks. It would have held considerable appeal for that aspirational constituency of the rising middle class as it allowed families to make an annual payment into a fund that would guarantee or enhance the size of their daughters’ dowries when they reached marriageable age (O’Conor Eccles 201-202). Advance promotion in the *Academy* underscored the breadth and substance of the *Windsor* billing it “The Biggest and Best Sixpennyworth Ever Issued” (483). The one hundred-page issue of the magazine represented an excellent return for one’s sixpence. Instalments of two serial novels, several short stories, together with six to eight articles on a variety of subjects, poetry, and extensive visual content all featured. The presence of serial fiction set *Windsor* apart from *The Strand* as the Newnes enterprise in this period privileged series of interconnected but self-contained short stories ahead of novels published in instalments. Ward, Lock & Bowden’s decision to feature serial novels suggests a calculated effort to foster a monthly purchasing habit in its audience. A monthly outlay of sixpence would have been eminently affordable to most strata of the middle class given that Jackson notes that the typical income of the late Victorian and Edwardian middle classes ranged from £160 to £700 per annum (41).

*Windsor* formed part of the new wave of popular magazines of the late nineteenth century that emerged in the late Victorian print marketplace. The sale of the magazine at railway bookstalls along with the prominence of light
genre fiction suggests that an important constituency of the target readership was the rising middle class commuting public or the “gathering millions” (to borrow Ferris’ term). The general register and typical subject matter of the non-fiction fare exuded accessibility. The size of the typography and the line spacing were both generous while visual content was a central part of the publication.

In addition, the subtitle of the Windsor, which was “a home magazine for men and women”, was reflected in the inclusion of female oriented content such as pieces on interior design, home-making, fashion, and family, suggests an effort at intra-publication segmentation. The foreword that opened the first number articulated Ward, Lock & Bowden’s aspirations that their journal be consumed as entertaining but not insipid recreation by a family audience in the domestic sphere (“Windsor: A Foreword” 2). Therefore, an individual copy of the magazine lent itself to consumption by multiple different readers of varying outlooks and interests. Furthermore, the monthly rundown of readers’ letters and submissions that appeared in “The Editor’s Post-Bag”, which was introduced in the journal’s second year, indicate that there was an international dimension to the readership of the Windsor. This page recounted the receipt of reader correspondence from Japan, Australia, and New Zealand and featured photomechanical reproductions of photographs received from these readers.

The configuration of Windsor had the capacity to stimulate lateral reading strategies amongst its audience, particularly those who were habitual readers. Greenfield likens the March 1895 Hewitt story “The Holford Will Case” to Conan Doyle’s “A Case of Identity” and “The Adventure of the Cooper Beeches” as it features a vulnerable young woman who almost falls victim to a scheming male relative’s attempts to defraud her of her inheritance (26). Miss Garth is the ward and heiress of Mr Holford but the old man’s will goes missing immediately after his death, meaning that Holford’s nephew, Mr, Mellis, will instead inherit the estate and Miss Garth will be penniless. Hewitt discovers that Mellis used hypnosis to force Miss Garth to secrete her guardian’s testament. Greenfield highlights the likely association that the late Victorian reader would formulate with du Maurier’s Svengali (26). The print context within which the audience
consumed “Holford” would reinforce such analogous thinking. This particular number of *Windsor* also featured an article on the Italian community living in Saffron Hill. The piece included a section on “Dickens’ Fagin Land at the Present Time” with the authors also examining the history of this quarter of London focusing particularly on its associations with the other most notable mesmeric Jew in Victorian literature.

Moreover, the preceding issues of *Windsor* had included the early instalments of Guy Boothby’s *A Bid for Fortune*, which had introduced the mysterious figure of Doctor Nikola who is shown to possess the capacity to influence and control the behaviour of others. It is possible that certain readers would view the shadowy calculating Mr Mellis, who early in the story is revealed to have studied both medicine and law, through the lens of Nikola. Similarly, the January and February parts of Henry Seeton Merriam’s *The Grey Lady* had depicted a young woman who is left destitute and compelled to leave her family home due to an unforeseen development with her father’s estate. Consequently, readers would have been sensitive to the fate that potentially awaited Miss Garth. The design of the March issue also fostered dialogic reading. Further information was offered on the provisions of *The Windsor Magazine* Marriage Insurance Scheme; it was revealed that participating women over the age of fifty could claim an annuity if they had not accessed the dowry fund earlier in their lives. The need for this sort of provision highlighted the potential financial vulnerability of older women and reflected their increasing number in society. This knowledge combined with the considerable attention afforded by earlier accounts of the scheme to the plight of young women without dowries would underscore the particularly desperate situation of Miss Garth.

Greenfield’s study of the plots of the three Hewitt series overlooks entirely the role of illustration in magazine audiences’ construal of narrative. Seven separate illustrations were spread throughout each Morrison story. The layout strategy employed during this era in the *Windsor* meant that a certain proportion of the pages of an individual Martin Hewitt story would be
characterised by a blend of image and text. Stuart Sillars observed of this class of publication:

The older magazines of the 1850s and 1860s had contained episodes of serial fiction, usually with one or at the most two wood-engraved illustrations for each part, the new magazines were largely composed of self-contained short stories, each of which had three, four or more illustrations, often in half-tone (Visualisation in Popular Fiction 73).

The era of photomechanical reproduction of illustrations had dawned by the 1890s yet the general tenor of this artwork reflects Gerry Beegan’s contention that such advancements in process methods did not necessarily result in a more detailist style of image (11-12).

The first series of cases featuring Morrison’s detective that had appeared in the pages of The Strand were accompanied by illustrations from Sidney Paget. Morrison’s collaboration with Paget would have situated Hewitt very firmly within the shadow of the other high profile serial detective whose adventures the artist had previously chronicled in pictures. Hewitt’s 1895 relocation to Windsor saw Paget replaced with an illustrator engaged by Ward, Lock & Bowden. David Murray Smith was a comparatively less distinguished figure but this is not to suggest that any major decline in quality is discernible in the second series’ visual co-text. Nonetheless, it is notable that the very first illustration in the opening January 1895 story of the second series of Martin Hewitt tales is a representation of the titular character (Figure 6). It is clear that Smith took his cues from Paget regarding Hewitt’s physical appearance; there are no significant differences between the original and later representations of the detective. Paget’s legacy was not solely limited to the characterisation of the protagonist as Smith also continued to employ the visual narrative structure in evidence in Doyle’s “A Scandal in Bohemia” and Morrison’s “The Lenton Croft Robberies”, where the illustrations charted the successive stages in the protagonist’s investigative journey.

For example, the quest narrative framework in the visual co-text of the January 1895 story, “The Ivy Cottage Mystery” begins with Hewitt being summoned to consult on the case and ends with the detective’s final confrontation with his antagonist. Smith’s employment of this framework, which chronicled the steps in deductive process, would have reaffirmed the
detective fiction credentials of this particular series of Hewitt stories. Morrison had ventured into somewhat more varied generic territory with several tales. The shipboard setting and missing treasure plot of the February 1895 “The Nicobar Bullion Case” owed a certain debt to the sea novel. There was also a more highly coloured quality to the plot of the April 1895 “The Case of the Missing Hand” in comparison with earlier Hewitt fiction. Not only did it follow the detective’s efforts to recover the titular body part, but also the folk myth of ‘the hand of glory’ was the critical revelation in Hewitt’s solution to the mystery. In addition, this style of organising the visual narrative fostered an enhanced participatory quality in the reading experience offered by Morrison’s fiction, as a reader who consumed the illustrations sequentially would potentially feel as if s/he were accompanying the detective in investigating the crime.

The majority of illustrations would have functioned in an analeptic way for *Windsor* readers while several would have been situated directly adjacent to the textual passage that inspired them. There were scarcely any instances where the proleptic parts of the visual narrative blatantly disclosed important plot twists before they featured in the text. This is not to suggest that the reader who afforded a comparable degree of attention to Smith’s illustrations as s/he gave to letterpress would not open him/herself up to an enhanced reading experience. The first and third illustrations (Figure 7) (Figure 8) that featured in “The Nicobar Bullion Case” had the capacity to intensify the mystery of this story as the nature of their depiction of the ship’s second officer introduced a red herring into the plot that would encourage readers to suspect this man of stealing the missing bullion.

An unsettling quality also haunted the conclusion of “The Nicobar Bullion Case” as although Hewitt recovers the stolen precious metals, the villain would successfully evade capture in a situation that replicated the events at the end of “Ivy Cottage”. The extradiegetic quality to Smith’s work on the Hewitt series is predominantly insubstantial yet the visual narrative of this story would moderate the writer’s refusal of closure as the seventh and final illustration offers a quasi-reassuring depiction of Hewitt apprehending Gullen’s accomplices (Figure 9). Morrison’s departure from the print context of George Newnes’
philosophy of wholesome entertainment for the newer pastures of Ward, Lock & Bowden’s journal meant it was possible for him to send Hewitt into territory that was of a slightly darker and more vivid hue.

However, the full extent of this departure to a comparatively less inhibited field was not always reflected in the composition of the visual co-text. The title of “The Case of the Missing Hand” evokes a certain “literature of the charnel house” quality and the critical incident of the plot centred on the discovery in an isolated forest of a man’s mutilated body hanging from a tree. There is a definite sense of restraint in evidence in the visual narrative as Smith does not offer a pictorial representation of this grisly sight. Although the gypsy man’s ‘hand of glory’ ritual does feature in the penultimate illustration of the story, the shadowy and smoky quality to the drawing meant that the reader is merely afforded a glimpse of the severed body part (Figure 10).

The general atmosphere and mise en scène of the illustrations accompanying the 1895 Hewitt series typically varied according to the individual tone of each story. Ideas of atavism featured prominently in the plot of “The Case of the Missing Hand”. Accordingly, there is a wild rustic backdrop to quite a number of the illustrations in this particular story. Furthermore, Smith actually concludes the visual narrative of this particular tale with an analeptic vision of Sneathy cutting a quasi-simian figure cowering amongst the undergrowth (Figure 11). The artist displays an impressive level of sensitivity about the degree of visual contextualisation that is necessary in the scenes that he depicts. The action in “The Ivy Cottage Mystery” unfolds in routine metropolitan environments like the middle class home, a boarding house, a city office, and an urban eatery. Accordingly, the degree of scene setting that Smith performs is quite minimal as most Windsor readers would be familiar with such places. Conversely, Hewitt and Brett’s investigation into Sneathy’s death in “The Case of the Missing Hand” takes them to a gypsy encampment and this is unlikely to have been an especially familiar setting to the largely urbanite Windsor readership. Smith strived to capture the spirit of this particular environment with a vista of caravans, tents, smoke, and bustling people (Figure 12). Although this illustration advanced the narration of the story, there would
Chapter 1

also have been a certain classist voyeuristic quality to the consumption of this variety of image. Moreover, Smith collaborated with Morrison to transport the reader aboard both a merchant ship and a recovery vessel in “The Nicobar Bullion Case”. The artist was especially assiduous in his delineation of place in the opening and in the fifth illustration (Figure 13) of this story where particular attention seems to have been paid to depicting the fittings and effects above and below decks.

While Morrison’s Hewitt stories did articulate a minor level of social comment about late Victorian society, this was literature that was designed primarily to furnish its audience with escapist reading matter. The parallel text that unfolded in the sequence of illustrations appearing alongside Morrison’s writing had the potential to enrich the immersive experiential quality of these tales thus ensuring that Windsor consumers had absorbing reading matter for their leisure hours or commuting period. There were a number of stories in the second Hewitt series that ventured into yellower territory than the more purified school of detective fiction that Conan Doyle had spearheaded in The Strand. However, the model of reader woven into the periodical with its mix of popular fiction and engagingly written accessible journalism generally situated The Windsor Magazine within the middlebrow family reading market. While it may have modelled itself overtly on The Strand, this should not diminish the standing of The Windsor Magazine. It is important to emphasise as Jackson does that the format of the Newnes publication itself owed a certain debt to American magazines like Harper’s and Scribner’s (92).

Conclusion

The four periodicals considered here are united by the fact that when launching their efforts to establish a foothold in the marketplace, they pursued a strategy where they anchored a certain proportion of their identities in already existing (and successful) commodities. Lest one regard this as mere derivativeness, the periodical is an object that exists to sell itself and romantic
ideas of originality are not especially relevant in the context of the breed of mainstream commercial publication under consideration in this study. A product’s fate in the marketplace is largely determined by its capacity to realise an apposite blend of familiarity tempered by novelty. In case of the periodical, the “new” quotient centres on the publication’s ability to tap into a need or an appetite that existing print commodities are not satisfying. This process of modelling did not occur solely in the realm of content. The strategy of situating the new publication within a particular strand of print also centred on the associations that its aesthetic evoked. The ocular resonance that analogous material coding would evoke in readers suggests also a calculated effort to trade on the target readership’s previous encounters with the established publication. Moreover, the periodical is an adaptive form that can rebrand and reorient itself if its initial or longstanding shape is not in tune with the appetite of its intended constituency.

The title under which a publication was circulated constituted a core part of the branding process necessary to institute habitual consumption. Such exercises in habit formation often endeavoured to ally the periodical with a specific reading community, space, or period. The target constituencies along with the sorts of readerships constructed by the periodicals’ material and compositional codes represent the readers whose experiences lie most readily within our reach. Nevertheless, that is not to say that other sorts of individual would not have read these publications. The history of reading is replete with examples of sideways consumption. Serial fiction also commonly served as the buttress of the brand that the Victorian periodical set out to establish. In certain respects, analysing the serial run of a specific text in a particular publication is an exercise involving the imposition of artificial parameters. The periodical is the sort of genre that in one sense defies finitude in its continual promise that further reading matter will be delivered in forthcoming issues. While judiciously engineered divisions imposed on narrative by serial reading had the capacity to copper-fasten reader commitment to a publication, such breaks could also register a thematic statement. Hughes and Lund have highlighted the parallels between the experience of seriality and ideals
underpinning the capitalist system (4); one imagines that this sensation would grow especially palpable in those serials that trained their focus on the marketplace.

An even more distinctive strain of dialogue might well emerge from the modes of reading cultivated by the species of juxtaposition arising from the organisation of the constituent parts of an individual issue. The presentation of content on the pages of the issue also conditioned the reading strategies that the periodical texts invited. Yet this is not to contend that such associations and reading styles embodied the way that all readers would process a particular periodical. There is an individuality to each reader’s engagement with this genre of text that the complete novel issued as a codex does not permit. Moreover, those visual co-texts that accompanied the letterpress serial or series constituted an additional strain of exchange filtering into the reader’s consumption of narrative. If skilfully executed, the illustrations could heighten the immersive quality of the plot even perhaps registering on a visceral level. However, the reading process involves each reader crafting his/her unique personal sea of visuals on a cognitive level. The narrative delineated by the illustrator may have chimed with that of the reader but it might also jar. Reading a serial in the periodical press commonly demanded a six-month commitment; a book typically offered a more concentrated sort of reading experience. Particular sorts of volumes were encoded for consumption in specific environments and some texts were marketed on their capacity to meet the needs or tastes of distinct communities of readers.
Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Figures


Chapter 1

Chapter 1 List of Figures [CD]


Chapter 2: Readers, The Book, and Value

Introduction

To reconstruct this process of the actualization of texts in its historical dimension first requires that we accept the notion that their meanings are dependent upon the forms through which they are received and appropriated by their readers [...] Readers [...] in point of fact, are never confronted with the abstract or ideal texts detached from all materiality; they manipulate or perceive objects and forms whose structures and modalities govern their reading [...] thus the possible comprehension of the text read (Chartier The Order of Books 3).

As Roger Chartier observes, readers’ encounters with texts do not take place in a vacuum, materiality is a key determinant of the experience one derives from print. The reconstitution of the serial text as a book reconfigured the dynamics of reader engagement with plot. In theory, the reader now held a comparatively greater degree of agency with regard to the imposition of breaks in the consumption of narrative, but external temporal forces, like the duration of a journey aboard public transport or the amount of time available for leisure, also exercised a significant level of influence. Eliot has highlighted that “in any money economy, price determines how a book is sold, where it is sold, in what condition it is sold, to whom it is sold, and in what quantities. It determines if and how a book gets to a reader, as well as the conditions in which that book is read and absorbed” (“Never Mind the Value, What about the Price?” 160-161). Therefore, it is possible to infer a great deal about the constitution of a book’s target readership from the economic value accorded to the format in which it was circulated. However, this is not to suggest that the readers situated in those constituencies would have comprised the entirety of a particular book’s audience. Books do not solely circulate brand new at full price nor is their circulation always grounded in a monetary transaction.

Nevertheless, the original monetary value will be reflected in the codex’s production values. The esteem that readers were likely to have accorded to this fiction in light of a volume’s materiality represents a pivotal and related issue. In addition, reading does not occur in a vacuum. It is necessary also to explore the
impression registered on one’s practices by the sites from which one derives one’s reading matter together with the environment where one actually consumes the book.

1. Consumption of the Circulating Library Three-Decker

Even to people who have never been to London, the name of Mudie’s Circulating Library is not unfamiliar. Even those who have never seen the huge concern at the corner of Oxford and Museum Street know that here thousands of persons are supplied with hundreds upon thousands of books which they would never have dreamed of buying, even had they the means to do so (“Mudie’s Library” The Leisure Hour March 1886. 187).

This section aims to examine those thousands of persons to whom The Leisure Hour writer refers. The clichéd image of the Mudie customer is that of the young well to do (female) person but the reality of circulating library patronage was far less straightforward. Guinevere L. Griest’s history and Sutherland’s Victorian Novelists and Publishers are the standard accounts of the workings of Mudie’s. I would like to use their discussion as a foundation from which to consider the consumption of two less conventional writers of three-deckers during two distinct periods of the nineteenth century while also tracing how the value ascribed to fiction published in three volumes changed over time.

Fiction aimed at a middle class readership was customarily published in three volumes; the predominance of this format began in the 1820s and would continue until the final decades of the nineteenth century. A new three-decker’s prohibitive price of thirty-one shillings sixpence meant that the overwhelming majority of readers would borrow these works from private circulating libraries as opposed to purchasing their own copies. Mudie’s Select Library founded in 1842 was the foremost of these establishments and Sutherland identifies the emerging mid-Victorian middle class as the core constituency of this institution (Victorian Novelists and Publishers 25). Mudie’s “talismanic one guinea, one volume, one year” subscription as Sutherland bills it (Victorian Novelists and Publishers 24) would have been within reach of 60,000 of the 4,600,000 families in mid-Victorian Britain according to figures that Griest
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derives from *The Spectator* (79). The familial categorisation employed by Griest is significant; the opening scenario delineated in an 1869 *London Society* sketch of Mudie’s patrons highlights how the members of the family unit often determined as a collective the selection of the reading material that the household took on loan from the library (“Going to Mudie’s 445”). Sutherland notes that “a year’s reading for half-a-dozen members of a family could be had for two to three guineas, equivalent to £200 worth of new books bought in the shops” (*Victorian Novelists and Publishers* 24). The writer of this *London Society* piece also presents a collection of pen portraits of the types of patrons who pass through the doors of Mudie’s New Oxford Street headquarters.

Various categories of male reader are said to occupy a very definite presence amidst Mudie’s clientele. The professional male reader is one such individual. The following character sketch is offered:

the quiet, self-possessed man, with a deeply acute face and that expression of cynicism which has found the nose for its exponent, is a briefless barrister, who has nevertheless, fine chances in the future, and in the meantime occupies himself with writing reviews, chiefly of the tomahawking description. He has in his hand a list of all the important books coming out in his particular line of business, and calls in at Mudie’s, the earliest bird of all, to see whether any copies have just been issued from the publishers (446).

Other types who frequent Mudie’s include the man about to embark on an extended spell overseas in search of reading material for his time away. The fast young man about town also patronises the library in search of the most popular book of the moment in order to ensure that he remains *au fait* with the latest cultural trends in society.

Yet, mid-Victorian cultural commentary trained much of its attention on middle class female patronage of Mudie’s library. This *Illustrated London News* print by P. Rumpoff entitled “The End of the Book”, along with its accompanying character study detailing the voracious and supposedly superficial reading habits of the young middle class female with plentiful leisure time (Figure 14), typifies the points of view articulated by contemporary observers. There was no doubt a certain stylised quality to this particular visual but the young woman’s complete absorption in the volume she holds along with her determination to procure the remaining rays of sunlight is especially striking.
Although the “Going to Mudie’s” article had underscored the heterogeneity of
the circulating library clientele, the accompanying illustration that appeared
directly after the text takes as its subject the female patrons depicting a group
of well-to-do young women gathered outside the doors of Mudie’s in New
Oxford Street clasping volumes in their hands (Figure 15).

While the nucleus of the Mudie operation was situated at this metropolitan
London base, a sophisticated distribution network of near-global proportions
had evolved by the time the library reached the peak of its operations. *Once a
Week* appraised the various ways by which Mudie’s clients procured their
reading material:

Town subscribers generally change their own books over the counter, and the bustle of the
scene may be imagined when we say that, on the average, 1000 exchanges are effected
[sic] in the day, representing not less than 3000 volumes. Suburban subscribers are
supplied with their exchanges by cart, and those living in the country have their own
boxes; these are of all sizes, from those holding four volumes to the monster packages
holding one hundred. Upwards of a hundred of these boxes are received and sent out
each day. Taken together, no less than 10,000 volumes are circulating diurnally through
this establishment (“Mudie’s Circulating Library” 706).

The boxes that the *OAW* writer described did not merely journey from London
to other parts of England; expatriate readers also obtained reading material
from Mudie’s. *The Leisure Hour* observed that New Oxford Street regularly
dispatched volumes to colonial subscribers in South Asia and the Southern
hemisphere (“Mudie’s Library” 189). The subscription rates charged by Mudie
represented excellent value for money. This was particularly true if one was an
“omnivorous” reader as *OAW* described it; the writer cited the example of “one
lady [who] for her guinea subscription, read a number of volumes which, if
purchased, would have cost her 200l”(706). *OAW* estimated in this 1861 piece
that Mudie’s collections consisted of some 800,000 volumes, which would have
afforded borrowers a relatively wide array of choice.

Sutherland stresses that the composition of these collections owed a
great deal to the religiosity and bourgeois conservatism of the library’s founder,
Charles Mudie (25). *The Saturday Review* wrote in 1860 that

it seems that Mr Mudie has been accused of regulating his purchase of particular
publications, not by the demand for them, but by his personal preferences; this, it is
urged, is a breach of contract with the public [...] Mr Mudie rebuts the accusation [...] by
pointing out that he has always called his Library a ‘Select’ Library, and has thus formally
reserved to himself the power of selection. But the question is not as to the power of selection, but as to its limits. When Mr Mudie first styled his Library ‘Select’ he doubtless intended to distinguish it from the common circulating libraries of the time [...] now that he absorbs a third or a half of the entire issue of [three-volume novels], it is a very formidable conclusion to build on this little word ‘Select’ if he means to argue that it authorises him to bind and loose the saints and sinners of literature ("Mudie’s Library" 550).

This point of view also manifested in Carlyle’s famous 1850 remark to Charles Mudie about the Select Library founder’s apparent administration of his establishment according to a policy involving the separation of sheep from goats. Therefore, the reading experiences that subscribers enjoyed via their membership of this institution were indirectly mediated by the beliefs held by the gentleman at the helm of the library. A comparatively more direct sort of influence on subscribers’ reading would potentially emanate from the branch assistants who administered the borrowing and exchange of volumes at the New Oxford Street Great Hall. The eliciting of recommendations from these employees was apparently a common phenomenon; The Leisure Hour wrote that these book clerks were “mostly well-informed and well-read” and commonly subject to requests for “a new book” from customers of undeveloped tastes but eager to be part of the going thing (187-88).

The most prolific phase of J.S. Le Fanu’s career coincided with the zenith of Mudie’s business in the 1860s. Almost all of Le Fanu’s novels from this era were issued in three volumes by London-based publishing houses as the DUM serialization drew to a close. Richard Bentley issued a three-volume edition of Wylder’s Hand in January 1864 (“Mr Bentley’s List” 146) and a three-decker of Uncle Silas in late December of that same year (Richard Bentley “The Popular Novels at all Libraries” 846) while Tinsley Brothers published The Wyvern Mystery in three volumes in September 1869 (Tinsley Brothers “New Novels in Reading at all Libraries” 292).

Griest underscores the prestige that the three-volume novel carried in this era in comparison with its one-volume sister (49) and the bibliographical coding of these works conveyed the impression that such novels constituted an object of substance. Le Fanu’s works were firmly bound in cloth. Good quality paper
was used and each page was printed with ample margins and generously sized type.

The three-volume format imposed a distinct structure on readers’ engagement with the plot of a novel. If the reader had only borrowed a single volume from the library, the response garnered by the first and indeed second of the three volumes might well determine a reader’s continued consumption or rejection of the novel. The imposition of tantalising volume breaks represented the most obvious strategy of guaranteeing reader commitment. The volume divisions imposed on Le Fanu’s narratives were likely to pique reader curiosity. The first volume of *Wylder’s Hand* ended with the receipt of a letter supposedly from the eponymous Mark Wylder, who has recently disappeared in unusual circumstances, signalling his wish to release his fiancée, Dorcas Brandon, from her engagement. The second volume concluded with the culmination of the unscrupulous Lawyer Larkin’s scheme to secure control of the Wylder estate by ensnaring the unworldly Rev. Wylder into relinquishing his claim to the property. 16 Similarly, the first volume of *Uncle Silas* concluded with the newly orphaned Maud Ruthyn’s receipt of a letter from her enigmatic eponymous guardian stating that she is to come live with him. Maud’s befriending of a girl in the neighbouring property of her guardian’s house, may ostensibly have seemed a more low-key conclusion to the second volume of *Uncle Silas* but the importance of this connection would become clear in the third volume when the threat Silas poses to Maud becomes clear. The opening volume of *The Wyvern Mystery* closed with Charles Fairfield’s procrastination about revealing the full extent of his financial difficulties to his new wife, Alice. The novel’s second volume came to an end with the local doctor’s pronouncement that Charles is unlikely to recover from the injuries he sustained in an attack by his vengeful mistress. The doctor also reveals that Alice is pregnant with the couple’s first child. 17

16 The first volume ended at the same point in the story where the September 1864 instalment of *Wylder’s Hand* serialised in the DUM had concluded. The end point of the second volume of *Wylder* did not echo any of the subsequent serial breaks.

17 The volume divisions imposed on the 1864 edition of *Uncle Silas* and 1869 edition of *Wyvern* did not replicate any of the endings from the serial run of both novels.
The designation on the title pages of Le Fanu’s works that the novels were emanating from the houses of Bentley or Tinsley in the case of Wyvern would have situated his fiction within quite a specific literary context. Tinsley’s leading novelist in the earlier years of the 1860s had been Mary Elizabeth Braddon, the foremost female writer of sensation fiction. Braddon’s reputation in this era rested on her unconventional transgressive heroines but Bertha Velderkaust of The Wyvern Mystery was a grotesque creation poles apart from Lady Audley. Sensation fiction in three volumes (albeit by largely minor writers) still represented a significant presence in Tinsley’s output during the period when Wyvern was published (“Tinsley Brothers’ New Books” 292). Furthermore, the house had also issued the volume edition of Wilkie Collins’ The Moonstone in 1868. Bassett’s meticulous study of the economics of Bentley’s three deckers during the 1860s underscores the predominance of popular female novelists in the house’s output in this era. Ellen Wood, author of the bestselling East Lynne (1862), was the most high profile of these writers. The advertising context in which Wylder’s Hand was promoted saw the novel juxtaposed with the second edition of Wood’s The Shadow of Ashlydyat (“The Four Popular Novels” 349). The juxtaposition was a somewhat specious one. Both novels were set in the households of gentry families. Each centred on young men driven to ruin and crime and heroines compelled to endure suffering owing to the excesses and transgressions of their male relatives. It is ostensibly true that Le Fanu’s novels were in a broadly similar vein to the school of sensation fiction parodically delineated in this 1864 Punch cartoon (Figure 16) and consumed with such zeal by Mudie’s patrons in this era. Yet one wonders to what extent his particular brand of psychological gothic and the unsettling tone that pervades his writing would have been entirely suited to that constituency of Mudie’s subscribers in search of light reading or a less claustrophobic sort of sensation. The Saturday Review opened its review of The Wyvern Mystery by observing that “the name of Mr Le Fanu is a guarantee for a ghastly kind of sensationalism” (“The Wyvern Mystery” 457).

Le Fanu himself displayed considerable unease with the perception of his work as sensation fiction. The writer even included a preface in the 1864
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dition of *Uncle Silas* that registered a desire that his work be interpreted as “a tragic English romance” (vii) in the context of Walter Scott’s Waverley Novels. He wrote “no one, it is assumed, would describe Sir Walter Scott’s romances as ‘sensation novels’; yet in that marvelous series there is not a single tale in which death, crime, and, in some form, mystery, have not a place” (vi). Similarly, the January 1864 issue of the *Dublin University Magazine* had featured a poem satirizing the current vogue for sensation fiction. It lampooned the more fanciful excesses of Lady Audley. The verse also highlighted the existence of an older tradition in prose fiction and on the stage where a different sort of highly coloured subject matter flourished. Reader appetite for sensation fiction conditioned by consumption of Collins, Braddon, et al together with the publication of novels in three volumes were the defining conditions of the sector of the popular fiction marketplace in which Le Fanu was operating in the 1860s. The dynamics of reader tastes, values, and habits shifted somewhat in later decades; surprisingly, author efforts to tailor their output accordingly did not always proceed entirely unimpeded.

Chapman and Hall published Arthur Griffiths’ *Fast and Loose* in three volumes in late 1884 (“New Novels: Chapman & Hall” 644). Although its production values were lavish with a characteristically generous typographical arrangement, *Fast and Loose* was not likely to have been held in an equal degree of esteem as an equivalent work issued in the mid-Victorian era. The rise in the quantity of three deckers issued had seen a corresponding decline in the overall quality of work appearing in this format (Griest 170).

One also gets the sense of a growing perception of the three-volume novel as offering a hackneyed sort of reading experience. This 1885 *Punch* cartoon highlights the perception of how clichéd the tripartite narrative structure had grown. (Figure 17) When reviewing his career in 1904, Griffiths noted his dissatisfaction at the time with the dissemination of *Fast and Loose* as a three-decker and even admitted to abridging the text and urgently petitioning his publishers to circulate a cheap edition (*Fifty years of Public Service* 400). Chapman and Hall complied and issued a one-volume paperback in September 1885 priced at one shilling (“New Publications: Chapman & Hall” 315). The firm
dated from the oligopolistic period of Victorian publishing and most of their attention in this era was concentrated on the Dickens reprint trade (Waugh 177-178). Accordingly, significant onus would have rested on Griffiths’ name to attract readers to *Fast and Loose*. While he was not exactly an obscure figure, his reputation at this point in his career rested largely on his non-fiction studies of criminality and penology and on his journalism. Yet this did mean that Griffiths was some way toward possessing the recognisability and eminence that Jasper Milvain of *New Grub Street* diagnosed as the prerequisites to a successful literary career.

The divisions imposed on the narrative of *Fast and Loose* by the volume breaks in the three-decker edition held ample potential to stimulate reader curiosity. The first volume ended with the duplicitous and corrupt Percy Meggitt’s ascension to the position of chief cashier at Waldo’s Bank in London. Serious doubt overhangs the bank’s future now that Meggitt and Joseph Devas, his cohort from the criminal underworld, hold such authority at the institution. The second volume concluded with the arrest of Devas and his lover at Dover while Meggitt anxiously awaits his cohort’s return from France as the pair’s embezzlement has brought Waldo’s to its knees.

The critical response elicited by the novel agreed that the subject matter of this principal plot of the novel owed a great deal to French detective fiction. *The Academy* described *Fast and Loose* as “an exciting and sensational story that suggests Gaboriau” (“New Novels” 389). *The Saturday Review* pronounced it “an English novel adapted from the French school of M. Fortuné du Boisgobey” (“Three Novels” 185) while *The Athenæum* observed that Griffiths had some way to go before he became “a successful follower of MM Gaboriau and du Boisgobey” (“Novels of the Week” 118). When writing his memoirs almost two decades later, Griffiths acknowledged that these very same writers were amongst the influences that inspired his early detective writing (*Fifty Years of Public Service* 400). If it was Griffiths’ aspiration to capitalise on the contemporaneous popularity of English language translations of Gaboriau’s fiction, the three-decker may not have been the most appropriate format by which to achieve this as the translations were circulated in inexpensive single
volume editions. The rationale underlying Griffiths’ enthusiasm for the swift publication of *Fast and Loose* in one volume becomes clearer if one appreciates the different sort of appetite he was looking to satisfy.

The bibliographical coding of the three-volume novel exuded the aura of a quality object. It also originated in a setting that branded itself “select”. The various strata of the middle class from both home and overseas sourced their reading from these institutions. The sorts of voracious reading practices facilitated by the circulating libraries may well have fostered a perfunctory as opposed to a considered approach in certain readers. The eventual saturation of the three-decker market ultimately diluted the value held by novels published in this format. The wider availability of the very same sort of fiction in more compact, less expensive modes had also eased readers’ dependency on circulating library three-deckers for new reading matter.

A certain cultural conservatism will of course pervade middle class taste. Moreover, if one derives stimulation from a particular genre or novel, this tends to beget a desire for a similar sort of pleasure in subsequent reading experiences. This can limit the appetite for writers whose output does not sit neatly within specific generic parameters or conform to the prevailing conventions of the period. Furthermore, J.S. Le Fanu demonstrates how a chasm can exist between the way a writer’s output comes to be framed and the actual spirit of their work. In addition, the traditionalism that set in amidst the arrangements between the major private circulating libraries and the principal publishing houses meant that novels like Griffiths’ *Fast and Loose* that had a greater chance of securing a more captive public in alternative venues were still initially disseminated via Mudie’s. The one-volume shilling reprint that Chapman & Hall later issued was situated at a relatively low rung of the pricing scale. The first wave of reprints of fiction originally published in three volumes typically cost between three shillings sixpence and six shillings. Readers generally consumed a reset and repaginated text rather than an abridged one while the experience of engaging with the novel could come also to encompass the consumption of newly introduced visual content.
2. Readers and The Illustrated Reprint

I think that every book bound in cloth ought to have a frontispiece at least; if possible, also a vignette for the title page. If it is a novel of a sensational or exciting nature it does not require any more. The tasteful reader when he takes up a book, likes to be introduced to it with a well drawn finely executed frontispiece; he naturally looks at that first because it opens first to him. He lingers for a space over that frontispiece, and is either attracted or repelled by it (Nisbet, “Illustrative Art Past and Present” The Gentleman’s Magazine March 1892. 271).

The illustrated book the reader with two texts made by two hands and two looks (Kooistra, The Artist as Critic, 1995, 12).

The Victorian illustrated book was a discrete category of volume. Richard Maxwell situates its origins in

A pair of converging developments: first, the art market shifted in nature, providing a powerful set of opportunities for selling books; by the same token, book illustrations were often reconfigured as new versions of high art. […] Second, book illustrations were simultaneously reimagined as a crucial component of the institution of literature, just coming into its own around 1820; illustration and literature subsequently fed off each other (Introduction, The Victorian Illustrated Book, xxv).

Dedicated review columns appraising the latest releases in illustrated books were a regular feature of the mid-and late-Victorian periodical press. The reissue of novels originally published in three volumes in one-volume editions complete with new visual co-texts was an enterprise pursued by many publishing houses. The frontispiece, which Nisbet accords considerable power in shaping the choices of the browsing reader, was an important component of this new visual matter. Lorraine Janzen Kooistra’s Bakhtinian bitextual theory of the illustrated book, which she employs in her study of fin de siècle volumes, highlights how “interpretation [was] produced out of dialogic engagements of image and text” (13) when readers engaged with such hybrid objects. David Skilton’s exemplary examination of the sorts of reading strategies invited by the illustrated novel stresses that the illustrations constituted “an elaborated interpretation” (303) of the letterpress and that the joint visual-verbal text represented “an interesting weave of narrative and commentary” (304). Publishers’ promotion typically emphasised the new pictorial elements introduced for the re-release of such fiction in cheaper editions; such reprints
sought to attract new readers to purchase a copy of these works. The aim was also to persuade readers who had already consumed the novels on loan from the circulating libraries to revisit the work by acquiring their own copy, which promised a different sort of reading experience.

*Uncle Silas* was one of the few Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu novels from the 1861-1869 phase of his career to be reprinted in a one-volume edition during the author’s lifetime. Seven months elapsed between the December 1864 release of the three-decker and Bentley’s July 1865 issue of this six-shilling crown octavo one volume edition. Bentley had purchased a two-year lease on the copyright of *Uncle Silas* from Le Fanu in 1864 (Colclough “J. Sheridan Le Fanu and the Select Library of Fiction” 10). It would prove a wise decision, as this was the Le Fanu novel that realised the greatest degree of success with critics and readers; the 1865 reprint represented an attempt by Bentley to capitalise on this. Eliot’s study of the rise of the one-volume reprint highlights the role that editions of this sort, which were released within a short space of time of the publication of the three-decker, played in the destabilisation of the three-volume format (“The Three-Decker Novel and its First Cheap Reprint” *The Library*). While a seven-month interval did not qualify as an especially overly hasty reissue in light of the case studies that Eliot chronicles, one imagines Mudie might have preferred a while longer to circulate the first edition of the novel amongst his subscribers. The reprint was cloth bound; the typeface was significantly smaller than the three-volume edition but the line spacing and margins in this reprint were comparatively ample. However, the quality of paper used was of a lower standard than that typically employed in the printing of three deckers for the circulating library trade.

Advance promotion for “the cheap edition” as the house termed it emphasized the inclusion of two illustrations in the volume (“Mr Bentley’s List” 1865 40). This pair of wood engravings would appear as a frontispiece and a title page vignette. The frontispiece illustration (Figure 18) was unsigned. While there is a signature in the bottom corner of the title page vignette (Figure 19), the script is indecipherable. It is clear that each was the work of a separate artist as the novel’s heroine is figured differently in each visual.
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This frontispiece and title page vignette combination was uniform with Bentley’s one-volume reprints of Ellen Wood’s novels. Wood was the house’s leading popular novelist in this period and the single volume cheap edition of her bestselling *East Lynne* published in May 1862 had launched the publisher’s “Bentley’s Favourite Novels” series (Maunder “A Note on the Text” *East Lynne* 36). This July 1865 edition of *Uncle Silas* was announced as the latest volume in this particular series (“Mr Bentley’s List” 1865 40).\(^\text{18}\) Priced at six shillings, the target readership of this reprint lay amongst a relatively affluent class of consumer who had a reasonable level of disposable income. Bentley’s release sought to court those readers given to purchasing books and not previously acquainted with Le Fanu’s novel along with those circulating library subscribers who had particularly enjoyed the three-decker and wished to have *Uncle Silas* as part of their personal collections. The new visual content would ideally further stimulate a desire to revisit the novel in the latter constituency while also acting as an attractive selling point for the former category of consumer.

The positioning of the two illustrations at the beginning of the volume cast the two visuals in distinctly proleptic terms. Although the frontispiece did not reference a particular page of the textual narrative, the caption beneath the visual highlighted the particular scene in Le Fanu’s text that had inspired the illustration. A reader conversant with this image of Mme de la Rougierre interfering with her employer’s private papers would regard the French governess with (reasonable) suspicion when s/he consumed the textual narrative. They would also realise that the heroine’s anxieties about Mme were not imagined and did not constitute the irrational fantasies of an unreliable narrator. There is a particularly significant extradiegetic dimension to the frontispiece as a bust situated on top of an adjacent chest of drawers gazes down upon the governess’ furtive information gathering. One possible reading of this classical sculpture is that it symbolised the ethereal master of the house,

\(^{18}\) This 1865 edition was not a continual presence in the series and *Uncle Silas* was later reissued as a “Bentley’s Favourite Novel” in 1886 with no reference to its inclusion in the collection over twenty years previously. See chapter IV for a full discussion of the later edition.
Austin Ruthyn, and his obliviousness to the threat his daughter’s governess poses to the household.

The link between the vignette on the title page and the textual narrative was far less concrete but this particular illustration would have served to reinforce the moral ambiguity surrounding the novel’s titular character. Upon first examination, the picture ostensibly depicts a moment of religious instruction involving the novel’s heroine and her uncle, Silas. However, chapter XLIV of the textual narrative reveals that this scene is actually a perversion of the familial ideal. The reader is in fact observing the heroine witness the opium-induced somnambulistic ravings of her guardian while the visual also hints at the threat of violence that overhangs the relationship between uncle and niece. Furthermore, the reader who examined this representation of Silas in a greater degree of detail was likely to be struck by the spectral quality that the illustrator elected to accentuate in his depiction of this figure. His characterisation in this visual foreshadows the otherworldly aura that will surround this character in the textual narrative. In addition, Maud’s stasis in both scenes where she is seemingly powerless to react against her governess’ transgressions or her uncle’s delirium, anticipates the passivity that would be the defining quality in the characterisation of the textual narrative’s heroine.

Maud’s first person narrative voice is amongst the most distinctive elements of Uncle Silas. However, the omniscient point of view of the images at the beginning of the volume meant that the focalisation of the narrative was initially heterodiegetic before the textual narrative engineered a switch to an exclusively homodiegetic mode. What is more, the intensely dark quality of the illustrations would have served as a prelude to the shadowy and paranoid atmosphere fostered by the textual narrative. These two episodes singled out for illustration assumed greater prominence in reader consumption of the plot of Uncle Silas, as Skilton notes those parts of the letterpress depicted in the visual narrative are “incidents [that hold] a privileged status by mere fact of their double presentation” (306). This illustrated reprint of Uncle Silas was issued within months of the publication of the original three-volume edition. The Wyvern Mystery, another of Le Fanu 1860s three deckers, would also be
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reissued in one volume, complete with illustrations. However, this reprint would be published almost two decades after its original 1869 appearance and the identity of the artist contributing the visuals was something that the publishers would underscore.

Ward & Downey’s six-shilling reprint of *Wyvern* was released in April 1889 (“New Editions of Popular Novels” 257). The announcement of the publishing house’s release of this edition framed *Wyvern* as “a novel written many years ago by the late Sheridan Le Fanu, and published in three volumes, [to be] shortly [...] issued in a single volume, with illustrations by Mr Brinsley Le Fanu, a son of the author of ‘Uncle Silas.’ It is the only one of Le Fanu’s novels which has not been reprinted” (“Literary Gossip: The Wyvern Mystery” 149). While the latter claim was not strictly true as several of Le Fanu less successful works would remain out of print until Ward & Downey’s collected works of Le Fanu venture released in 1898, the firm was in effect endeavouring to frame their edition of *Wyvern* as a lost classic or rediscovered novel.

The reprint of the Le Fanu novel was not the only enterprise in this vein pursued by the firm; Ward & Downey issued contemporaneously a six-shilling edition of the early Thomas Hardy novel, *Desperate Remedies*, first published in 1870. Bound in the same rust-coloured cloth complete with geometric emboss design as *Wyvern*, this edition of the Hardy novel had a frontispiece by F. Barnard. A prefatory note by the publisher noted it was from a phase of Hardy’s career when the “author [was] feeling his way toward a method” and “for some considerable time [had] been reprinted and widely circulated in America” (*Desperate Remedies* 1889).

The pricing of these works at six shillings positioned them as relatively expensive reprints, especially when one considers that *Wyvern* was a less prominent work by an author who had died over fifteen years ago, while the value of *Desperate Remedies* lay in the fact that it was a foretaste of Hardy’s prodigious talent as opposed to a novel of brilliance. The production values of *Wyvern* were adequate; the typographical presentation left liberal quantities of white space and no type was printed on the reverse of the leaves of volume upon which the illustrations were presented. The quality of paper used did
result in a slight bleed of text and image. *Wyvern* was an historical novel set in the early decades of the nineteenth century. The late 1880s was a transitional era in book illustration and Brinsley’s Le Fanu’s use of the older wood engraving style would have served to enhance the historical feel of the novel.

Brinsley’s new contributions were acknowledged directly beneath the statement of authorship on the edition’s title page. Essentially, Ward & Downey’s foregrounding of this dimension of their reprint of *Wyvern* represented an effort to enhance the value of their product. The implication was that the author’s son’s work held a degree of insight that no other artist could possess. Brinsley supplied six wood engravings; the edition had a frontispiece along with five illustrations that were interwoven amongst the letterpress. Three of the six drawings were presented in landscape view; Sillars has emphasised the restraining impact upon the momentum of the verbal reading experience of the adjustment in perspective necessary to consume this category of visual (26).

The captioning of the image with a sentence of dialogue and with a reference to the relevant page number invited a joint visual-verbal reading strategy in this edition of *Wyvern*. The opening of the visual narrative with a representation of Alice Maybell-Fairfield emphasised her prominence in the novel’s plot (Figure 20). The large sundial in the foreground of the frontispiece was an especially notable extradiegetic feature as this object was positioned between Alice and her husband, Charles. He is off-stage, so to speak, and it is from his perspective that we observe the vision of the heroine at work in her garden at Carwell Grange. The sundial hints at the fact that the time will separate the couple and their married life together will be short. Brinsley was pursuing what Kooistra terms an “impression” strategy (17) in the response he was advancing to the text with the design of this particular illustration.

Brinsley took his cues for the omniscient point of view in the visual narrative from the zero focalisation utilised by his father in the narration of the novel. The opening illustration in the text depicts Alice’s first vision of the exterior of her future marital home at Carwell Grange. (Figure 21) The frontispiece had portrayed a specific quarter of the Grange and reader was now
afforded a panoramic vision of the property. This first illustration was itself
distinctly analeptic and it constituted a “quotation” approach (to use another
Kooistra term for the dialogic relationship between image and text) in that it
was visual rendering of what had been presented in two earlier paragraphs of
textual description.

With the second illustration, Brinsley captures the very moment at which
the Squire begins to rethink his original view that the Rev. Maybell’s child be
sent to the workhouse (Figure 22). Charles and Alice’s secret marriage, the
subsequent familial estrangement, the violent quality that characterises the re-
entry of Charles’ past indiscretions into his new marriage, and the switching of
the Wyvern heir with a dying village baby all directly or indirectly emanate from
this decision. In addition, the positioning of this image of Alice directly after the
Carwell Grange panorama and immediately preceding the visual narrative’s sole
Wyvern scene served to foreshadow Alice’s eventual status as the latest
incarnation in a line of tragic women who were associated with the two
properties. The drawing room of the Wyvern manor house was the setting for
this third illustration (Figure 23). The intensity of the old man’s gaze as he
listens to Alice’s piano playing is itself quite suggestive. The unseemliness of the
Squire’s intention to wed Alice grows especially striking when this image is
considered alongside the previous illustration depicting the pair’s first meeting
where he was already advanced in years and she was merely a baby. The first
four illustrations depicted regular domestic scenes. However, the plots of Le
Fanu’s fiction from this period rarely remained in the natural realm nor were
events always figured in absolute or definitive terms.

The fourth illustration (Figure 24) depicts one of the verbal narrative’s
most enigmatic incidents. The novel never definitively accounts for the
mysterious vision, which apparently unsettles Alice as she walks along the
landing of Carwell Grange while in the company of Mildred Tarnley. However,
the visual narrative’s interpretation of the text suggests that Alice’s moment of
terror is not a fantasy of her impressionable imagination. The fixity of the
housekeeper’s gaze upon her new mistress suggests that the vision may be
unique to Alice. The image-text relationship is one of impression as this
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illustration imposes a degree of form upon Alice’s obscure descriptions of the sight that unsettles her. The cloud of dust that she apparently sees is delineated in a shape that is strongly suggestive of the winged two-legged dragon creature referenced in the novel’s title.

There is also a jointly proleptic and extradiegetic dimension to Brinsley’s illustration. There is a portrait in the background of the illustration of a man dressed in early modern style; this is likely a reference to Harry ‘Boots’ Fairfield. Mildred Tarnley will subsequently tell in chapter seventeen how the legend of the black curtain, which apparently ushered in the gathering of dust, is an omen associated with the suffering and mistreatment endured by multiple generations of Fairfield women at the hands of their husbands. Harry ‘Boots’ and his tragic wife, who was the original Carwell heiress, were the first in a succession of unhappy couples to reside at the property and the events of their estrangement gave rise to the myth. The final illustration also revolved around a disruptive return of a repressed past.

The secret return of Charles’ former mistress, Bertha Velderkaust, to Carwell Grange midway through the novel precipitates Wyvern’s most dramatic incident. Brinsley elected to depict the very moment when Charles’ secret past collides violently with the new life he has created with Alice. His former mistress, Bertha Velderkaust, launches a nocturnal attack upon her former lover’s new bride (Figure 25). The Dutchwoman is one of the novel’s most haunting figures; this slice of the visual narrative had considerable potential to shape readers’ conceptions of her character. The shapelessness of the Dutchwoman’s flannel nightgown lends her an androgynous air while the near complete whiteness of her eyes emphasised her blindness. There was also a particularly striking contrast between Bertha’s loose unkempt hair and Alice’s neatly coiffed locks, which was perhaps designed to signify that the two women stood at opposite ends of the moral and class spectrum. Their respective ethical polarities were further emphasised by the fact that the room’s sole point of illumination was situated directly beside Alice, which had the effect of bathing the young wife in light. This figuratively set her apart from the greyness that surrounded her husband’s belligerent mistress. An extradiegetic
dimension of the illustration also cultivated this sense of a binary opposition. A book, which we can reasonably assume to be a Bible, was placed on the bedside table that separated Alice and Bertha. Arguably, this was the most vivid of Brinsley’s six illustrations; Ward & Downey engaged another artist to reproduce it in colour for the pictorial cover of its later two-shilling 1891 edition of Wyvern (Figure 26).

The conclusion of Brinsley’s Wyvern visual narrative with this sixth illustration meant the co-text finished on an unresolved note and also replicated somewhat the sense of open-endedness produced by the unanswered questions that remain at the end of Le Fanu’s novel. This choice also meant that Brinsley’s visual contributions did not cover the novel’s later chapters that charted the early life of Alice and Charles’ son. Consequently, the focus of the illustrations in this edition upon the earlier parts of the plot had the potential to render more concrete the novel’s relationship with an 1839 Le Fanu short story that the author had used as inspiration for the core narrative of Wyvern. Interestingly, Ward & Downey once again engaged Brinsley’s services in 1894 for a three-shilling sixpence collection of his father’s short fiction entitled The Watcher and Other Weird Stories; the artist contributed twenty-one illustrations in total to this anthology of six stories. The collection featured this same 1839 story but its visual narratives invited a divergent sort of reader engagement to that of Wyvern owing to a different tone, focus, and structure.

Skilton has highlighted how the illustrator is in effect a reader who fashions an interpretation in response to the novelist’s text (303). The illustrated reprint situates the reading formulated by the illustrator as either a gateway to the novel or as a text running in parallel to the letterpress. Both of these components condition the interpretive process of those subsequent readers who consumed this fiction in these reprint editions. This visual matter also potentially shaped the impressions formed by the browsing reader examining such volumes at the bookseller’s and indeed at the library or drawing

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19 ‘A Chapter in the History of a Tyrone Family’ was published in The Dublin University Magazine in October 1839. It was the tenth instalment in the series of pieces that would later be published in collected form as The Purcell Papers (1880).
room table. The views formed by such skimming might well then contribute to readers’ selections.

On a basic level, these supplementary illustrations fed in to the conceptions of character that audiences formed in the reading process. When consumed in a linear way, a sequence of illustrations that were interwoven with the letterpress did recount their own distinct narrative. If successfully executed, the visuals could also register on a figurative level; the *mise-en-scene* of an individual illustration held a discrete significative capacity. The six-shilling reprint was a relatively expensive volume and the inclusion of visual matter was an attempt at added value. Neither of the artists who designed the two illustrations for Bentley’s *Uncle Silas* reprint is credited on the title page, which suggests that their contributions did not constitute a star turn. While both frontispiece and vignette held the potential to enrich readers’ engagement with Le Fanu’s text, it must be acknowledged that the artwork is comparatively workaday and their aesthetic value would not have been especially great. Conversely, Ward & Downey sought to use the presence of Brinsley’s drawings in their reprint of *Wyvern* as a sales point. In artistic terms, the six illustrations are relatively conventional yet there are several amongst the set that are quite evocative and multi-layered.

The visual could also constitute an important ingredient in those less expensive one-volume novels circulating in this period. The illustrated content of books with pictorial covers confronted potential purchasers even before they held the volume in their hands. Accordingly, a different aesthetic often characterised such visuals, as the ability of such books to catch a potential purchaser’s eye contributed significantly to their commercial prospects. The one-volume reprint was decidedly less cumbersome than the three-decker and lent itself to reading in contexts other than the home. Many novels that began their lives in one volume were encoded so as to meet the reading needs experienced by specific categories of individual in environments outside the domestic sphere.
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3. Consumption of Inexpensive One-Volume Fiction

No divine influence can be imagined as presiding over the birth of the work [of the popular novelist], beyond the market-law of demand and supply; no more immortality is dreamed of for it than for the fashions of the current season. A commercial atmosphere floats around works of this class, redolent of the manufactory and the shop. The public want novels, and novels must be made (Mansel “Sensation Novels” Quarterly Review, April 1863 483).

These books would certainly not be written if they did not sell; and they would not sell if they were not read; ergo, they must have readers, and numerous readers too (Mansel “Sensation Novels” Quarterly Review, April 1863 486).

A significant proportion of the inexpensively priced fiction aimed at the growing mass reading public fell within the market-driven category as delineated by Mansel and was ostensibly defined as situational reading matter.

Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s The Trail of the Serpent was published in February 1861 by Ward & Lock as a yellowback or railway novel priced at two shillings (“The Trail of the Serpent” 207). Michael Sadleir identifies 1855 to 1870 as the golden age of the yellowback (143). Yellowbacks were typically sold via railway bookstalls; the booksellers’ units on many lines would have been run by W.H. Smith in the era when The Trail was published (Colclough “Purifying the Sources” 27). Altick details how the stalls of the predominant purveyor of books and periodicals were “efficiently managed, neatly arranged, and plastered with posters.” (The English Common Reader 301). Therefore, the target readership of The Trail of the Serpent was the Victorian travelling public.

Passengers during the earliest decades of rail travel emanated mostly from the middle and upper classes but excursion trains served to open access to rail travel to the lower middle and working classes (Freeman 114-117). However, a shilling was likely to have represented a substantial outlay for the latter group of travellers. An 1864 study of railway reading in The Reader observed “any book, it seems, that is to be largely bought by railway travellers must be cheap and easily portable. A shilling appears to be the ideal price for this class of works” (“Railway-Literature” 343). The selection criteria readers employed when acquiring this sort of material were commonly of a different
order to those underpinning their regular reading choices, with The Saturday Review observing in 1857 that railway reading originated in a desire “to enable passengers to relieve in some degree the dulness [sic] of their monotonous transit” (“Railroad Bookselling”100). The writer also observed that “no doubt, the great majority of publications sold on a railway must be at once cheap and light; for such travellers as want graver books would naturally choose them beforehand, and take them with them.” The preference registered by many readers for material that did not require a substantial level of mental exertion might also be explained by Colclough’s observation that illumination in the carriages may have been poor (“Purifying the Sources” 43). The lighting provisions in these public spaces were uneven and did not universally improve as the century progressed. As late as 1902, The Saturday Review was complaining of “the non-lighting [...] or the half-lighting, or the intermittent lighting of public vehicles” (“The Lighting of Railway Trains” 424). One also was reading against a backdrop of the noise generated by the train and possibly one’s fellow passengers. These 1859 illustrations of a Christmas excursion train printed in The Illustrated Times underscore the close proximity in which passengers travelling in both compartments and carriages might be compelled to sit (Figure 27). An inexpensive novel might well serve as a tool by which to insulate the self while travelling in the company of strangers.

Therefore, some readers would have conceptualised their consumption of these volumes in predominantly functional terms. A high proportion of yellowbacks were reprints of classic novels but Altick does note that “originals” as he terms them did feature (The English Common Reader 300). The Trail stood somewhere in between these two categories as an earlier version of the novel had been published provincially the previous year as the penny serial, Three Times Dead. The text’s serial history meant the plot of the novel would have lent itself particularly well to generating momentum and sustaining reader engagement. Such republication of penny fiction as yellowbacks was apparently a not uncommon occurrence according to an 1864 discussion of railway literature in The Reader (“Railway Literature”343). The purchasers of yellowbacks were likely unaware of the prior histories of the works they were
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consuming. The title of a yellowback had an important role in eliciting interest in a potential purchaser; the renaming of Braddon’s novel to a title with a Thomas Moore allusion signalled an attempt to address a reader with greater reserves of cultural capital.

Sadleir’s examination of the yellowback form also highlights that another significant element was the cover illustration, which aimed to offer a visual representation of the book’s contents (“Yellowbacks” 127). Arguably, this image was perhaps the most potent tool an individual yellowback possessed in enticing a potential reader in search of mental stimulation for his/her journey to purchase it ahead of the other titles on offer. The illustration used by The Trail was especially eye catching as it depicted a climactic moment in the novel where the detective and the police thwart the attempts of the villain to evade capture by hiding himself in coffin (Figure 28). The use of such a sensational visual image in the paratextual zone would have led readers to regard this particular yellowback as a source of entertainment rather than edifying reading material.

Consequently, consumption of works of this sort might not have been regarded in particularly positive terms. The older gentleman in the first class compartment illustration in The Illustrated Times appears to be in the act of either inspecting or confiscating the yellowback held by the young lady. The poor quality paper and dense typographical presentation used by Ward & Lock in The Trail would not have fostered the impression that this was a particularly valuable object. If readers regarded a yellowback as a source of escapism, the advertising that featured on the back cover of The Trail would have reinforced this notion. Ward & Lock used this zone as a location to promote their series of two-shilling volumes by Gustave Aimard recounting his experiences as a European man who had lived with American Indian tribes. The series’ highly coloured titles, which included The Tiger Slayer, The Gold Seekers and The Pirates of the Prairies evoke precisely the escapism that railway literature endeavoured to offer. The Trail of the Serpent was classed as a yellowback owing to its material construction, the designation applied to the works that were disseminated via the railway bookstalls in the subsequent generation.
would in fact allude to the sort of reading experience it would supposedly furnish.

Fergus Hume’s *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* and *Madame Midas* were published in 1887 and 1888 respectively by the Hansom Cab Publishing Company as shilling paperback novels. Genre fiction circulated in this particular format was in the 1880s assigned the designation of ‘shilling shocker’. Mr W.F. Kingdon, head of the Book Department at W.H. Smith in this era identified *Called Back* (1883) by “Hugh Conway” (F.G. Fargus) as the prototypical shilling shocker that obtained a singular level of sales (“W.H. Smith & Sons” 166). The Australian publishing entrepreneur, Frederick Trischler, arguably aspired towards emulating the success of *Called Back* when he established the Hansom Cab Publishing Company with the express purpose of circulating Hume’s work. This unusual situation facilitated the concentration of the entirety of the house’s efforts onto the promotion of a small group of titles in the hope of achieving a bestseller like *Called Back*. *Hansom Cab* indeed reached comparable levels of popularity; Eric Sinclair Bell estimates that 340,000 copies were sold between July 1887 and August 1888 (123). A writer working in a somewhat similar line to Hume regarded this success with disdain (tinged also with jealousy one assumes). Arthur Conan Doyle, whose first Sherlock Holmes novel was also released in 1887, remarked in a letter to his mother “What a swindle ‘The Mystery of a Hansom Cab’ is. One of the weakest tales that I have read, and simply sold by puffing” (250).

*The Illustrated London News* offered the following account of the powerful impression made by *Cab*: “persons were found everywhere eagerly devouring the realistic sensational tale of Melbourne life. Whether travelling by road, rail or river the unpretending volume was ever present in some companion’s or stranger’s hand” (“The Author of Madame Midas”410). One critical appraisal of the appetite of readers who purchased these inexpensive shockers at railway stations adopted a culinary metaphor with a writer in *Time*.

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20 *Punch* displayed a particular penchant in the 1880s for sending up the contemporary shilling shocker vogue. The publication also employed the term, *shilling dreadful*, with a certain level of interchangeability.
noting that most possessed a taste more inclined towards red herring than caviar (“Shilling Literature” 115). It is a reasonable assumption that those new readers of the rising lower middle class whose tastes leaned predominantly toward light reading would have figured prominently amongst Hume’s audience.

However, the context in which such fiction was sold may also have led readers of more sophisticated tastes to purchase such shilling literature. An 1888 satirical piece from *Punch* highlighted that the circumstances in which such transactions took place did not always lend themselves to lengthy customer deliberation with time-pressed travellers often simply purchasing the newest work of genre fiction as recommended by the stall keeper (“Railway Reading” *Punch* 106). Readers who habitually consumed shilling fiction of this sort may well have come to view such reading matter as something that would occupy their minds while not demanding significant mental exertion. An 1893 *Fun* sketch highlighted the perception that the shilling shocker represented an unchallenging generally formulaic read (“The Latest Shilling Shocker” 164). Part of the critical response to the success achieved by this sort of literature inevitably centred on the extent to which consumption of shilling fiction diminished reader appetite for more literary works. The teenage Mark Tellar’s confession to his schoolteacher that his holiday time reading had comprised Hume’s *Hansom Cab*, Conway’s *Called Back*, and fiction by Braddon, Wood, and Ouida was met with a negative response and elicited a recommendation that the young man would find better company in Eliot, Charlotte Brontë, and Thackeray (*Waller, RED*). The London correspondent of *The Western Mail* challenged anxieties of this sort by stressing the catholicity of the general reader’s appetite and emphasising that “the shocker is for to-day only; Scott and Dickens, it may be, for all time” (“Shilling Shockers” 2).

The materiality of the Hansom Cab Publishing Company editions of *Cab* and *Midas* might also have cultivated reader attitudes in this vein. The paperback bindings and the printing of the text on poor quality paper would have infused such shilling literature with an aura of ephemerality. Once a reader had exhausted the pleasures that genre fiction published in this format
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had to offer, s/he was unlikely to retain a volume of this sort on aesthetic grounds. An 1885 *Punch* satirical poem, which enumerated the ingredients necessary for a successful shilling thriller exemplifies the perception that a mechanized quality pervaded such fiction (“How to Do It” 281). Several pages of bound-in advertising for a diverse array of consumer goods framed the text in the Hansom Cab Publishing Company’s editions of both *Cab* and *Midas*. Although such advertising was very common in Victorian print culture, the presence of publicity notices for products like foodstuffs, cosmetics, furniture and patent medicines in the peripheral material of Hume’s work had the potential to reinforce an existing conception of such inexpensive reading as a mass produced commodity, which satiated a particular need for its purchaser.

While the designation attached to a yellowback was a reference to its physical make-up, the label assigned to a ‘shocker’ alluded to the type of reading experience it could offer to its consumer. Therefore, this was a format literally defined by its capacity to arouse heightened emotions in its readers. The connotations evoked by one particular region of the paratext of *Madame Midas* would also have underscored the fact that the reading experience offered by this novel would play exclusively on readers’ senses and emotions as opposed to their intellect. The arresting illustration that dominated the novel’s cover possessed an interpictorial quality that referenced the famous poisoning scene from *The Hidden Hand*, a popular nineteenth century stage melodrama (Figure 29). This allusion also signalled the theatricalised quality of *Madame Midas*, which manifested most strongly in the fallen woman melodrama subplot of the novel centring on the ingénue friend of the eponymous heroine. While it reputedly sold 158,000 copies in two months (“The Author of Madame Midas” 410), *Madame Midas* ultimately did not outsell or even match the success of Hume’s bestselling debut. However, *Hansom Cab* had made Hume a recognisable name and openings with other publishing houses and outside of the field of shilling literature did come his way.

F.V. White & Co. issued Hume’s *Miss Mephistopheles* in January 1890; it was available in cloth binding for two shillings sixpence and in picture boards at two shillings (“F.V. White & Co.” *The Academy* iii). This dual format strategy
was standard practice by the house. Cloth bound editions were described as “One Volume Novels by Popular Authors” while those bound in picture boards were simply termed “Popular Novels” (F.V. White & Co.’s List of New Publications 10, 12). It is also significant that White’s advertising dubbed the cloth bound Mephistopheles the ‘library edition’ (“F.V. White & Co” The Academy iii). The connotations of genteel book collection that this latter designation exuded suggests that White was endeavours to cultivate a slightly more discerning class of reader while at the same retaining the core target readership of such light fiction with the pictorial covers edition.

Topp’s discussion of F.V. White & Co. highlights the fact that the firm was a continuation of the Tinsley Brothers concern and that a considerable number of women writers featured on the firm’s lists (Victorian Yellowbacks and Paperbacks Volume VII. xi). If one surveys the sorts of material White was issuing in 1890, a picture of a house endeavouring to satisfy the late Victorian mass reading public’s taste for inexpensive light fiction emerges. It circulated military novels by “John Strange Winter” (Mrs Arthur Stannard), sporting novels by Mrs Edward Kennard and Hawley Smart, and romances by Mrs Alexander and ‘Rita’ (F.V. White & Co.’s List of New Publications). Publication under the White imprint would have done little to undermine The Academy’s pronouncement that “Miss Mephistopheles has absolutely no claim to be considered as literature” (“New Novels” 352). Nevertheless, White’s publication of Hume’s work would have situated the author on a comparatively more respectable footing in contrast with the circumstances under which his first two novels of Melbourne life were issued. White even released a three-decker by Hume entitled The Man with a Secret in August 1890; however, the symbolic capital to be accrued from this in the 1890s would have been comparatively depleted owing to the fact that the three-volume novel was teetering on the verge of collapse by this time. The materiality of the two-shilling edition of Mephistopheles somewhat reflected the announcement on the title page that this work was a “sequel to Madame Midas”.

The cover illustration used in the picture boards was of a similarly garish quality to the visual content present on the Midas’ cover. The image depicted
the eponymous heroine acting on stage dressed in a rather daringly cut Faust costume (Figure 30). Several pages of advertising also featured at the beginning and end of the volume. However, even the cheaper of the two editions of *Mephistopheles* was still double the price of *Cab and Midas*; this was reflected in the comparative generosity in the typographical arrangement of the text. Furthermore, White’s promotion noted that one could purchase *Mephistopheles* “at all booksellers [my italics] and bookstalls” (“F.V. White & Co.” *The Academy* iii). This suggests that this particular volume was not defined by its status as situational reading to the same degree as *Hansom Cab* and *Midas*. Fiction in the one-shilling price territory grew less synonymous with low quality production values as the century progressed.

Anna Katharine Green’s *The Mill Mystery* was first published in England in February 1886 by Routledge & Sons; the house issued a one shilling sixpence cloth gilt edition and a one shilling paper cover edition (“Routledge & Sons” 309). The release of *The Mill Mystery* by Routledge situated this Green novel within a very specific print context as this publisher had a long history of publishing both genre fiction and literary classics in inexpensive formats. A catalogue for its long-running and extensive two-shilling *Railway Library* novel series featured at the rear of the 1886 edition of *The Mill Mystery*. This was not the first Green novel that Routledge had published; the firm had issued a sixpenny edition of Green’s immensely popular debut work, *The Leavenworth Case*, in 1884. This was one of a number of unauthorised editions of Green’s early novels that were circulated in England. The Routledge *Leavenworth’s* dual column textual presentation, small typeface, and visually arresting cover illustration depicting a man and woman standing over a corpse, would not have elevated Green’s stock to any great degree (Figure 31). However, the edition of *The Mill Mystery* circulating in England and issued exclusively by Routledge was situated on a different stratum.

While the typographical presentation was not as generous as the American edition of *The Mill Mystery* published by G.P. Putnam, the text of the Routledge edition was not heavily compacted to the extent that prolonged reading would be rendered disagreeable. The text was printed in a single
column and the page margins left a reasonable level of white space. It was also a compact volume that one could carry on one’s person with ease when travelling. Although the novel was inexpensive, it would not necessarily have possessed the same aura of ephemerality with which a shocker was infused. The cloth gilt edition had a decorative quality to its binding with an elaborate green coloured floral cover design. If one were the sort of reader who esteemed a volume for its aesthetic value, one would not be inclined to dispose immediately of this book after having completed it.

The red cloth binding and gold title lettering of Arthur Griffiths’ *The Rome Express* also exuded an aura of respectability. This novel was published by John Milne in late 1896 and priced at two shillings sixpence. Older, more established publishers had issued Griffiths’ earlier novels, but Milne was a comparatively new fixture in the late Victorian literary marketplace. Novels like *The Rome Express* exemplify Eliot’s assessment of the late nineteenth century British book market as an era characterised by an abundance of inexpensive print ("From Few and Expensive" 291-292). *The Review of Reviews*’ observation that “The Rome Express [...] is sensational enough to keep many an eager reader from his bed” ("Our Monthly Parcel of Books" 561) highlights the fact that new readers in search of diversion during their leisure hours would have figured prominently amongst the target readership of Griffiths’ novel. An undeniable element of cultural snobbery underlay The Academy’s pronouncement that “a book such as Major Griffiths’s does not allow much scope for genuine study of character. If the actors have a semblance of life, if they are not so flagrantly inconsistent as to outrage the average reader’s sense of probability, it suffices” (“Fiction” 45). Yet there is no doubt that there were readers in search of light entertainment, such as a detective story, who would privilege the sort of reading experience that a text like this would afford. A tale centring on the unravelling of a murder mystery would represent an appealing prospect.

While *The Rome Express* was inexpensively priced, its production values were high. The generosity of the margins and good quality paper was almost reminiscent of the three-decker of old. Griffiths’ lower middle class readers would possibly have come to acquire a familiarity with such volumes on a
second-hand basis. The disintegration of the system of three-volume publication frequently led the circulating libraries to dispose of old and unwanted three-deckers at drastically reduced prices. A simple and brief note with a selected list of Griffiths’ previous work was the only advertising material contained in the volume. The novel was apparently a minor commercial success. Ten thousand copies were sold in its first year of publication according to Milne (“John Milne’s List” 508) and the firm claimed that *The Rome Express* had entered its sixth edition by 1898 (John Milne “Three Books for a Holiday” iii).

On one level, inexpensive genre fiction of this sort was a commodity that fulfilled a particular function for its consumers. The needs of these consumers were commonly allied to a particular context or period of the week. Those travelling aboard public transport derived mental stimulation for their journeys while those readers who desired light reading to occupy their leisure time procured entertainment. One also cannot discount the potential for sideways reading; Colclough has highlighted how individuals from the communities surrounding the railway stations were in the habit of patronising the stalls of W.H. Smith in the mid-Victorian period (“Purifying the Sources” 41). Furthermore, once a book was not particularly tawdry or likely to exude suspect connotations, readers might well transplant material defined as railway reading to another context like the home. The visual imagery employed in the paratextual zone of such inexpensive works held considerable signifying potential. Equally so, an abstract or entirely plain cover communicated a great deal about the constituencies of readers that a novel was endeavouring to court. In the final decades of the century, it became possible to acquire an elegant cloth bound volume for less than three shillings. In general, the production values underpinning especially inexpensive works were not always particularly high and this may well have imbued them with an aura of disposability for those readers who had access to a surfeit of printed matter.
Conclusion

A book’s price, materiality, and site of distribution exercised a significant degree of influence on the constitution of its readership, the esteem the book was accorded by these readers, the environment in which they consumed it, and the potential duration of the book’s lifespan. Poor quality paper, a visually taxing typographical presentation, and insubstantial binding did not necessarily encode an inexpensively priced book for an enduring existence. It also limited (but not negated) the potential of such reading matter to transcend its original situational designation as a book for reading aboard public transport by the individual reader.

Books like the three-volume novel were encoded for consumption on loan in the domestic sphere by the individual well-to-do reader or amongst the micro reading community of the prosperous family. Subscription to a commercial circulating library facilitated readers to read a wide array of novels if they so wished. The cycle according to which society apportions value means that the cachet held by a once highly valued object like the three-volume novel will inevitably decline. The late-nineteenth century collapse in the esteem of the three-decker was exacerbated by the fact that as the quantity of novels appearing in this format increased, the perceived quality of the sort of reading matter one might borrow from the libraries fell. Increasing staleness began to surround the sort of narrative structure the format imposed on texts. Competition from one-volume reprints of those works that were a cut above the surfeit of three-volume chaff grew more acute. A reader’s engagement with the text in such reprints commonly extended beyond the verbal to encompass also a visual dimension, which could greatly change how s/he conceived of narrative, character, and theme.

Contemporaneous to the increasing proliferation of such reprints, the growing market of readers who could afford to support a modest book-buying habit now had an increasing range of newly released and inexpensively priced one-volume fiction from which to select their light reading. The production
values of the volume to be procured for a modest outlay also in many cases improved, which meant such books now represented the sorts of object that readers would value for its aesthetic appeal as well as the mental pleasures it could yield.

The choices of all readers about what they read would certainly have been shaped by trends and reviewers’ pronouncements but the advice of those individuals who administered the locations where a reader procured his/her reading also would have held a certain degree of sway. In a setting like the railway bookstall, selections of reading matter also involved a certain element of judging a book by its (frequently pictorial) cover. A reader might well value a book to be read in the public sphere for the distinct signal the volume would communicate to his/her environment as much as the mental stimulation it would yield. In turn, those individuals in the reader’s surroundings were equally liable to judge the reader according to signals exuded by the external characteristics of same said volume. One imagines that concern for this may also have been a factor in purchaser decisions.

The associations brought to mind by the publishing house name printed on the cover, spine, or title page also potentially shaped reader selections along with the mentality from which s/he approached a work. This sort of association originated in an individual’s reading history. Reception theory underscores the fact that one does not process a text in a vacuum. The nineteenth-century practice of printing specific authorship designations alongside a writer’s name on the title page of a book would have represented an important determinant of the horizons of expectations that shaped the frame of mind in which readers would have approached a novel or short fiction text.
Chapter 2 Figures


Figure 17. *Our Three-Volume Novel*. In *Punch’s Almanack for 1885*. Print. James Hardiman Library. National University of Ireland, Galway.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 List of Figures [CD]

Figure 20. Le Fanu, Brinsley. Frontispiece: She stood up-how pretty she was! - looking on her work. 1889. In Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu. The Wyvern Mystery. London: Ward and Downey, 1889. Print. British Library. London.


Part 2. Readers’ Horizons, Frames of Reading, and Oscillatory Trans-Media Consumption
Chapter 3: Reconstructing Audiences’ Horizons of Expectation

Introduction

The analysis of the literary experience of the reader avoids the threatening pitfalls of psychology if it describes the reception and influence of a work within the objectifiable system of expectations that arises for each work in the historical moment of its appearance, from a pre-understanding of the genre, from the form and themes of already familiar work, and from the opposition between poetic and practical language (Jauss 22).

Audiences find satisfaction and a basic emotional security in a familiar form; in addition, the audience’s past experience with a formula gives it a sense of what to expect in new individual examples (Cawelti 9).

John G. Cawelti’s observation appears in his seminal study of the modern genre novel. While my attention is trained on the light reading of the Victorian era, a guiding principle of this chapter will, nevertheless, be the idea that a certain level of conservatism defines popular taste. Hence, such audiences favour works that afford a similar sort of gratification to the pleasure derived from familiar and esteemed cultural objects. Jauss’ concept of the horizon of expectations will be employed to discover how readers were likely to process the selected texts with the degree of aesthetic distance between our reconstructed version of said horizons and the character of the texts serving to illuminate the extent to which a work satisfied reader appetite. The sort of popular fiction that was widely read and secured a pan-constituency medium-term foothold in the cultural consciousness would largely shape audiences’ pre-understanding of genre. The specific “already familiar” work that potentially exercised a singular level of influence on the horizon of the Victorian reader would be the other title or titles from the same writer that were referenced in the paratextual zone of the nineteenth-century volume edition. For the most part, popular fiction uses language in a functional way to advance narrative via the twin strategies of dialogue and description. Accordingly, this element of Jauss’ framework would be less profitably employed here and is better suited to the literary fiction with which the theorist himself works.
1. Distinctive Voices of the Mid-Victorian Period

‘The main question,’ says Sydney Smith, ‘as to a novel is, did it amuse? - Were you surprised at dinner coming so soon? - Did you mistake eleven for ten? […] If a novel produces these effects, it is good...It is only meant to please, and it must do that, or it does nothing!’ As a general rule, it is perhaps only too true, that a vast proportion of the works of fiction current at the circulating libraries ‘do nothing,’ or even worse than nothing; but it does so happen that every now and then we are roused by the appearance of a triton among the minnows (“The Popular Novels of the Year” Fraser’s Magazine for Town and Country August 1863. 253).

An 1877 Temple Bar article by A.P. Graves observed of J.S. Le Fanu that “Mr Wilkie Collins, amongst our living novelists, best compares with [him]. Both of these writers are remarkable for the ingenious mystery with which they develop their plots, and for the absorbing, if over-sensational, nature of their incidents” (“An Irish Poet and Novelist” 516). McCormack has qualified these sorts of comparisons, observing that “on the surface, the characteristic Le Fanu plot conforms roughly to the rules of the Wilkie Collins school” (144). Collins was the leading writer of sensation fiction of the 1860s and the promotion of Le Fanu’s writing as part of this generic school would have led readers to view his works in the same context as those emanating from the pen of the author of The Woman in White. However, there is much to suggest that the output of the Irish writer would have made for a significantly different reading experience indeed. Although Le Fanu varied his focalization from novel to novel, readers do not encounter the sort of polyphony of tales told by many hands present in works like The Moonstone or Armadale. Furthermore, where Collins can be categorised as an engagé writer, who for instance used the plot of The Woman in White to attack the abuses perpetrated by private asylums, there was a more subtle figurative quality to Le Fanu’s writing with a novel like Uncle Silas representing an allegory of the Protestant ascendancy experience. Although he commonly dwelt on the more insalubrious side of life, Collins situated his 1860s novels against an everyday mid-Victorian backdrop. By contrast, there is a genuinely surreal aura to the environments that Le Fanu created where one frequently feels a sense of detachment from the world of the real. Reviewers
habitually remarked upon this ethereal quality to his work. *The Saturday Review* wrote of the “Rembrandt effects” of *Uncle Silas* noting the novel brought to mind Mrs Radcliffe (“Uncle Silas” 146) while the publication would observe of the plot of *The Wyvern Mystery* that it was “a very witches’ sabbath of evil deeds and evil doers” (“The Wyvern Mystery” 457).

Bentley’s designation on the title page of the 1864 edition of *Uncle Silas* that the novel was by the author of *The House by the Churchyard* and *Wylder’s Hand* was also likely to require readers to cross a certain degree of distance between their horizons of expectations and the text they encountered. In *Uncle Silas*, Le Fanu used a different type of focalisation to his earlier works. Readers accustomed to a peripheral character using his reminiscences and accumulated recollections to narrate the novel in an omniscient style would now experience a single voice situation where the protagonist relates a life altering experience from her youth. Although Maud Ruthyn does not necessarily fall within the category of an unreliable narrator, this strategy significantly limited readers’ perceptions of events in comparison with the multiplicity of perspectives mediated through de Cresseron. Furthermore, the singularity of Le Fanu’s narrative focus in *Silas* would form an arresting contrast with his two previous works as it fosters an atmosphere of an uneasy claustrophobia from which the levity displayed in *Churchyard* and in the subplots of *Wylder* is absent.

Thematically, there would be comparatively less mental distance to traverse between what readers were likely to expect of Le Fanu’s fiction and what they actually encountered. Murder motivated by a desire for pecuniary gain is a core part of all three novels. Readers would first encounter in *Churchyard* Le Fanu’s usage of the gothic motif of a capital crime committed in the distant to recent past that makes a spectral-like return to disrupt the present. Le Fanu employed this motif in various forms in both *Wylder* and *Silas*. Furthermore, a space that is loaded with heinous associations owing to supposed past horrors is introduced in each of the works. Readers who had previously consumed the turbulent history of the interrelated Brandon and Wylder clans in *Wylder* would readily process the similar scenario depicted in *Silas* involving a gentry family with a history of scandal, misfortune and ruin.
Furthermore, the ghost of the murdered Mr Charke, which figuratively haunts Bartram-Haugh, would have seemed like a heightened version of the phantom-like Uncle Lorne Brandon who functions as a personification of his family’s dubious history. It is possible that readers would initially associate Silas’ Maud Ruthyn’s efforts to eradicate the contagion of suspicion that contaminates her uncle’s reputation with Mr Mervyn’s attempts to clear his dead father’s name in *Churchyard*. However, Le Fanu challenged any such expectation fostered by a possible association between Silas and Lord Dunoran through the ultimate revelation of Silas’ culpability in Charke’s death and his subsequent attempts to murder his niece. Silas in certain respects proves reminiscent of Stanley Lake as both are initially clouded in moral ambiguity until it becomes increasingly clear that they are puppeteer-like villains who compel others to work toward the realisation of their nefarious schemes. A similar pattern of villainy featured in a later Le Fanu novel but the ambiguity would linger until the final chapters of the novel.

William Tinsley announced on the title page of the three-decker edition of *The Wyvern Mystery* (1869) that the novel was “by the author of *Uncle Silas* and *Guy Deverell* [1865]”. The form that Le Fanu employed with this 1869 work was likely to locate *Wyvern* in relatively close proximity to the horizons of readers familiar with these earlier novels. Readers who had previously consumed *Deverell* were likely to readily accept the omniscient narrative point of view employed in *Wyvern*. However, individuals whose reading history was limited solely to *Silas* would have horizontal change to navigate if they had expected that the terrible events at Carwell Grange would be narrated in the voice of Alice Maybell who is a similar sort of ingénue to the heroine of the 1864 novel. Seasoned Le Fanu readers would anticipate correctly the terse chapter divisions of *Wyvern* along with the prevalence of unanswered questions and the enigmatic plot developments. Those who had previously consumed *Deverell* where the atmosphere was at times heavily reminiscent of a silver fork novel would find this to be very much at odds with the bleak and austere setting of Carwell Grange. Nonetheless, the earlier chapters of *Wyvern*, which take place at the titular estate, would evoke the gloomy claustrophobia that dominates
much of *Silas*. The denouement of *Wyvern* lacks the same degree of death and destruction that characterises the endings of *Silas* and *Deverell* as Le Fanu situates the principal episodes of disaster and suffering in the middle of the novel. Yet memories of Maud Ruthyn’s marriage to Lord Ilbury and the union of Beatrix Marlowe and Guy Deverell junior would lead readers to foresee the optimistic ending where a new family is established when Henry Fairfield weds Alice’s adoptive daughter.

There was a similar aesthetic proximity between the thematic character of *Wyvern* and the works referenced in its paratext. Previous consumption of tales of gentry families with histories of misfortune, scandal, and ruin such as the Ruthyns and the Marlowes would lead readers to readily process the position of the Fairfields of Wyvern. It is probable that readers would also anticipate the establishment of an experienced or corrupted woman-innocent woman binary opposition. The dynamic between Alice and Bertha Velderkaust somewhat echoed the Maud and Mme de la Rougierre situation. One of the earlier episodes of *Wyvern* involves the aged Squire Fairfield’s grotesque romantic pursuit of Alice, who is his ward and a mere girl in comparison with the Squire’s advanced years. Those in Le Fanu’s audience who were familiar with the marriage of General and Lady Lennox in *Deverell* would perhaps expect a similar May-December union involving Alice and the Squire, which would lead Alice to become a disaffected Lady Jane-like figure who pursues an illicit and doomed liaison with her beloved. Le Fanu would subvert this through Alice and Charles’ elopement. Yet the bigamous cloud that overhangs Alice and Charles’ union would offer a soupçon of the forbidden similar to that of Lady Jane and Sir Jekyll’s adultery. Prior exposure to the motif of the mysterious visitor with malevolent intentions in the form of Mme de la Rougierre and M. Varbarriere was likely to lead readers to anticipate correctly the destructive ramifications for Carwell Grange that would emanate from Bertha’s clandestine arrival. However, Le Fanu was likely to surprise his audience with his apparent refusal to offer his customary rational explanation for the sinister seemingly supernatural vision that confronts Alice when she first arrives at Carwell.
Le Fanu was not the only writer of the sensation novel era who introduced a hint of the paranormal into an ostensibly prosaic setting.

Charles Warren Adams’ *The Notting Hill Mystery* was published in book form in 1865 at the height of the decade’s sensation novel vogue. Warren Adams located *The Notting Hill Mystery* within the upper middle class home and his novella treated issues like duality, insanity, unconventional femininity, domestic intrigue, and inheritance fraud. Therefore, the general subject matter of the work would have demanded little horizontal change of readers accustomed to a diet of *The Woman in White*, *Lady Audley’s Secret*, and *East Lynne*. While the plot of Adams’ work, which centred on a foreign villain’s efforts to murder and disinherit a middle class young woman, was ostensibly quite conventional aside from the faint supernatural touches, there would have been a certain aesthetic distance to navigate. It is clear that Adams set out to extend the boundaries of Collins’ experimentation with narrative. The structure of the text was termed a “carefully-prepared chaos” by the *London Review* (“Novelettes” 178) and the patchwork of letters, affidavits, diary entries, and facsimiles of official documents may have initially proven rather disorientating for the reader. Adams privileged form over a captivating cast of characters and narrative thrills; the text may well have read like a deconstruction of sensation fiction with the *London Review* also remarking that it was “a skeleton of a story, which requires to be clothed in flesh and blood” (“Novelettes” 178). Mystery and the prospect of the revelation of a great secret at the end was one of the distinguishing features of sensation fiction and *The Athenaeum* found puzzling Adams’ disclosure early in the text of the truth about the suspicious deaths that occur in the two households (“*The Notting Hill Mystery*” 520).

The title page of the Saunders, Otley, & Co. 1865 one-volume edition of *The Notting Hill Mystery* introduced the work as “by the author of *Velvet Lawn*”. The house had published the latter work as a three-decker the previous year. *Velvet Lawn* was a characteristic “loose baggy monster” complete with the usual circulating library novel tripartite narrative structure and conventional plot resolution. A traditional omniscient narrative point of view was employed. The form of *The Notting Hill Mystery* represented an arresting contrast with
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*Velvet Lawn* as readers familiar with Warren Adams’ 1864 work were now compelled to navigate a more fragmented and disorienting narrative terrain in which they would be denied definitive closure as *Notting Hill* concluded on a decidedly open-ended note.

Thematically speaking, the distance to be traversed between Warren Adams’ audience’s horizon and the reading experience afforded by *Notting Hill* in certain respects would not prove as vast. The plot of *Velvet Lawn* was likely to have evoked memories of the Road Hill Murder and there was a comparable verisimilar quality to *Notting Hill* in that it owed a certain debt to the William Palmer case, the other major cause célèbre of the 1850s. Readers who had previously consumed the mystery of the strangulation of the wealthy John Radnage in *Velvet Lawn* would encounter another tale of murder in ostensibly respectable domesticity with *Notting Hill’s* account of the mysterious poisonings of Gertrude Anderton and Madame R. Furthermore, readers familiar with Jane Carthew’s somnambulistic patricide where she strangles her estranged father, John Radnage, would readily process Baron R’s manipulation of his wife’s sleepwalking to compel her to ingest a lethal dose of acid. The character of Jane owes a certain debt to Braddon’s bigamous blonde heroine and accordingly, readers’ expectations that Warren Adams would once again paint from a similar palette would be confirmed through his modelling of Baron R on Collins’ Count Fosco. However, Warren Adams’ audience were liable to be confounded by the paranormal forces that Baron R employs to kill Gertrude Anderton as although Jane Carthew’s villainy originated in an unconscious impulse, it was driven by entirely human agency. Similarly, *Velvet Lawn* centres on Lillian Rensdale’s wrongful implication, false imprisonment, and eventual exoneration in her stepfather’s death largely due to the initial misinterpretation and subsequent reappraisal of the evidence of the volume of Millingen’s *Aphorisms on Insanity*. Accordingly, readers would expect confirmation of William Anderton’s innocence in his wife’s death and the reassessment of the evidence of the poison bottle label. Anderton’s suicide while still in custody would demand significant horizontal change. Moreover, Warren Adams’ atypical use of an insurance investigator as the primary detective and frame narrator in
Notting Hill would surprise readers who anticipated a repeat of the conventional strategy present in Velvet Lawn. In the latter, an ineffectual police detective named Inspector Dudget arrests the wrong person only for a benevolent amateur to lift the cloud of suspicion from their falsely accused relative or significant other by identifying the actual culprit.

The popular taste of this particular period was influenced strongly by the nature of the works that ascended to become books of the season. All of the texts considered in this section had elements that would have lent them a certain level of appeal to readers of the 1860s. However, none fall within the category of colourlessly predictable, formulaic fare. Narration and form were two areas in particular where these writers played with expectation and convention. If there was considerable aesthetic distance to be traversed in this respect, this could hinder the prospect of a work securing a favourable reception. However, it is also possible to identify recurring motifs, characters, and narratives across both authors’ oeuvres, which would have situated their works in reasonable proximity to the reading histories of consumers familiar with their earlier publications. The average mid-Victorian reader turned to popular fiction as a source of entertainment during leisure hours. The size of light reading audiences along with the quantity of available leisure time both increased as the century progressed. The writers who endeavoured to meet this demand were often compelled to produce prolifically for readers not necessarily looking to experience horizontal change. The reading material consumed along with the influences that determined audience expectations also assumed a more international flavour.
2. The Prolific Popular Novelist of the Late Victorian Period

The most successful author of novels of mystery was, beyond all doubt, the late Emile Gaboriau, some of whose curious and rather ghastly stories seem to be now as widely read as when they were first produced (619).

The writer who is able to invent a plot, and is willing to take the great trouble necessary for carefully following out all its ramifications, will be hailed with delight by the novel-reading public, who will assuredly quit the word-painters and the analysts for him. Their work is easy enough and insipid in proportion; but to produce a good story requires some inventive power and a great capacity for taking pains. The author who can bring these to bear is sure to reap the recompense of being widely read (620).

(“Modern Novels” *The Saturday Review* 18 May 1878: 619-620)

The natural impulse of the popular fiction reader is to attempt to prolong the pleasure afforded by a particularly entertaining read. S/he desires another work that will yield an equivalent level of enjoyment. Of course, the text must not be so derivative or repetitive that it strikes the reader as stale. Taking three prolific writers of detective fiction as an example, I wish to probe the print context within which their work was consumed.

The contemporaneous proliferation of English language translations of the French detective writing of Emile Gaboriau would have exerted significant influence on the constitution of the horizon of expectations of audiences who consumed the volume editions of Arthur Griffiths’ crime novels. Gaboriau’s *roman judiciaires*, originally published in the 1860s, were anglicised by Henry Vizetelly as the *Gaboriau’s Sensational Novels* series and were issued in England from 1881 onwards (Ascari 107). The volumes were inexpensively priced at one shilling each (“Vizetelly & Co.’s New Editions” 4). *Fast and Loose* (1885) shared a common publication history with Gaboriau’s *feuilletonist* fiction as it also originally appeared as a newspaper serial. The text’s serial history goes some way toward illuminating the rationale underlying the panorama of the novel’s rather dense plotting. *Fast and Loose* and Griffiths’ *The Rome Express* (1896) chart the investigation of a crime by both professional and amateur detectives. The plots of both works recall Gaboriau’s *L’Affaire Lerouge* (1865) as the false
trail laid by circumstantial evidence wrongly implicates both Fast and Loose’s Mr Surtees in the theft of Portuguese banking bonds and Rome Express’s Contessa di Castagneto in the murder of the passenger at berth 7/8. Police detectives in each case are misled by the apparent culpability of these characters. This quest to illuminate the circumstances in which the crime took place typically culminates in Gaboriau with the introduction of an inserted story like the tale of the Count de Commarin’s two sons in L’Affaire Lerouge. Griffiths employs this device in Fast and Loose to relate the origins of the collaboration between the corrupt bank employee and the recidivist gangster. Griffiths’ villains were also evocative of the manipulative blackmailers and white-collar criminal types that featured prominently in Gaboriau’s novels. The malevolent Mr Quadling from The Rome Express threatens to cast suspicion upon the Contessa if she exposes his true identity during the French police investigation. He also defrauds many of the customers at his crumbling Italian bank by the asset stripping manoeuvre he performs prior to his departure aboard the train. Accordingly, Fast and Loose and The Rome Express were situated in close proximity to the horizons of Griffiths’ audience as the popularity of the Vizetelly series meant the conventions of Gaboriau’s writing influenced many readers’ conceptions of what constituted a good detective novel. The billing that accompanied Griffiths’ name on the title pages of the volume editions also influenced the nature of readers’ horizons.

Chapman and Hall introduced Fast and Loose as “by the author of The Chronicles of Newgate.” The latter was a two-volume history of the London prison, published by the house in 1884. Although The Chronicles was within the non-fiction arena of historical and documentary writing, readers familiar with this 1884 work would not have had a substantial aesthetic distance to traverse between the horizon formulated through their consumption of The Chronicles and the sort of novel they encountered in Fast and Loose. Griffiths had demonstrated an impressive capacity for shaping factual information about criminality and justice into a coherent engaging narrative in his earlier two-volume work. Accordingly, Griffiths’ penning of a novel about crime and punishment that echoed the frequent banking collapses of the period was
unlikely to evoke a huge measure of surprise in his audience. Readers who had previously consumed his factual accounts of a diverse array of insalubrious figures from the distant and recent past were likely to anticipate the centrality of the criminal underworld figure, Joseph Devas, and his nefarious associates in *Fast and Loose*. Similarly, the novel’s plot, which recounts events surrounding the embezzlement at Waldo’s Bank, would be located squarely within Griffiths’ audience’s horizons given that the three ‘Newgate Notorieties’ chapters that form a large part of the second volume of *The Chronicles* focused particularly on fraud. Furthermore, even readers who were not familiar with Griffiths’ 1884 history of the famous prison and simply observed the designation that Chapman and Hall had installed in the paratextual zone were still unlikely to face much horizontal change as Griffiths once again concentrated his attentions on the carceral. Several significant episodes in *Fast and Loose* occur at Chatham prison where Devas is incarcerated. The horizons of Griffiths’ audiences would shift as his career progressed and he acquired a greater number of detective novels to his name.

The expectations that would have accompanied readers’ commencement of Arthur Griffiths’ *The Rome Express* were conditioned by John Milne’s title page billing of Griffiths as the author of *Fast and Loose, Number Ninety Nine*, and *A Prison Princess*. Readers familiar with these earlier titles in Griffiths’ *oeuvre* would correctly anticipate light reading of the detective fiction category imbued with shades of romance and melodrama. The plot of *The Rome Express* furnished regular Griffiths’ readers with a similar sort of experience to that afforded by the previous three titles. Readers familiar with the murder of Xavier de Yriarte in *Number Ninety Nine*, which initially appears a crime of passion or revenge committed by an incensed lover but is subsequently revealed to have originated in homicidal greed, would readily process the disclosure of the identity of the murderer of the inhabitant of berth 7/8 of the Paris-bound train. Natale Ripaldi was not killed by an enraged mistress but rather died at the hands of Francis Quadling as part of Quadling’s efforts to secure his escape having earlier embezzled funds from his ailing financial house. Moreover, readers with memories of Percy Meggitt in *Fast and Loose* were
likely to readily consume another tale of a senior figure in a financial house who descends into white collar criminality by defrauding his bank’s deposits. Similarly, readers would rightly expect the suspicions about Hortense Petitpré fostered by the narrative of The Rome Express to be genuine given Griffiths’ previous use of the trope of the deviant (and typically foreign) servant. The duplicitous lady’s maid, Mdlle Fanchette, reveals herself to be a tool of the counterfeit Marquis in Fast and Loose while A Prison Princess’s Sal Crealoach is a petty criminal who poses as a lady’s maid.

The flag-waving patriotism that underlies Griffiths’ negative depiction of the French police in The Rome Express was also unlikely to evoke surprise in readers who had previously encountered his quasi-xenophobic portrayal of Cadiz officialdom in Ninety Nine. Griffiths’ audience’s reaction to Contessa Sabine di Castagneto, who is implicated via a trail of circumstantial evidence in the murder of Natale Ripaldi, would vary according to the composition of their horizons. If Ninety-Nine featured in their cultural memories, the Contessa might bring to mind Clara Bertram, who is wrongfully suspected of killing de Yriarte because items from her personal effects are also discovered at the murder scene. Alternatively, they might interpret the Contessa in the context of Mary Nadaievna Pahlovsky Walgate (or Nada as she is known) from A Prison Princess. Nada also suffers at the hands of her malevolent and criminal suitor Hugh Walgate to the extent that she eventually kills him in an apparent act of self-defence. Those who knew both works would enjoy the added mental challenge of deciding whether the Contessa was closer to Nada or Clara. All three were young and beautiful women who possess an external air of foreignness but their exclusively English lineage is revealed as the plot develops. Griffiths’ characterisation of women can occasionally lack flesh and blood but this is not a charge that one can level against a contemporaneous female writer of detective fiction.

The success of Vizetelly’s Gaboriau’s Sensational Novels series in the 1880s coincided with the release in England of inexpensively priced editions of the novels of American writer, Anna Katharine Green. Americans such as Green had had access to acknowledged translations of the French writer’s output far
earlier than their European neighbours, as English language editions of Gaboriau’s novels were available in the United States in the 1870s (Ascari 107). Popular fiction audiences whose horizons were conditioned by the blend of sensation, melodrama, and detection that featured in Gaboriau’s writing would encounter a somewhat similar sort of reading material when consuming Green’s work. Characters in The Leavenworth Case and The Mill Mystery (1886) find themselves wrongly implicated in crimes owing to circumstantial evidence that leads to an inference of culpability. These Green works also eschew a chronological narrative trajectory as the novels open with the discovery of a suspicious death and the story then traces efforts to illuminate the chain of events that led to the demise of the victim. Mr Gryce, an accomplished police detective, features in a number of Green’s novels, and he resembles a sort of Monsieur Lecoq- Pere Tabaret hybrid. However, significant aesthetic distance existed between such Gaboriau-conditioned horizons and the female amateur detectives who appear in several Green novels. The introduction of this sort of female agency together with the quasi-incongruous title Vizetelly devised for his Gaboriau series highlights another possible dimension of the horizon of Green’s English readership.

The sensation novel was long past its peak by the 1880s yet a continuous stream of inexpensively-priced reprints of the works of Braddon and Collins together with the singular quality of many of the genre’s most notable works meant it would not have simply vanished from readers’ cultural memories. Constance Sterling, the heroine of Green’s The Mill Mystery, who turns detective when tragedy strikes those closest to her, followed in the footsteps of the procession of women from this genre who conduct enquiries in such circumstances. Notable examples included Collins’ Valeria Woodville from The Law and the Lady (1875). Green does not offer cause to regard Constance as an unreliable narrator. Nevertheless, Thoms’ study of narrative and detection should make us cognizant of the fact that given the detective of the novel is also the text’s lead storyteller, the version of events afforded will not be entirely impartial and characterised by a constructed quality. Green’s successful amalgamation of the Gaboriau inserted story device with the polyvocality of
Collins’s “tales told by many hands” was likely to please readers already familiar with such narrative strategies.

The horizons of a Victorian audience consuming Green’s The Mill Mystery would also have been shaped by George Routledge & Sons’ designation of this novel as “by the author of The Leavenworth Case”. Green’s 1878 debut novel was a major commercial success on both sides of the Atlantic (Sussex 164) and it became standard practice for publishers to brand almost all of her subsequent output in such terms.

G.P. Putnam’s Sons had published The Leavenworth Case in 1878 but its illicit circulation in England took off in late 1884 with the release of a number of inexpensive pirated reprints. Readers familiar with the clue puzzle mystery form of this novel would correctly anticipate the generic orientation of The Mill Mystery. Both chart the efforts of detectives to discover the true circumstances of unexplained and suspicious deaths by interpreting the information and signifiers they accumulate during the investigative process. Moreover, it would come as little surprise to readers familiar with Leavenworth that Green juxtaposed a lengthy statement from David Barrows detailing his final days alongside the recollections and observations of The Mill’s first person narrator, Constance Sterling. Audiences were likely to remember that interspersed with Everett Raymond’s narrative were extracts from Eleanore Leavenworth’s journal, Trueman Harwell’s confession, and Amy Belden’s testimony. Similarly, readers who had observed in awe as Ebenezer Gryce gradually reconstructed from a collection of partially destroyed fragments of paper the letter Henry Clavering sent to Horatio Leavenworth detailing the former’s clandestine marriage to Mary Leavenworth would have their hopes for a similarly thrilling experience rewarded with the 1886 text. The story of the Epiphany in Samuel Pollard’s Bible contains a cipher where a selected series of verses narrate the story of his secret granddaughter; Green incorporates the Biblical quotations into the text, allowing the reader to follow Barrows’ decoding of the cipher.

Elements in the plot of Mill would at times offer a relatively similar reading experience to Leavenworth, but Green would also occasionally challenge her readers by breaking with the narrative strategies she had
employed in her first great success. Hannah Chester’s loss of her life in *Leavenworth*, owing to the machinations of the malevolent Trueman Harwell, would mean that Green’s audience would not be overly surprised that an equally vulnerable young woman, Grace Merriam from *The Mill*, would be placed in so desperate a situation by her grandfather’s sinister second wife that Grace would commit suicide. A scenario involving shifting suspicions that either party in a fraternal or sororal-like relationship may be guilty of murder would be situated firmly within Green’s readers’ horizons of expectations owing to the successive (and false) incrimination of both Mary and Eleanore Leavenworth in their uncle’s death. Accordingly, Green would engender a similar type of tension in *The Mill* as the Pollard brothers are successively implicated and then exonerated in cases of suspicious death. Constance Sterling’s reappraisal of her investigative priorities to privilege romantic motives ahead of sisterly concerns meant Green’s audience were also likely to equate the reasons for Constance’s assuming of the role of the detective with Raymond Everett’s *Leavenworth* investigations. He too is endeavouring to remove suspicion from the person he loves. However, *The Mill* would also require readers to traverse a significant distance between their cumulative reading histories and the text they were consuming. If readers expected a genteel depiction of femininity in the vein of the refined Leavenworth cousins, they were likely to be deeply surprised by the callous matriarch Mrs Pollard and the fiery cross dressing Rhoda Carwell. Moreover, the relative open-endedness of the dénouement of *The Mill* would also trouble readers who anticipated a similarly definitive resolution to that afforded in *Leavenworth*. Green’s first novel was an enduring work of popular fiction that in effect constituted the lynchpin of her brand. Fortunately, it did not quite develop into an albatross around the neck of the writer as her subsequent output continued to evolve while still attracting audiences. Other writers were not so fortunate; I would like now to consider a case study of a writer who would be associated with his debut novel for almost the entire duration of his career.

Audience expectations of Fergus Hume’s novels of the late 1880s and early 1890s would have been framed partly by experiences of consuming
shilling literature, including translations of Gaboriau’s detective fiction, and partly by the authorial categorisation employed by his various publishing houses in the paratextual zone of the nineteenth-century editions. As a young unknown writer, the symbolic and monetary capital that accompanied popular literary success no doubt represented an appealing prospect to Hume. Accordingly, he elected to situate his output in close proximity to his audiences’ horizons and took a calculated decision to model his early writing on the French author’s work. Hume’s preface to an 1896 reprint of The Mystery of a Hansom Cab (1887) recounted the origins of his bestselling debut: “I enquired of a leading Melbourne bookseller what style of book he sold most of. He replied that the detective stories of Gaboriau had a large sale. I bought all of his works [...] and read them carefully. The style of these books attracted me and I determined to write a book of the same class” (8). Hume even references Gaboriau amidst the opening passages of Hansom Cab in a rather amusing meta moment where the verisimilar clipping from the Argus observes “it would seem as though the [hansom cab murder] case itself had been taken bodily out of one of Gaboriau’s novels” (Hume Hansom Cab 1985 7). Hansom Cab also employed the strategy perfected by Gaboriau of beginning the narrative in media res with the discovery of an unexplained crime and then charting efforts to illuminate the past events that led to the murder. Subsequent Hume works would be organised in a more conventional chronological way; however, inserted flashback narratives are a feature of much of the writer’s early work. The enquiry into the cab murder was likely to bring to mind L’Affaire Lerouge as rival Melbourne police detectives, Mr Gorby and Mr Kilsip, pursue competing investigations to catch the killer.

The portrayal of detection in Hume’s subsequent work also resembled Gaboriau, as Inspector Naball in Miss Mephistopheles (1890) was somewhat reminiscent of the youthful and dynamic incarnation of M. Lecoq present in Le Dossier No. 113 and Le Crime d’Orcival. Hume also set about fashioning similarly loose links between his novels with detectives and legal professionals from his debut reappearing in his follow-up effort. Moreover, the Gaboriau-esque figure of the homicidal blackmailer was a recurring villainous type across
Hume’s work. Readers conversant with the plot of the Count de Commarin’s two sons in *L’Affaire Lerouge* were also likely to appreciate the similar half sibling scenario that Hume paints in *Hansom Cab* where one sister grows up in obscurity in the Melbourne slums while the other enjoys a life of privilege as the daughter of one of the city’s wealthiest men. The 1887 publication in England of *Hansom Cab* as a shilling paperback occurred in the wake of the enormous success of a similarly priced mystery novel. The tenor of this 1883 work would also have influenced the horizons of Hume’s readers.

*Called Back* by “Hugh Conway” (F.J. Fargus) was published in Bristol at Christmas 1883 and was the surprise nationwide success of 1884. Readers who had been entertained by this mystery novel would discover a somewhat similar sort of pleasure in Hume’s debut work. A suspicious death in singular circumstances lies at the heart of both novels. There were definite parallels between the hansom cab murder where the vehicular design means that the driver remains unaware until journey’s end of the violent death that has befallen his passenger and the scenario where Conway’s protagonist witnesses a murder in an unfamiliar house during a period of his life when he has lost his sight. Audiences would not have significant aesthetic distance to navigate between the plot of *Hansom Cab*, which turns on the distribution of the Frettly family fortune, and earlier reading memories of *Called Back* where the allocation of the Marsh-Ceneri inheritance is the catalyst for the murder at Horace Street. In addition, the hero and heroine of both works is a young couple who have obstacles to overcome on their journey to eventual happiness; the difficulties experienced by each set of lovers originates in the dysfunction that afflicts the heroine’s family. The problems of his beloved’s family thrust *Hansom Cab’s* Brian Fitzgerald into a situation where he is falsely accused of murder while the family trauma that haunts his wife compels *Called Back’s* Gilbert Vaughan to journey from London to the wilds of Siberia.

Coincidence has an important role in advancing both plots. Gilbert Vaughan falls in love with the very woman who had been present at the murder he had witnessed during the period of his life when he was without sight, while a search in Brian Fitzgerald’s waste paper basket yields the exact letter
Chapter 3

fragment that enables his lawyer to furnish his client with an alibi. However, *Hansom Cab* demanded some change to horizons acquired through consumption of *Called Back*. Conway’s novel is focalised in the first person narrative voice of Vaughan, which would have made for a very different sort of reading experience in comparison with the omniscience of *Hansom Cab*. The voice of this omniscient narrator offers a wry and sometimes rather cynical commentary on the novel’s plot. In addition, major European political events serve as a backdrop to Conway’s novel as it becomes increasingly clear to Vaughan that the March/Ceneri family’s troubles are indelibly linked to events that occurred during Italian unification of the mid nineteenth century. The explanation for the enthusiasm with which popular fiction audiences greeted *Hansom Cab* lies partially in the fact that the novel achieved such an apposite blend of the familiar and the imaginative. Hume’s later work did not always feature the same degree of balance.

The Hansom Cab Publishing Company introduced *Madame Midas* (1888) as “by the author of *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*”. In some respects, the form of *Midas* would afford the type of reading experience anticipated by a reader previously acquainted with Hume’s bestselling debut. Hume once again uses a scenario involving a central character’s efforts to conceal a shameful secret from his past as a means by which to organise the plot. In addition, Hume adopts a similarly self-conscious writing style that features a diverse array of literary allusions and is judiciously interspersed with wry asides about the reading public’s appetite for sensational accounts of violent crime and the shallowness of humanity. *Midas* also features the ‘Q’ and ‘A’ strategy to render courtroom exchanges that had been deployed to such great effect in *Hansom Cab*. However, *Midas* would also compel its audience to traverse a significant distance between their horizons and the object they were consuming. Readers anticipating a yellow journalistic-style opening reminiscent of *Hansom Cab* instead encountered a prologue dominated by a lengthy poetic description of the Australian coastline. Whereas the Oliver Whyte murder mystery dominates the plot of *Hansom Cab* from its very first page, the reader did not encounter the mysterious poisoning of Selina Sprotts until the third quarter of *Midas* and
this subplot reads almost like an afterthought on the part of the author. Similarly, the sunny image of Brian and Madge sailing away to England closes *Hansom Cab* and somewhat distracts from the injustice suffered by Sal Rawlins, yet the dénouement of *Midas* is dominated by a disquieting melancholia as it features attempted suicide, violence against women, and accidental death.

*Midas* would also significantly challenge readers’ thematic expectations. Hume’s treatment of crime in the metropolis was amongst the most evocative elements of *Hansom Cab*. Accordingly, the author’s decision to reorient his focus onto the Australian gold mining district of Ballarat for the first of *Midas*’ two parts was likely to surprise certain readers. The anticipated return to the Melbourne demi-monde happened in the second part of the novel where Hume once again depicts a metropolitan landscape of grand St Kilda townhouses, gentlemen’s clubs, and boarding houses run by comical landladies. Yet his reticence about returning to the city slums would disappoint readers who expected a repeat visit to the milieu of Mother Guttersnipe. The Melbourne counterworld forms a single minor episode in *Midas*, and Hume limits the extent of his entry into this zone. Hume once again introduces a fallen woman character in the figure of Kitty Marchurst who is somewhat analogous to Rosanna Moore. Interestingly, Hume uses *Midas* to challenge the convention that requires the fallen woman to die in the novel’s dénouement, as death is not used to repress Kitty’s supposed moral corruption. Hume’s decision to foreground Gaston Vandeloup, the novel’s villainous anti-hero who is a New Caledonia escapee, was also liable to confound readers. The audience is afforded an extended insight into Vandeloup’s thought processes and nefarious scheming whereas Roger Moreland and Oliver Whyte in *Cab* were murky figures kept at a safe distance from the reader. Consequently, although professional detection once again succeeds in apprehending the architect of the novel’s murder mystery, the returning Mr Kilsip and Mr Calton play a comparatively minor role. Conversely, *Miss Mephistopheles* (1890) would satiate many of the reader expectations fostered by the house of F.V. White’s presentation of the novel as from the author of *Hansom Cab, Midas,* and *The Piccadilly Puzzle*. The form that Hume employs would situate the novel squarely within readers’
horizons. Memories of his bestselling debut were likely to feature in the reading experience of most. If these impressions were combined with an awareness of 1889’s *The Piccadilly Puzzle*, readers were almost certain to anticipate a murder mystery where professional detection would occupy a central role. *Mephistopheles* would meet these generic expectations in its foregrounding of the homicidal death of a Jewish pawnbroker. Moreover, regular consumers of Hume would readily process the integration into the narrative of New Journalism-style newspaper articles recounting the details of the robbery of the title character’s diamonds and the murder of the Russell Street pawnbroker. *Mephistopheles’* employment of a quasi-providential brand of poetic justice where the two villains are crushed beneath the wheels of a train on the railway bridge over the Yarra Yarra was unlikely to surprise readers familiar with Vandeloup’s drowning in the same river or *Piccadilly*’s Spencer Ellersby’s impalement with his own poisoned dagger. Furthermore, Hume’s audience would also conceive of this train episode in the same way that they construed Vandeloup’s death, as both of these incidences were heavily reminiscent of the sensation scenes that were the highlights of popular stage plays. The dénouement of *Mephistopheles* would echo the conventional parting image offered in *Cab* and *Piccadilly* as it depicted the departure of a heterosexual couple to begin a new life elsewhere with all of the novel’s complications ostensibly resolved.

The plot of *Mephistopheles* would largely offer a similar experience to Hume’s earlier work. It utilised a metropolitan setting. The Melbourne equivalent of the London bohemia depicted in *Piccadilly* featured prominently, with Hume offering a well-realised portrayal of the literary and theatrical set in Victoria. Clubland, luxurious urban villas, and boarding houses once again provided a backdrop for the novel. A stereotypically orientalised opium den was used to satiate the desire of the urban crime novel audience for a glimpse into the counterworld. Readers were likely to equate Keith Stewart with *Hansom Cab’s* Brian Fitzgerald and *Piccadilly*’s Myles Dowker. He too was a young man who is falsely accused of murder but chivalrously refuses to disclose the information that will exonerate him as it has the potential to implicate a
lady. All three manage to retain the support of devoted and genteel fiancées throughout their ordeals. Moreover, individuals in Hume’s audience familiar with the poisoning that Bartholomew Jarper attempts at Madame Midas’ house owing to the imminent discovery of his forgery of cheques drawn on her bank account would readily absorb the revelation that Mephistopheles’ Hiram Fenton has resorted to robbery and murder to conceal the embezzlement he has committed at his insurance company.

Prior acquaintance with Hume’s fiction would lead readers to anticipate that the morally corrupt or fallen woman would occupy a central role in Mephistopheles. Such expectations would be confirmed by the return of Kitty Marchurst as a cynical and worldly actress who has risen to fame under the name of Caprice. Hume was likely to surprise readers who had previously consumed Piccadilly as Caprice does not suffer a similarly murderous fate to Lady Amelia Balscombe, the mistress or kept woman of the 1889 novel. Nonetheless, those who anticipated that Hume’s characterisation of Kitty would continue in an unconventional vein would be disappointed. Caprice is now compelled to play the Rosanna Moore role of the wronged woman corrupted by a licentious male who in turn herself becomes a source of contagion, which manifests in a critical illness that consumes her. Society is then symbolically decontaminated by her death. Therefore, Hume’s crime fiction grew increasingly conventional and formulaic as his career advanced. A number of other inferences can be extrapolated from the three previous case studies.

It has become very clear that if we are to limit the study of the late-Victorian popular fiction reading experience to material written by English writers, a complete picture of the cultural landscape will not be obtained. The considerable influence of translations of Gaboriau on readers’ horizons and authors’ creative processes is not always afforded adequate weight by studies of this period. A discernible pattern characterises Griffiths’ fictional output. Audiences were furnished with light reading, which first and foremost served as entertainment that fulfilled the promises registered by its billing. However, the fact that Griffiths afforded readers the opportunity to engage with thematically related subject matter in both factual and fictional modes sets him apart from
the mass of late nineteenth-century writers offering throwaway formulaic fare. A similar consistency and continuity marked Green’s work. Her writing generally lived up to the billing under which it was introduced. Yet her novels avoided lapsing into predictability as each text still retained a certain measure of power to surprise audiences. Calculated hard headedness marked Hume’s entry into the sphere of popular fiction as the writer set out to cater to an appetite that he knew to exist. The nature of this debut cultivated an expectation that it was anticipated Hume would meet. He instead presented audiences with a more melodramatic follow-up work that demanded major horizontal change. Readers did not reject outright the new novel but its popularity paled in comparison with what had preceded it. As the rate at which Hume worked accelerated, his fare became progressively more conventional. These novels no doubt secured a readership but an aura of the disposable began to haunt his work. Certain end-of-century popular fiction writers did avoid falling victim to the predicament that befell Hume. The next section will examine a writer who cultivated two distinct identities amidst the segmented late-Victorian literary marketplace.

3. A Writer of Multiple Parts

We shall be justified in believing that the imaginative literature now printed in the popular magazines coincides with the popular taste as precisely as the limitations of human insight and ingenuity will permit [...] The most characteristic from, [...] without doubt, is the connected series of short stories, of five or six thousand words each, in which the same characters, pitted against a succession of criminals or adverse fates, pass again and again through situations thrillingly dangerous, and merge at length into the calm security of ultimate conquest ("The Fiction of Popular Magazines: An Inquiry The Academy 24 February 1900. 167)."

The circumstances in which Arthur Morrison’s short fiction series about the private detective, Martin Hewitt, was launched in April 1894 meant it was inevitable that audience expectations would be conditioned by their earlier consumption of the adventures of Conan Doyle’s detective. Greenfield correctly observes that the Hewitt stories were characterised by definite parallels with Holmes as they featured similar crimes, styles of deduction, and
narrative strategies (19). However, this is not to suggest that Holmes’ successor would have struck readers as absolutely imitative or derivative. Although he was producing detective fiction fare to fit a very specific set of criteria, Morrison’s output was not entirely bereft of creativity of thought. Scholarly discussion of the Holmes-Hewitt relationship has often led to some rather simplistic analysis. Lila Marz Harper represents yet another example of the “plain man” reading of Morrison’s detective in that her discussion greatly over-stresses Hewitt’s minor differences to Holmes like the two detectives’ contrasting physical appearance, class backgrounds, and attitudes to official authority. The first series of stories was released in collected form in December 1894 as *Martin Hewitt, Investigator* (“Ward, Lock, & Bowden’s New and Standard Books” 697) and originating as they did in Newnes’ *Strand* would have represented a largely conventional sort of fare that would afford a similar sort of reading experience to Conan Doyle’s writing. I would echo Christopher Pittard’s observation that Hewitt’s adventures grew progressively more sensational as Morrison’s stories migrated from the Newnes stable to other publications less concerned with wholesomeness (“Cheap Healthful Literature” 15-16). Accordingly, the yellower mysteries of the second collection, issued in November 1895 as *The Chronicle of Martin Hewitt*, (“List of New Works” 607) would have demanded a certain degree of horizontal change. Although Morrison and Conan Doyle were associated through their work on series detectives, Morrison achieved the critical and commercial success with his non-genre fiction that Conan Doyle desperately sought and ultimately failed to obtain.

Ward, Lock & Bowden introduced Morrison on the title pages of the first and second collections of Hewitt stories as “the author of *Tales of Mean Streets*”. Methuen issued in collected form in late 1894 these thirteen short stories of working class life, (“Messrs Methuen’s New Books” 703) which had with the exception of one all originally appeared in the pages of the *National Observer*. The contrast between the light reading offered by the Hewitt stories and the realist character-driven tales was so striking that the *Saturday Review* observed upon Methuen’s release of *Mean Streets* that it was almost as if the
reading public were encountering two different Arthur Morrisons. There was “the purveyor of marketable journalism [and] imitations of the happily-deceased Sherlock Holmes” while this new collection introduced a writer capable of “good descriptive sketches of sordid life [and] construct [ing] a short story with considerable ability” (“Fiction” 605).

Although the stories of Mean Streets and the Hewitt short fiction shared a common publication history in that each was a compilation of material originally disseminated individually alongside other texts in a weekly or monthly periodical, the distinct generic character of each collection would have necessitated a major shift in reading mindset. Detective fiction privileges effective plot construction where a mystery or puzzle is introduced and then resolved as the narrative progresses. It is obvious at times that the development of multi dimensional characters was not always a priority or a possibility in the context of the Hewitt canvas within which Morrison was working. However, Mean Streets was naturalist fiction in the vein of Gissing, which endeavoured to chronicle the poverty and misery of life in the East End of London. Speech was of pivotal importance in the delineation of character, and dialogue is phonetically rendered in many of the tales. The Hewitt stories mostly unfolded against a familiar middle class backdrop and were always accompanied by a parallel visual narrative, which meant that the textual did not always have to work especially diligently toward the establishment of setting and the delineation of character. Conveying a definite sense of place was imperative with the tales where the East End landscape represented a character in itself. Morrison’s writing was exceptionally evocative of the sights and sounds of this particular region of the metropolis. The author’s frankness about the brutality of life in this place proved unsettling in some quarters. P.J. Keating details how the cruel domestic violence represented in “Lizerunt” perturbed a number of critics (23), which prompted Morrison to write a letter to the Spectator challenging such criticism of the collection. Many of the stories are unflinchingly bleak and Morrison seldom offers solutions to the problems cast in the spotlight by his tales. This denial of closure ran contrary to the neat resolution characteristic of detective fiction. Morrison did not always seem
comfortable with such finitude even when producing his genre fare; a greater degree of open-endedness took root in the second Hewitt collection.

While there frequently was a singular quality to the cases investigated by Martin Hewitt, the stories in the Mean Streets collection chronicle the tragedies of everyday life. Mrs Perkins and her adult daughter fall on hard times in “Behind the Shade”; the pair’s desperate attempts to maintain a veneer of respectability eventually lead them to an ignominious end. The survey of the various individuals travelling aboard a late night East End tramcar in “To Bow Bridge” includes a pen portrait of an aging good-hearted prostitute who takes joy in the brief contact with children that the journey brings. Motherhood is unlikely to feature to any great degree in her own life. Familiarity with the Mean Streets collection would condition audiences to expect that marital discord and dysfunction would figure prominently amongst Hewitt’s casework. A number of tales include especially compelling portrayals of the cruelty endured by both men and women at the hands of their spouses. The eponymous heroine of “Lizerunt” endures much mistreatment at the hands of her wastrel husband and the story ends with their financial circumstances reaching such a desperate point that he forces her into casual street prostitution. Bob Jennings of “A Poor Stick” must contend with an abusive and indolent wife who neglects their children. She eventually runs off with their lodger taking everything of value from the family home, including her husband’s boots. However, aside from the family strife surrounding the abusive Mr Sneathy that features in the backstory of “The Case of the Missing Hand”, Hewitt’s practice trades primarily in the recovery of misappropriated personal and intellectual property. These thefts are commonly motivated by greed and a desire for advancement. Such yearnings for self-betterment had also been present in Mean Streets. They had however manifested in more licit ways. The dashing of these hopes would have struck a far graver note as it highlighted that the good do not always triumph and that failure sometimes mars the conventional narrative of advancement. For example, the Munsey family of “In Business” use money they inherit to set up a draper’s business that fares so disastrously that Mr Munsey eventually commits suicide in a misguided attempt
to rescue their situation. *Mean Streets* offered little indication that such a major proportion of Hewitt’s detection would be in the realm of white-collar crime. Criminality features in a single tale entitled “A Conversion”, which relates the life story of a blue-collar petty criminal named Scuddy Lond. Lond exhibits a leaning toward wrongdoing from a very young age and a curious ideological tone haunts the narrative as Morrison makes a number of sardonic references to campaigners who would attribute Lond’s criminality solely to environmental factors. The narrative also seems to suggest Lond is incorrigible as he undergoes a religious conversion, which is so short-lived that he steals the takings of an old lame street seller almost immediately after he has left the mission hall.

Sherlock Holmes also grappled with a different class of opponent than the quotidian recidivist criminal. The early Hewitt stories would not challenge to any great degree horizons shaped by consumption of Holmes’s cases but the aesthetic distance between Morrison’s detective fiction and Conan Doyle-conditioned horizons would grow with subsequent Hewitt series. Expectations fashioned by the terms in which Morrison was introduced in the paratextual zones of the first two Hewitt collections would be challenged greatly. The narrative structure and socio-economic landscape of the detective stories differed greatly from his other short fiction collection. For the most part, Hewitt’s work concentrates on the recovery of property with only two of the first thirteen stories centring on intrigues of the domestic sphere. In addition, his investigations do not take him to the rookeries of the criminal underworld. Readers whose tastes were confined to the middlebrow might not have been familiar with Morrison’s naturalistic fiction; the title of the collection referenced alongside the writer’s name may very well have led them to anticipate (wrongly) that the cases of the titular investigator would involve a journey to the counterworld. Although Morrison did not incur the ire of nineteenth-century critics for seeking to exist in both popular and literary writerly guises, the words of a 1905 profile piece was typical of the response elicited. This *Bookman* writer observed “[Morrison] has written detective stories and the like, but the work of his which counts is that which depicts for us the shame and
sorrow of the little squalid streets” (115). Satiating the appetite for detective short fiction cultivated by Conan Doyle may well have secured Morrison an eager audience but he secured a greater level of symbolic capital amidst the mean streets than the avenues of genre fiction.

**Conclusion**

There existed in the mid-Victorian period a breed of popular writer like J.S. Le Fanu and Charles Warren Adams who would have struck readers as a distinctive voice. This novelist’s output ostensibly formed part of the predominant cultural trend but his/her works were also characterised by a certain brand of singularity that left the reading public with a certain but not unviable aesthetic distance to traverse. The relative success of a work like Arthur Griffiths’ *The Rome Express* demonstrates that there existed a late-Victorian constituency who set great store by light fiction that was both undemanding yet still engaging. Griffiths’ continued popularity with genre fiction readers illustrated that specialist knowledge enabled a writer to bring colour to a formula that might otherwise result in a stale and colourlessly formulaic novel in less skilled hands. Commenting on T.S. Eliot’s famous distinction between the poor and the great artist, Clive Bloom has observed:

> the popular artist must steal even more successfully if the work produced is to replace a previous product to which it has an uncanny resemblance. The new author’s work is a type of sleight of hand, making what they produce appear new and fresh until it inevitably falls back into the mass of titles on a similar theme, written in similar narrative style and set in the same place (*Bestsellers* 17-18).

Bloom’s observation is most illuminating in attempting to understand late nineteenth century writers’ appropriative use of translations of Gaboriau’s fiction. Novels like *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* or *The Leavenworth Case* that ascended to become the popular book of the season cultivate a particular appetite amongst audiences that the work’s writer is then expected to continue to satisfy. Authors like Hume attained this ephemeral position of pre-eminence owing to their capacity to appraise the state of popular taste and then fashion a
hybrid work with the requisite blend of sameness and difference. The writer’s name would then go on to assume a specific set of connotations for readers and his/her work would only continue to appeal to audiences if the characteristic plots, motifs, and archetypes were tempered with a proportionate level of variety. A writer like Anna Katharine Green accomplished this feat. On the one hand, if substantial distance existed between readers’ horizons and a text packaged as a popular novel, this limited considerably the appeal of said work. On the other hand, a text situated squarely within readers’ horizons and light on novelty and distinctive qualities could very well seem dull and uninspiring to the reader. Paul Delany’s contention that the late nineteenth century literary marketplace was defined by its segmented structure (97) is borne out by the fact that Arthur Morrison successfully straddled the light and the literary fiction divide. His detective fiction proved popular with the middlebrow constituency while his naturalistic fiction appealed to those who were not simply seeking entertainment and desired a text that would cause them to think about their environment. An author might climb to such a position of prominence with the popular reading public, if like Arthur Morrison, s/he succeeded in filling a particularly pressing gap in the audience’s popular culture diet. To have been deemed to have satisfied this deficiency in some measure elevated a writer’s profile with readers. It then became possible for the novelist to reorient partially this genre fare out of the shadow of the particular niche to which such reading matter had been catering.

The horizons of expectations reconstructed in this chapter related to the moment when material appeared in its initial volume publication. Popular fiction was commonly reissued as a different grade of book via assimilation into a publisher’s series. This situated it within a new nineteenth-century print context thus potentially bringing it to the attention of a new public and creating the possibility for a new variety of reading experience.
Chapter 4: Readers and the Publisher’s Series

Introduction

What may be the precise object of giving a number of stories by different authors a uniform appearance is one of those dark mysteries which only a publisher could solve ("The Libraries of Fiction" The Athenaeum 21 November 1896: 713).

Nothing makes a room so homelike as its books, their mere presence suggests culture and leisure, and for that reason gives pleasure. What is more decorative than the tone of the leather gold of old bindings, or the brighter coverings of modern novels. [...] Without books you must always feel as if you were in an hotel – my bête noire for a drawing room. One of the most attractive drawing-rooms I know in London, is almost clothed with books, in a house the stairs of which have been trodden by Byron and by Scott (Frere, “On Furnishing a Drawing Room” The Ludgate March 1896: 555-556).

The practice The Athenaeum writer perceives to be shrouded in dark mystery represented a quotidian part of Victorian readers’ encounters with print. John Spiers has defined the publisher’s series as:

a set of uniform volumes with a distinctive look, often (but not always) uniformly priced, usually comprised of titles by different authors, sequentially unified as an artistic or intellectual project by an individual and specific character described in an accompanying ‘blurb’. Usually (but not always) issued under a general collective title; sometimes (but not always) numbered (inside the book; on the spine; in a list on the back-cover or in an advertisement), with titles issued in succession and in relation to one another and being offered by the same publisher.

(Spiers “Introduction: Wondering about ‘the Causes of Causes’: The Publisher’s Series, Its Cultural Work and Meanings” 23)

These “sustained literary ventures”, to employ the 1884 Publishers’ Circular designation that Leslie Howsam takes as the title for her Publishing History article on this print commodity, centred on the re-issue and re-clothing of previously published texts in new guises or the circulation of a sequence of new reading matter in affiliated volumes. In light of Spiers’ contention that “any series is a niche” (Spiers “Introduction: Wondering about ‘the Causes of Causes’: The Publisher’s Series, Its Cultural Work and Meanings” The Culture of the Publisher’s Series: Authors, Publishers, and the Shaping of Taste 3), a central area of enquiry when probing these endeavours involves identifying the target
readerships to which a series addressed itself while also delineating the specific need the collection endeavoured to satisfy. One must also try to illuminate the forces that drove consumer demand for a particular venture. Print culture scholars, as far back as Altick, have diagnosed the assorted impulses that impelled purchasers’ procurement of these forms. Altick’s study of nineteenth-century cheap reprints series elucidates the marketing ideology that underlay such libraries. He contends: “brand name psychology assumes that a reader who is already pleased with one or two books belonging to such-and-such a "library" will regard the name of that series as a guarantee of excellence,” while "package psychology assumes that when a buyer owns a few volumes in a given series (the "package"), he is likely to want to acquire the rest” (“From Aldine to Everyman” 12). The acquisition of “the rest” fashioned a very specific sort of reading experience. My particular interest is in the new frames of references and lateral ties potentially fostered on a narratological and generic level, owing to reader engagement with fiction disseminated in a series.

The return one procured from acquiring the complete run of a series did not merely exist at a textual level. Howsam stresses that the sight of “a whole row of uniformly bound books” (“Sustained Literary Ventures” 23) displayed in one’s drawing room, parlour, or study would prove an appealing aesthetic prospect to many sorts of reader. Accordingly, it is also necessary to appraise the sort of display one would derive from a complete compilation. The appropriateness (or not) of a particular collection for presentation in such a context is an important consideration. Bibliographical analysis aids greatly in the illumination of such concerns. Chester Topp’s magisterial multi-volume study of the annual cheap fiction output of the leading British publishing houses represents an invaluable reference work and indeed template when it comes to researching publisher’s series. Leah Price has demonstrated the extent to which Victorian readers put their books to many other uses in addition to simply reading them, and the series also makes for a fascinating case study in the circulation of the book as object.
1. Canonisation and the Publisher’s Series

The slaughter of literature. And the butchers—readers: who read novel A (but not B, C, D, E, F, G, H, . . .) and so keep A “alive” into the next generation, when other readers may keep it alive into the following one, and so on until eventually A becomes canonized. A space outside the school, where the canon is selected: the market. Readers read A and so keep it alive; better, they buy A, inducing its publishers to keep it in print until another generation shows up, and so on (Moretti “The Slaughterhouse of Literature” 209-210).

The publisher’s series, according to Spiers, “has been a temple of many columns, both of renewal and remembrance. [...] It has been a perennial home for the survivor advanced to the canon” (Serious about Series 4). The popular novel customarily falls within Ruskin’s books of the hour category, but the assimilation of such fiction into publisher’s series can serve, in the medium term at least, to prolong the lifespan of these works. For instance, inclusion in a publisher’s series ensured that the work of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu continued to be circulated in the later decades of the nineteenth century. There has, however, been little effort to chart the dissemination and reception of the editions in which the Le Fanu novels were reissued during the 1880s and 90s.

“Bentley’s Favourite Novels” was over two decades in existence when fiction by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu was incorporated into this publisher’s series in the mid-1880s. The series’ origins in a May 1862 publication of a one-volume edition of Ellen Wood’s East Lynne (Maunder “A Note on the Text” East Lynne 36) were discussed earlier in the context of the 1865 reprint of Uncle Silas. The series was an enterprise initiated by George Bentley, who had assumed the reins of the firm from his father, Richard (Ray “The Bentley Papers” 178). The collection had come to encompass a diverse and expansive selection of works by May 1886, when the Le Fanu three-deckers, The House by the Churchyard

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21 Colclough’s “J. Sheridan Le Fanu and the ‘Select Library of Fiction’” has charted the inclusion of reprints of four Le Fanu novels including Wylder’s Hand and Uncle Silas in this W.H. Smith/Chapman & Hall two-shilling series during the 1869-71 period.

22 Gettmann’s study of the house of Bentley does not examine this series, focusing instead on the history of “Bentley’s Standard Novels”, the firm’s foregoing flagship series.
and *Uncle Silas* were (re)issued as the series’ latest volumes (“Richard Bentley & Son’s List” 576). The connotations evoked by the title of the series implied that works issued under this banner had proven especially popular with readers. This was an accurate appraisal of the contemporary stock borne by a sizeable number of the series’ volumes but the classification was somewhat tenuous in the case of others.

Nevertheless, the production values of the series effused an air of quality. Each octavo volume was bound in dark green cloth with a distinctive embossed geometric pattern and gold lettering on the spine. An assemblage of these volumes would have made for quite an elegant display on one’s bookshelf. The volumes were typically free of bound-in promotional material. The typography and page layout were not as liberal as a three-decker, yet the size of the type, line spacing, and the margins of these Bentley editions were all comparatively generous. While there was a distinctive appearance to the volumes of this series, their paratextual zones did not overtly announce their status as a “Bentley’s Favourite Novel”. Neither was the individual numerical classification of the volume indicated on the spine, which afforded collectors a certain degree of agency in determining the exact composition of their personal collections as it was possible to omit a volume without harming the aesthetic wholeness of the display.

Reprints of works that had originally appeared in three volumes formed a significant part of “Bentley’s Favourite Novels”, and the six-shilling price of an individual book in the series corresponded to the typical cost at which the one-volume reprint retailed during the mid-Victorian period. This would have been within reach of most strata of the Victorian middle class. It is worth noting that while six shillings would have seemed comparatively inexpensive during the hegemony of the three-decker, this would have been a relatively expensive reprint by the 1890s. It is perhaps surprising that Bentley did not reduce the cost of an individual volume in the series given that the (admittedly far less ornate) reprints from houses like Routledge retailed at a fraction of the price. The maintenance of this six-shilling price tag in the late Victorian era situated “Bentley’s Favourite Novels” as a select or more upmarket category of reprint.
Promotion for the series in the 1880s noted that one could purchase these volumes at booksellers suggesting that these were books intended for the library or the parlour. Railway bookstalls were also identified as a point of sale by the 1890s (“Bentley’s Favourite Novels” The Athenaeum 357). However, six shillings would have represented a significant outlay in this context for all but the wealthiest of travellers, given the availability of more reasonably priced reading matter in such venues.

The incorporation of Uncle Silas into this series situated Le Fanu’s novel within a very definite literary context. Comprising over one hundred titles by the mid-1880s, “Bentley’s Favourite Novels” was an expansive and catholic series. If one were looking to satiate the collecting impulse to which the publisher’s series is said to give rise and aim for a complete run, this would have made for an ambitious, but not entirely impossible, endeavour. The average reader was, perhaps, more likely to visit the series periodically. If one volume in the series had offered a pleasurable reading experience, the implication was, as Spiers has emphasised, that the other volumes would prove equally agreeable (Serious about Series 9). Le Fanu’s Uncle Silas would have accrued a certain level of prestige by featuring in the same series as the collected works of Jane Austen and a Trollope title, The Three Clerks. However, the juxtaposition of his fiction alongside the principal titles of Ellen Wood and Rhoda Broughton, together with the prevalence in this series of works by female writers of popular fiction in a sensational vein such as Marie Corelli, would potentially train a spotlight on the chasm between Le Fanu’s writing and the typical spirit of the sensation novel. Yet that is not to suggest that Uncle Silas would necessarily prove a disappointment to habitual purchasers of this series. For the Term of his Natural Life, Marcus Clarke’s gothic romance set in a penal colony, had been part of the “Favourite Novels” since 1878. Moreover, the 1880s would have proven a particularly apposite literary climate for the psychological gothic style of Uncle Silas. Le Fanu’s In a Glass Darkly collection, which bore certain thematic similarities to Uncle Silas, had been part of the series since 1884 (“Bentley’s Favourite Novels” Saturday Review 72).
The reprinting of Le Fanu’s work continued with Ward & Downey’s March 1889 release of a one-volume six-shilling edition of Le Fanu’s 1869 three-decker, *The Wyvern Mystery.* While the return to print of this novel was significant in itself, an initiative pursued by the firm a decade later in its new incarnation as Downey & Co. held significant potential to ensure that posterity did not consign Le Fanu’s work to obscurity during the late Victorian period. The house issued a series of Le Fanu’s collected works in 1898 that again featured the illustrative talents of the Brinsley Le Fanu, albeit on a significantly reduced scale than the earlier edition of *The Wyvern Mystery.*

Each individual number of the Le Fanu series cost two shillings sixpence and the relative cheapness of this price would have placed it within the reach of a wide circle of readers. The eight titles, which comprised the series upon its launch, included many of his major titles from the 1860s like *Wylder’s Hand* and *The Wyvern Mystery* (“Downey & Co.’s New Publications” *The Athenaeum* 550). The eventual full thirteen-volume series would even include Le Fanu’s two historical novels from the 1840s. However, *Uncle Silas* was a conspicuous absentee. The absence of the Le Fanu novel that had garnered the greatest critical and commercial success had the potential to diminish potential purchasers’ appraisals of this series.

Nevertheless, the materiality of this collected edition on the whole conveyed an air of substance. Each crown octavo volume was bound in dark green cloth with gilt trim, adding a dash of elegance to the series in an era where inexpensively priced reprints were commonly issued in formats of a decidedly insubstantial character. There were decorative chapter breaks and initials, and the typography and page design were comparatively generous. In addition, there were no advertisements in the volumes’ peripheral material other than a list of the Le Fanu titles in the series. Brinsley Le Fanu’s visual contribution to the series involved the design of a special series title page that featured in each volume. The import that the prominent positioning of his name in Downey & Co.’s promotion looked to communicate was that this series

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23 See chapter two for a discussion of the six illustrations by Brinsley Le Fanu featured in this 1889 book.
held the approval of the writer’s family, and was not merely an opportunistic scheme by an acquisitive publisher with no connection to the author. There was a suitably ghostly quality to Brinsley’s design; it depicted a spectral lantern-carrying figure against an evocative nocturnal backdrop with the sign above his head bearing the title of the individual novel (Figure 32).

Similar endeavours pursued contemporaneously by Downey & Co situated this Le Fanu series in decidedly auspicious company. The house’s promotion juxtaposed this 1898 series with a ten-volume collection of the Brontë sisters’ novels, complete with author portraits, priced at two pounds six shillings, and a profusely illustrated forty-volume collection of Balzac’s novels priced at twenty-five pounds (“Downey & Co.’s New Publications” *The Athenaeum* 63). In addition, Le Fanu was not the only minor Irish writer whose collected works Downey & Co. believed would appeal to the late Victorian reading public. A thirty-seven-volume series of the collected works of Charles Lever, priced at nineteen pounds eight shillings and sixpence was circulated concurrently.

Strong production values characterised this Lever collection; each volume was bound in crimson red cloth with gold spine lettering. It too boasted a familial tie in that Lever’s daughter was named on the title pages as the series’ editor. Moreover, the original Phiz and Cruikshank illustrations were included. It was billed as a limited edition with the house claiming that only one thousand copies were to be printed (“Downey & Co.’s New Publications” *The Athenaeum* 63). The Brontë sisters, Balzac, and Lever series were high end products directed at an affluent breed of consumer whereas it seems that the collected Le Fanu sought also to cater to a less prosperous sort of demographic. No total price is quoted, suggesting that this particular series endeavoured to appeal to a constituency whose disposable income lent itself more to piecemeal purchases rather than a single large-scale investment.

If the Ward & Downey endeavour stimulated the collection urge to which the publisher’s series was said to give rise, the end result would of course be the same as one would possess upon one’s shelves what amounted to a library where all of the volumes were uniformly bound. An expansive series like the “Favourite Novels” afforded even greater potential to fashion a collection in this
Moreover, a long-running series of this sort was essentially positioning itself as a guide to what was supposedly worth reading amongst fiction originally published in the recent past. The reissue of Le Fanu’s novels in the Bentley and Downey & Co. series brought his writing to the attention of a new generation of readers, while it afforded the opportunity to those readers who held favourable reading memories of his fiction to renew their acquaintance with his work. Arguably, it was a timely republication, given the rise at the fin de siècle of a style of gothic fiction centring on psychological terrors. There can be little doubt that the publisher’s series potentially fostered lateral reading across its various volumes. However, lacunae are equally telling; the absence of Uncle Silas and In a Glass Darkly from the Downey & Co. venture held genuine capacity to diminish an otherwise quality endeavour.

The sorts of figurative connections that arose in readers’ minds when works by distinct authors were juxtaposed in a publisher’s series could prove noteworthy in fashioning audience conceptions of genre, especially in an era when these concepts were evolving. The constitution of certain series even encouraged readers to conceive of such classifications in transnational terms.

2. Transnational Detective Books and the Publisher’s Series

If the abundance of supply affords any accurate test, the demand for the detective novel is great and increasing. Novels of this class must surely be counted amongst the greatest successes of the day. It is book-stall success, so to speak; that achieved by extensive, sometimes phenomenal sales at low rates, and meaning a widespread dissemination far exceeding anything the circulating libraries could accomplish. The truth, too, of this substantial approval has been accorded to literature of foreign importation. The detective stories apparently most popular with the British public are of French or American origin (“Detective Fiction” The Saturday Review 4 December 1886: 749).

The writer of this 1886 Saturday Review piece went on to identify the novels of Anna Katharine Green as a prime example of this sort of literature. The “Routledge Sixpenny Novels” series, in which Green’s fiction was circulated in the late 1880s, was representative of the sort of reading habits identified in
the article. The reach of these volumes was apparently considerable. *The Academy* wrote in 1897 that “Messrs Routledge & Co. may claim, we suppose, to have invented the sixpenny standard novel [...]. To-day there is no more familiar sight in booksellers’ shops than the stacks of cheap novels, in their bright pictorial covers, issued by this firm” (“Bookselling Notes” 57). Discussion of the abundance of series that this particular house disseminated is, of course, indebted to Topp’s exemplary bibliographical work on their ventures. Accordingly, his reconstruction of Routledge’s register of publications will act as a starting point for my efforts to illuminate the sort of experience this publisher’s series afforded readers.

“Routledge’s Sixpenny Novels” was a broad and eclectic collection. Launched in 1867 (“Bookselling Notes” 57), it had assumed quite a definite shape by the 1880s. Proto-canonical English fiction from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries featured heavily. The principal works of Sir Walter Scott, Lord Lytton, William Harrison Ainsworth, Henry Fielding, Jane Austen, and Captain Frederick Marryat formed a large proportion of the series. Translations of major works of French fiction by Dumas, Hugo, and Verne also made up a considerable number of the series’ volumes (*Routledge’s Sixpenny Unabridged Novels* Supplement 1887). A transnational quality had characterised the series from its earliest point; the first twenty numbers of the “Sixpenny Novels” issued in the late 1860s had consisted of works originally published in the 1830s and 1840s by the American writer of historical romances, James Fenimore Cooper (*A Catalogue of Novels, Cheap Literature, and Useful Books* 9). Therefore, it is of little surprise that the “Detective Books” subcategory of the series, which appeared in 1887-1888, was comprised entirely of French and American crime fiction.

The monetary designation of this Routledge series highlighted how this particular collection defined itself by its cheapness. The labels “without abridgement” or “unabridged” were frequently appended to the series’ title in Routledge’s promotional notices (*Routledge’s Sixpenny Unabridged Novels* Supplement 1887, 1 and “Routledge’s Sixpenny Novels without Abridgement” 654), suggesting that this collection was also situating its identity in opposition
to the breed of inexpensive reprint that engaged in textual condensing or bowdlerization. The volumes were demy octavo paperbacks and had what the publisher termed a “fancy” cover, which meant that an illustration printed in colour was the first element that confronted a prospective reader. This series afforded readers access to a wide array of fiction in return for a relatively small outlay; however, this low cost was reflected in the production values. The paper quality was not especially high, which meant that the text bled through the leaf to a significant degree. Most volumes in the series employed a dual-column page layout while particularly small type was commonly used with longer works. It is worth noting that there was no typographical uniformity from volume to volume in the series, which suggests that the printing process was rooted in the use of pre-existing stereotyped plates. Several pages of bound-in advertising matter commonly bookended the text; patent medicines featured prominently amongst these notices in the 1880s. Once a reader had consumed a “Routledge Sixpenny Novel” and unless s/he intended to revisit the text at a subsequent point, it is unlikely that s/he would retain a volume of this sort for its aesthetic qualities. That said, the regular inclusion of catalogues for the “Sixpenny Series” at the rear of these Routledge volumes suggests an effort on the part of the publisher to persuade readers about what next to read. If the work the reader had in his/her possession had proven enjoyable, it enhanced the likelihood that the carryover impulse inherent in the publisher’s series would be successfully stimulated. The presence of a list detailing the other works available would facilitate this. Moreover, Routledge released new volumes in this series on a monthly basis, which also suggests an effort to inculcate a regular or semi-regular purchasing habit. The sale of books of this sort at railway stations as well as with booksellers meant the casual purchaser might acquire these volumes as well. The prevalence of reprints of classics or standards in this series meant this collection could also trade off the familiarity that specific works held in the consciousness of more cultured quarters of the reading public.

Routledge had previously published Anna Katharine Green’s *The Mill Mystery* in February 1886 as a one-shilling sixpence cloth-bound edition and a
one-shilling paperback. The novel was subsequently assimilated into the “Detective Books” subcategory of the house’s “Sixpenny Novels” series in November 1887 ("George Routledge & Sons’ Serials for November" 587). The 1887 edition had a visually arresting cover illustration (Figure 33). Underscoring the sensational quality of the novel’s plot, it depicts a key moment from an early point in the narrative where the traumatized fiancée of Rev. Barrows is confronted with his dead body. A crowd of primarily male onlookers encircle the scene, while her friend, Constance Sterling, who will later turn detective in order to unearth the truth about Barrows’ death, stands supportively at her side. While this visual did not exactly mis-sell _The Mill Mystery_, it potentially had the effect of overshadowing the exploration of female agency and transgressive modes of femininity that Green had woven into the mystery plot. This 1887 volume of the sixpenny series also made for a distinctive entry. It evidently reused the plates from the previous year’s edition thus lending it a single column page layout that set it apart from its fellow “Detective Books” that typically featured a dual-column presentation. This meant that the sixpenny consumers enjoyed the same generous organisation of text as those who, just over a year earlier, had paid an additional shilling for the novel.

The incorporation of _The Mill Mystery_ into this strand of “Routledge’s Sixpenny Novels” situated Green’s novel within a very particular literary context. Routledge had issued English language translations of Emile Gaboriau’s major works across the summer and autumn of 1887, while the house had also published “Sixpenny Novels” editions of American crime writing during this time by authors like “Lawrence Lynch” (Emma Murdoch), Frank Pinkerton and Myron Pinkerton.24 The “Detective Books” expanded further in 1888 as selected works by Fortuné du Boisgobey were assimilated into the series. The circulation of Green’s fiction alongside Gaboriau was a neat juxtaposition. _The Saturday Review_ described _The Leavenworth Case_ as “a very creditable imitation of Gaboriau” (“Five Novels” 793). A 1929 profile of Green observed of the writer

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24 The Routledge volume (Vol. I) of Topp’s _Victorian Yellowbacks and Paperbacks_ chronicles how the principal Gaboriau titles together with work by these American detective fiction writers were issued during July, August, and September of 1887.
that “her inspiration she traces to Gaboriau” (Woodward The Bookman 168), and, as chapter three has demonstrated, there was considerable affinity in the two writers’ plot construction and representation of professional detection. However, the situation of Green’s work alongside the Pinkertons and Lynch novels represented a more problematic species of combination. There were very obvious connotations evoked by the Pinkerton name. Routledge evidently hoped that the associations with the famous American private detective agency founded by the Scottish born Allan Pinkerton would tap into the reading public’s appetite for a window into the exploits of professional detectives. Routledge elected to circulate the Frank Pinkerton works in England under variants of the original titles. The billing of these novels under names like The Great Adams Express Robbery: A Detective Story served to emphasise the fact they originated in the realm of disposable fiction, and were not the sort of reading matter that endeavoured to engage readers on a cerebral level. The Great Adams Express Robbery was a thinly veiled fictionalisation of the real life Allan Pinkerton train heist case involving the James family of outlaws. The Myron Pinkerton novel, The Rokewood Tragedy, also documented the exploits of a professional Chicago detective named Captain Turtle. By contrast, psychological insight and a certain degree of social comment were interspersed with crime and detection in Green’s fiction.

In essence, a “Pinkerton” work was the sort of dime novel material that Green defined herself against in the US publishing context; her writing was issued in one-dollar cloth bound editions by the reputable house of G.P. Putnam. The fictitious label of “ex-detective” was appended to the pseudonym of “Lawrence L. Lynch” under which the Emma Murdoch novels Shadowed by Three and The Diamond Coterie were published. While wholly sensational in subject matter, LeRoy Panek rates Murdoch’s work above the usual inexpensive genre fiction fare of the period describing her writing as a “mixture of romance,

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25 Mere months elapsed between the original US publication of these Pinkerton works and Routledge’s issue of “Detective Books” editions in England. 26 Panek’s Before Sherlock Holmes states that Murdoch’s “Lynch” novels were published in the US during the same era as Green’s work. Shadowed by Three was first issued in 1878 while The Diamond Coterie was released in 1882.
detective genius, and a pinch of realism” (*Before Sherlock Holmes* 142). The artwork that Routledge used in the cover illustrations for these “Detective Books” underscored the yellowness of the “Lynch” and the Pinkerton works (Figures 34 and 35). It also framed both Gaboriau and Green in decidedly sensational terms. For example, the “Detective Books” edition of *The Widow Lerouge* depicted the moment at which the murdered body of the eponymous character is discovered (Figure 36). While the Vizetelly English language translation editions of Gaboriau issued in the earlier years of the 1880s had billed the works as “sensational novels”, their materiality was characterised by significantly greater restraint in that their cover art featured a portrait of Otto Von Bismarck in support of the house’s promotional line that Gaboriau’s fiction was the Chancellor’s favourite reading (Figure 37).

Considering the “Detective Books” as a whole, one is especially struck by the prevalence of dramatic imagery of corpses or individuals in varying states of incapacitation and distress across the series’ cover art. For those readers who read across the series, this blend of French and American titles fed into a distinctly international conception of the crime fiction genre. However, the poor quality of the other American fiction with which Green was juxtaposed had the potential to diminish readers’ perceptions of her work, when arguably she merited consideration as a minor writer in the vein of Braddon or Collins. It is also worth noting that Green did not acquiesce to the dissemination of her fiction in this context, while the international copyright situation in this period meant that neither was she deriving her rightful financial return from Routledge.27

Routledge was not the sole house who had sought to circulate Green’s novels in England. Editions of the four novels that Green had written after *The Leavenworth Case* and prior to *The Mill Mystery* were issued as “Ward & Lock Sixpenny Books” across 1883 and 1884 (“Ward, Lock, & Co.” *Publishers’ Circular*...)

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27 Green is quoted as registering her support for the passage of the Chace Bill in an 1888 *New York Times* article. She detailed the losses she had experienced due to unauthorised overseas reprints of her novels and outlined how in this period an unnamed English publisher (which the publication history of her works in England in the mid and late 1880s illustrates was Routledge) is providing her with a degree of remuneration for the supply of advance sheets of her novels.
While this series did not juxtapose Green’s work with lurid dime novels, it also diminished her stock somewhat. The Saturday Review remarked in its October 1884 review of *A Strange Disappearance* and *Hand and Ring*, which the reviewer had written using these Ward & Lock editions, that

[Green’s] two new books- new, at least, on this side of the Atlantic- are unluckily printed in double columns of very small type on a very stinted allowance of paper, It would probably be worth while [sic] to publish an edition of *Hand and Ring* which people could read without ruining their eyesight. The book (to persons who care for this sort of thing) is worth more than sixpence, the price charged for the nearly illegible copy which we have striven to decipher (“Three Sensational Novels” 635).

The sort of edition that the reviewer desired was, in fact, in contemporaneous existence in England in the form of the legitimately issued Putnam six-shilling cloth bound and two-shilling paperback editions of *Hand and Ring* (“List of New Books” *The Athenaeum* 631 and “List of New Books” *The Athenaeum* 431). The more inexpensively priced Ward & Lock edition evidently would have harmed the demand for the Putnam books, and, in the process, diminished Green’s cachet to a certain degree. As the nineteenth century progressed, the production values of the species of book that one might procure for several pence rose and this was reflected in the circulation of Green’s work.

Routledge launched The “Threepenny Novels” series in January 1897. Demy octavo paperbacks with pictorial covers, they resembled the sixpenny novels in appearance. The resemblance was not solely a material one. The new series interspersed out of copyright literary works with selected French and American detective fiction (“Bookselling Notes” 57) in the same way that the “Sixpenny Novels” had done. The collection debuted with the release of eight volumes of proto-canonical titles that were almost certain to have attained the status of classic in the common consciousness; these included Dickens’ *Hard Times*, Hugo’s *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, and Ainsworth’s *Old St. Paul’s* (“Routledge’s Threepenny Novels” 58). The genre fiction strand of the series came on stream with the publication of a further eight-strong tranche of titles in late February and early March. Green’s *The Mill Mystery* and *The Leavenworth Case* were once again interspersed with the same blend of Pinkerton and Murdoch titles together with Gaboriau’s *The Widow Lerouge*
(Topp Vol I 467). The *Academy* observed of the endeavour “the cheapening of paper and printing has enabled Messrs Routledge to so improve on their record that their threepenny novels of to-day are superior to their sixpenny ones of yesterday” (“Bookselling Notes” 57).  

The composition of the collection along with the very low price, facilitated by a lower cost base, suggests that Routledge’s target audience lay in the post-1870 ‘new readers’ and that the aim was to fulfil any potential auto-didactic desires for cultural enlightenment, while also meeting light reading needs.

The niche into which the sixpenny “Detective Books” endeavoured to position itself was the satiation of this appetite for light fiction. The 1886 *Saturday Review* appraisal of the vogue for tales of detection underscored the capacity of such works to serve as absorbing diversion for their consumers. The writer remarked: “it is surely something to secure and fix the attention early, to arouse interest soon, and retain it to the last; to take a reader quite out of himself while producing the pleasurable mental exercise that accompanies speculative thought” (“Detective Fiction” 749). Moreover, the escapist quality of this fiction would almost certainly be heightened by the fact that the tales of mystery and detection were set in locations like Chicago, New York, Paris, small town America, or the French provinces. Novelists like Green or Gaboriau who wove a well-realised delineation of place into their plots offered the “Detective Books” readers a window on a different world. My concern in this section has centred on the tension between Green’s work and the other American fiction with which it was paired in this collection. It is also worth emphasising the reverse implications of this juxtaposition. For the less sophisticated constituency of readers who purchased and consumed the Pinkerton volumes and who then proceeded to move toward the other American fiction in the collection, Green may well have constituted a real disturbance in the carry-over trajectory.

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28 Weedon has traced the reduction in the cost of paper from the mid to the late nineteenth century. The statistics that her study quotes indicate a near two-thirds fall in this commodity cost in the 1866-1896 period (66-67).
Chapter 4

The yellowness of the visual matter in the foremost region of the paratextual zone served as a definite unifying ingredient between the various volumes in this series. It certainly heightened the capacity of these books to catch the eye of a potential purchaser at the point of sale. However, the tenor of this artwork may also have led certain customers to shy away from acquiring such works, owing to the sorts of signals set forth by being seen to possess a book packaged in this way. The potential brevity of the life span to which these volumes gave rise is an important consideration. That disposability was the result of the mediocre production values inherent in an inexpensive volume like this is something that must be considered. The cloth bound format in which Routledge had originally circulated *The Mill Mystery*, in 1886, was elegant and durable, while assimilation into the “Detective Books” had rewritten this coding.

Spiers observes of the publisher’s series: “it has introduced new writers and new ideas, and more widely harkened older works” (“Introduction: Wondering about ’the Causes of Causes’: The Publisher’s Series, Its Cultural Work and Meanings. Part One: The Methodologies of Series and the Limits of Knowledge” 11). The majority of works designated for reprinting in series would already have demonstrated that they held a certain appeal for readers; the circulation of new material in collections potentially made for a more capricious and fluid sort of venture.

3. The Anatomy of Publisher’s Series Development

The first problem any commodity faces when it comes on to the market is to initiate the communicative event it is economically dependent upon. It must create the addressee by identifying potential purchasers. It must make potential purchasers give it an identity and persuade them that it relates to themselves. In order to do this it has to get the public to differentiate it from competing products while at the same time it must give the appearance of being already well known to them. The commodity thus suffers the dilemma of having to be new-and-not new (King, “A Paradigm of Reading the Victorian Penny Weekly” 81-82).

I quickly learned that reading is cumulative and proceeds by geometrical progression: each new reading builds upon whatever the reader has read before (Manguel, *A History of Reading*, 19).
The rise of John Milne’s “The Express Series” was an exemplar of organic publisher’s series development. An enterprising publisher endeavoured to capitalise on, and sustain, the esteem that a particular novel had realised with readers by looking to situate subsequent novels within the new-and-not new zone of which King writes. This scheme centred on the circulation of these later works under the umbrella of the original bestselling novel’s popularity.

There was a dual-pronged signification to the title under which this publisher’s series was sold. On one level, the designation of John Milne’s “The Express Series” constituted an allusion to the site of reading where purchasers might consume these volumes. There was a precedent for this strategy of referencing reading matter as intended for consumption on public transport; Routledge’s “The Railway Library” was amongst the most capacious and long running example of such a publisher’s series. On another level, the title of the collection highlights how it was instigated by the publisher in the hope of capitalising on the commercial success garnered by the house’s 1896 publication of Arthur Griffiths’ *The Rome Express*. It represented an effort to trade on the recognisability of the 1896 novel and, in effect, use this as the foundation for a brand that would inspire those consumers who had found *The Rome Express* an enjoyable read to purchase subsequent novels issued by the firm.

It was not until the appearance of the third volume that Milne overtly marketed the collection as a series. *A Girl of Grit* (1898), Arthur Griffiths’ follow-up to *The Rome Express*, was issued in August of 1898 and was proclaimed “a companion volume” to its author’s previous John Milne title (“Announcements” *The Academy* 94). This affinity existed on a number of levels. Thematically, the 1898 Griffiths’ novel represented a comparable breed of text to the 1896 murder mystery that had proven such a successful endeavour for Griffiths and Milne. *A Girl of Grit* centred on a civil servant working in the War Office who unexpectedly inherits a multi-million dollar fortune that propels him on a journey of danger and adventure. The novel’s plot was also constructed around deception, fraud, detection, and had a love story subplot in addition to the primary crime narrative. Frida Fairholme, the
spirited heroine referenced in the title, did, however, possess a far greater degree of agency than Contessa di Castagneto of The Rome Express. A Girl of Grit was identically priced at two shillings sixpence (“John Milne” The Speaker iii) and its red cloth binding was also uniform with the earlier Griffiths’ novel. A significant slogan was employed in the notice promoting the new Griffiths’ work; the publisher billed A Girl of Grit, the sixth edition of The Rome Express, and a six-shilling J. Henry Harris novel as “Three Books for a Holiday”. The styling of these works as ideally suited to reading during leisure time or while making one’s way to one’s leisure destination, foreshadowed, to a certain extent, the niche in which Milne would endeavour to situate “The Express Series” when it formally launched.

Milne’s November 1898 release of A Desperate Voyage by E.F. Knight was introduced as the third volume in “The Express Series”. A list presenting the Griffiths novels as the first two books in the series appeared prior to the title page of A Desperate Voyage, but it was the opposite end of the volume that advanced the most concrete statement about the values that were set to underlie the collection. The first item set forth in the publisher’s supplement that was bound in to the rear of the book was the series catalogue. The following blurb was printed in large type:

The Express Series is designed to meet the taste of readers who desire a swiftly-moving, well-written, dramatic tale, without superfluous descriptive or literary padding, but with continuity and action from the first page to the last. It contains only specially-written and selected stories, mostly by well-known writers (List of New and Recent Books Published by John Milne 1).

Therefore, this collection was selling itself as engaging light reading. Captivating narrative was to be the defining attribute of these works. Original fiction only would feature, thus distinguishing “The Express Series” from the myriad of other literary ventures that traded in reprints. Novelists of celebrity would predominate; the firm would at times struggle to make good on this promise in the latter stages of the series. The brevity and conciseness of style its writers would apparently display was also billed as an advantage. Such underscoring of the novels’ simplicity of language suggests an effort to court various
constituencies of reader. These target demographics included those who owing to underdeveloped literacy skills did not care for elaborate prose, others whose tastes leaned toward undemanding fare, or individuals who merely had a limited quantity of leisure time or reading space that did not lend itself to wading through dense prose.

A later advertisement from 1899 featured the banner heading: “Do not travel without a copy of the Express Series” (John Milne Advertisement The Pall Mall Gazette 3). The implication was of course that consumption of an absorbing volume from this series would make one’s journey pass much more rapidly. The noisiness of travelling aboard public transport meant a reader was consuming his/her book to a soundtrack of the engine of the omnibus or train and the din of his/her fellow passengers. Not everybody could manage under these conditions fiction characterised by a writing style that demanded close attentiveness. However, it is also clear from the constitution of the volumes themselves that Milne did not solely conceive of the novels as reading for the train.

The materiality of the first editions of novels that formed part of “The Express Series” took their cues from the appearance of the 1896 edition of The Rome Express. The crown octavo volumes had a distinct and uniform look; each was bound in red cloth with gilt lettering on the spine and cover. From The Girl of Grit onward, the Milne family insignia with its motto of “Dat Cura Commodum” (“Vigilance ensures advantage”) was imprinted on the binding. The crest also featured prominently within the books, often on the title pages, and functioned almost like an emblem for the series. In so far as one can judge from the editions preserved in copyright libraries, the volumes also appear to have been untainted by assorted promotional matter for food supplements, cosmetics and the like with which one habitually met in inexpensively priced books. An “Express” novel was the sort of cheap book that one might purchase at a railway bookstall. Unlike a significant proportion of the reading matter sold at such locations, even the most fastidious or refined of purchasers were unlikely to have qualms about displaying a volume from this series on his/her bookshelf. A Milne book was a tasteful and elegant object; the full run of “The
Express Series” would have made for an attractive sight. This is something that is reflected in Milne’s categorisation of these first editions as books “for the Library” (*List of New and Recent Books Published by John Milne* 1). The connotations of gentility bound up in this designation suggest also an effort to tap into an aspirational quality in consumers; one could procure an object that constituted a signifier of status by purchasing this series.

The excellent production values of these first editions procured one a good return on one’s half crown. There was typographical uniformity to the half-crown volumes in the series. The loose textual presentation, generously sized type, and liberal margins gave “The Express Series” a page design reminiscent of the three-decker of old. The collapse of the three-volume novel form had also occasioned the end of the two-tiered system of expensively priced three-deckers and more reasonably priced one-volume reprints.

However, Milne pursued an equivalent sort of strategy involving one-shilling reprints bound in colour illustrated cardboard covers. Typically released eight to ten months after the first editions, the firm billed these reprints as “for the Pocket or the Train” (*List of New and Recent Books Published by John Milne* 1). An obvious consequence of this policy was a broadening of the series’ customer base to include those readers with more modest reserves of disposable income that did not stretch to the half crown “Library” edition.

The peripheral material that featured in the “Library” books also endeavoured to maximise the chances of securing reader commitment to the series. Not only did the Milne promotional matter set forth the values of “The Express Series”, it also featured lengthy blurbs that summarised the narratives of previous works in the series, and reprinted judiciously selected favourable quotations from reviews. The graphics employed in the bound-in series promotional matter from the latter stages of the collection consisted of a pictorial border of locomotives and train carriages, which underscored the extent to which collection’s branding was rooted in the provision of situational reading matter. The second and third volumes were also characterised by a bold and rather calculating scheme to persuade readers to acquire the earlier books in the series. The opening chapters from the previous works were
included at the rear of the volumes and Milne terminated these previews on an unfinished sentence. The aim was of course to beget a desire that only this publisher’s stock could satisfy. The sole way to relieve this disconcerting sense of the unfinished and to learn of the direction in which the narrative continued was to acquire the other books.

The third book in the series, *A Desperate Voyage* by E.F. Knight, was a highly coloured story of adventure, centring on the escapades of a fugitive solicitor who, in an effort to escape his debts, commandeers a friend’s yacht and sails from the Thames to the South Atlantic, falling in with a crew of rogues at Rotterdam. The focalisation of the narrative from the point of view of the anti-hero would have formed an arresting contrast with the two previous Griffiths novels. Knight was also a curious selection on Milne’s part, as he was not regarded as a novelist of any great esteem but rather his renown in this period would have been based on his work as a war correspondent with the *Times*. Knight did succeed in imbuing the tale with a degree of local colour but the *Athenaeum* deemed the story “forced and lacking in probability” (“Tales of Adventure” 894). The John Milne catalogue that featured at the end of the Knight volume announced that David Christie Murray was to contribute the next “Express” novel. The characteristic Murray novel would not disappoint readers who had enjoyed *A Desperate Voyage*, and Murray had the sort of symbolic capital that Knight lacked, given that he already had a long list of novels to his credit. However, this promised Murray novel failed to materialise and the fourth novel in the “Express Series” was *The Ivory Queen: A Detective Story* by the comparatively undistinguished Norman Hurst. A murder mystery set in Chicago, that featured the suave professional detective Herbert Darrent nicknamed the “The American Lecoq”, this May 1899 release represented a return to pure detective fiction following the series’ brief foray into more general yellow territory with its second and third volumes. Milne evidently hoped that a return to the sort of tale that had launched the series would recreate some of the reader momentum that characterised its inception. These ambitions appear not to have been fulfilled as the novel failed to register an impression of any significance on the literary scene. Milne’s post-*Ivory Queen*
discontinuation of the practice of quoting in his promotional notices the sales figures that individual titles had realised suggest that the commercial performance of the collection no longer merited self-congratulation. *The Ivory Queen* also appeared to precipitate a significant reorientation in the series.

Readers who had come to associate “The Express Series” with narratives of crime and detection were certain to view the fifth volume with a degree of confusion. Milne diverted from course entirely with the issue of Morley Roberts’ *A Sea Comedy*, published in July 1899. While Roberts was a figure of some renown, owing to his travel writing and nautical novels, and the *Athenaeum* remarked “‘A Sea Comedy’ is great fun and the only fault we have to find with it is that it is too short” (“A Sea Comedy” 252), this humorous turn was at odds with the four previous works in the collection. There was a paradoxical quality to the *Athenaeum* reviewer’s observation that “if this book is a sample of the Express Series, Mr Milne is to be congratulated on his venture”, as *A Sea Comedy* was not at all representative of the series. The risk that it would destabilise the series brand was twofold. The habitual reader of “The Express Series” who used the collection to satiate his/her appetite for crime fiction would have regarded Morley Roberts as quite a disappointment. Such dissatisfaction might well send the reader elsewhere for future purchases. Conversely, an amusing maiden encounter with the series centring on *A Sea Comedy* that inspired a reader to investigate another of the volumes in the collection would also elicit frustration.

The curtain fell on “The Express Series” with the publication of the sixth volume, *Clare Monro: The Story of a Mother and Daughter* (1900) by Hannah Lynch. That over fourteen months elapsed between the issue of the fifth and sixth numbers suggests a real lack of vitality in the collection’s final period. While Lynch’s stock was at a distinctly high point following the October 1898-April 1899 serialisation of *The Autobiography of a Child* in Blackwood’s, the melodrama of *Clare Monro* constituted yet another about-face for “The Express Series”. An unimaginative plot about a daughter’s discovery of her mother’s dubious past was apparently compounded by Lynch’s failure to tailor her material to the dimensions of her canvas, with the *Academy* observing “Miss
Lynch has dealt in the dimensions of a sketch with a subject large enough to furnish forth the old-fashioned three volumes” (“Clare Munro” 413). The reviewer deemed the novel a failure and noted: “It was [...] probably meant to be a tragedy, it does but succeed in being a melodrama” (“Clare Munro” 413). Victorian popular taste generally appreciated melodrama but the termination of this publisher’s series with Clare Munro suggests this particular text had not found favour with readers nor had effected a reversal in the decline of “The Express Series”.

The root of the series’ demise lay in the fact that it failed to maintain momentum. Milne’s failure to release a novel that registered on an equivalent level with readers as the titular book had done meant that no renewal was realised in the spark of the brand. Such a process was necessary in order to offset the inevitable erosion over time of the cachet of a book of the hour like The Rome Express. The famed Jeff Bezos maxim that brand is formed primarily, not by what a company says about itself, but what a company does underscores the extent to which an ill-conceived selection of titles, along with an uncertain identity grounded in a wavering orientation, undermined the status of the “Express Series” brand. A number of the writers whose talents were engaged were likely to strike a familiar chord with readers and, considered individually, the authors’ contributions may well have constituted tolerable escapist fare. However, the constitution of the series grew deficient in coherence and this meant that the cohesion derivable from the possession of a complete run of the collection was stronger on the material than on the textual level. An erratic release schedule also likely harmed the package psychology impulse, diminishing the series’ potential to inculcate a regular purchasing habit in its audience. “The Express Series” may have precipitated a short-term extension in the lifespan of The Rome Express and introduced it to new readers, but this would be significantly offset by the inevitable diminution in the novel’s standing resulting from its association with the abortive series venture.
Conclusion

If its configuration was judiciously determined, a publisher’s series potentially enabled a reader to prolong the pleasure s/he had derived from a particular work by offering counsel on future choices of text where s/he would supposedly procure a similarly gratifying sort of reading experience. The publisher’s aim was to condition readers to frame the subsequent volumes in the collection in the lucrative “new and not new” terms. This in turn was designed to turn the casual reader into a serial purchaser driven to acquire multiple titles in the series. The role of the series as a counsellor in shaping readers’ choices is an influence that should be afforded due credence in reconstructing the history of reading. The peripheral material that featured in individual volumes also had the ability to stimulate this crossover impulse. This is not to suggest that all readers of series were impelled to realise completeness; reader engagement with especially capacious series likely existed on a qualified or more arbitrary scale. If the cohesion that supposedly underlay the distinct titles’ cumulation as a series was to be sustained, the links in the chain connecting the various volumes in the collection needed to consist of more than simply a uniform style of binding.

The connotations suggested by the series title not only signalled the values that underpinned the collection, but also underscored the sort of affinity that united the parts of the series. Such links were grounded in genre, a common status as a beloved book, or an apparent kinship with a well-regarded work. The sorts of affiliation that the series fostered between texts sometimes transcended conventional boundaries, juxtaposing texts that did not ordinarily intermingle. Nevertheless, there is no guarantee that readers consumed works in the sequential or numerical order that the publisher assigned to the collection. The impact on an individual text’s stock from its presence in a series was contingent on the constitution of this new print context. The indirect eminence radiating from the cachet of its auspicious companion volumes might well elevate the status of an individual novel. Conversely, poor quality company
could also deplete a title’s worth. Ultimately, such value judgements were contingent on the reading history and cultural literacy that an individual reader brought to his/her engagement with the series. Indeed, the importance of the publisher’s series to the study of the history of reading rests on the potential of such modes of publication to introduce readers to texts with which they had not engaged at the point when this material was originally issued. The reissue of such matter inevitably involved an element of recoding and repackaging.

Audience encounters with repackaged and transposed narrative were not solely limited to the medium of print during the Victorian period. Popular novels were regularly adapted for the stage and this afforded readers the opportunity to engage in a performance medium with characters and plots that had featured in their reading histories. Furthermore, the experience of the play might well stimulate a proportion of those patrons attending such dramatizations, who had not previously read the adapted text, to seek out the novel that had inspired the drama.
Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Figures


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Chapter 5: Reception and Stage Adaptations of the Popular Novel

Introduction

Works like *The Prisoner of Zenda* have charms, in particular, for that great section of the middle class which loves to see on the boards the people of whom it has read in books. The youngsters who delight above all in pictures develop into adults for whom the pictorial representation of a favourite fiction is a joy for ever [...] [The dramatised novel] is by no means the ‘new thing’ that some people seem to consider it. It has existed, and succeeded, in England since the time of Shakespeare, most of whose plays when you come to think of it, are dramatisations of popular stories. The simple Elizabethan had the same aesthetic desires as the simple Victorian. He liked to witness on the stage dramatic and pictorial illustrations of the ‘novels’ or ballads that he had read or had heard recited (W. Davenport Adams “What is the Theatrical Public?” *The Theatre*. 1 April 1897. 199-201).

Victorian audiences’ consumption of popular fiction narratives cannot be considered solely within the medium of print. Just as novels that capture the imagination of the reading public of today are adapted for cinema or television, the bestselling book of the nineteenth century was frequently dramatized for the theatre. While we do need to be wary of theorising the Victorian equivalent of such novel to screen transitions anachronistically, the field of adaptation studies represents a potentially very fertile body of theory against which to consider such transpositions of the nineteenth-century popular novel. However, the nature of the material that can be analysed when considering the nineteenth-century dramatization is comparatively more limited. As Michael R. Booth observes, “nothing is harder to bring to life for a modern reader than the theatre of the past” (*English Melodrama* 13). Today all that remains of an adaptation may be a playscript, critics’ appraisals of a particular performance, ephemera, and if the drama was an especially high profile production, visual representations from the press of notable scenes of the play. Predictably, a comparatively greater effort has been made to trace the nineteenth-century stage adaptations of the novels of canonical writers like Dickens. H.P. Bolton’s *Dickens Dramatized* constitutes a monumental work of scholarship. Its initial
sections also afford the non-Dickens researcher a wealth of contextual information on pre-Victorian adaptations of the novel, conventions associated with dramatizations in the Victorian period, and the histories of notable productions like the stage plays of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and *The Woman in White*.

When studying the reception of a specific adaptation, there are a number of key questions that need to be considered. Firstly, the composition of the audience who were likely to have attended the drama in question must be identified. Booth has highlighted the expansion in the Victorian theatregoing public that began in the late 1860s and continued until the end of century. He contends that it originated in increasing disposable income, leisure time, and a rise in the number of theatres (*Theatre in the Victorian Age* 7-8). Significant insight can be procured into an adaptation’s consumers if we adhere to David Mayer’s advice and consider the character and geographical location of the theatre where a drama was first performed, together with the sort of public that habitually patronized the house (“Encountering Melodrama” 146).

Secondly, it is essential that we endeavour to diagnose the appeal of this drama for these consumers. John Ellis’ appraisal of the allure of adaptation represents one of the more compelling takes on this question that I have encountered. He observes

> The form of the narrative novel resists re-reading in our culture: the vast majority of novels are designed to be read once and once only [...] Re-reading or re-viewing the same text always threatens to disappoint: the process of production of the illusion becomes too obvious, the memory interferes. Adaptation into another medium becomes a means of prolonging the pleasure of the original representation, and repeating the production of a memory (“The Literary Adaptation” 4).

Therefore, as Linda Hutcheon points out, consumers process adaptations in an oscillatory way: “it is a form of Intertextuality: we experience adaptations (as adaptations) as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation” (*A Theory of Adaptation* 8).

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29 Exemplifying the veracity of Mayer’s pronouncement, Davis and Emeljanow’s study of the patronage of seven London houses from four distinct quarters of the city during the 1840 to 1880 period constituted an exemplary undertaking, which fashioned an intricate portrait of the various theatregoing publics their project considered.
Finally, the components that comprise the adaptation that consumers experience need to be dissected. The analytical framework grounded in “wh” questions that Hutcheon models will enable this. A degree of comparison between the adapted text and the adaptation will be necessary to such discussion. Arguably, the ghost of fidelity criticism continues to haunt the field of adaptation studies. However, these are not the sort of value judgements in which I wish to engage. Rather, my interest lies in tracing what Geoffrey Wagner has termed the transposition or the relocation of a text from one sphere to another and its presentation to an audience according to the conventions of the new medium (Cited in Cartmell “From Text to Screen” 24). The new encounter perhaps unfolded in a different socio-cultural context, which potentially altered the substance of what was transposed. There were varied elements conditioning Victorian audiences’ encounters with adaptations in this new medium of the theatre. Martin Meisel’s study of the affinities between the visual qualities of the novel and the pictures devised in the dramatizations highlights one layer of signification flowing through an adaptation. The actors who interpreted the characters of course also shaped the pieces with which audiences engaged. Attendees would not necessarily regard these performers as blank canvases free of prior associations, as Mayer (“Encountering Melodrama” 146) points out. Adaptation also resulted in a discernible shift in the environment where audiences engaged with these plots and characters. It was now a collective experience. Booth highlights that a darkened auditorium did not become the norm until the early twentieth century (Theatre in the Victorian Age 62); accordingly, the responses of other patrons to what was occurring on stage were visible. In addition, Sarah Thomasson’s idea of multi-layered palimpsests involving the convergence of text and venue in meaning making, which she derives from Marvin Carlson’s notion of ghosting, underscores how “performance space shapes the reception of, and participation in, [the adaptation]” (Haunted Space 7).
1. Distillations and the Three-Hundred Page “Doorstopper”

It is easy enough to scissor a panorama of scenes from a story, but to make over the story itself into a play is not so easy. To get a true play out of a novel, the dramatist must translate the essential idea from the terms of narrative into the terms of drama. He must disengage the fundamental subject from the accidental incidents with which the novelist has presented it. He must strip it to the skeleton, and then must clothe these bare bones with new flesh and fresh muscle in accordance with the needs of the theatre (Matthews “The Dramatisation of Novels” Longman’s Magazine. October 1889. 591).

The multivolume novel and the part-issue novel were print narratives encoded for reading at intervals over multiple weeks and months. For audiences to engage with the narration of this same tale in a three to four hour performance in a theatre necessitated significant change, which, as Matthews observes, could not merely be realised by a scissors and paste strategy. Patrons arrived at the theatre with reading histories, together with tastes that were shaped by the fare that habitually featured on the nineteenth-century stage. There were certain popular novels, if imaginatively and appropriately adapted, which were likely to succeed admirably in this context.

Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s The Trail of the Serpent (1861) was a novel with significant adaptation potential. Written as Braddon’s career as an actress was drawing to a close, echoes of melodrama pervade the text’s narrative and characterisation. Maurizio Ascari has actually identified Charles Reade’s 1850 English language adaptation of the French stage melodrama, The Courier of Lyons, as a likely source for the novel’s plot (94). A stage adaptation by May Holt30 opened in Belfast in summer 1881 as Jabez North; or, a Golden Secret but was renamed Dark Deeds when it transferred to the London stage in March of the following year. The novel’s initial incarnation as a penny-part serial necessitated a certain level of condensing in Holt’s process owing to the sheer length of Braddon’s novel. Holt focused her attentions on constructing a four-act drama derived from the novel’s key personalities and pivotal incidents. The geographical breadth of the novel’s canvas was also reduced; three of the four

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30 Holt was an actress recently retired from the stage when she wrote this adaptation of Braddon’s novel. For discussion of Holt’s later career from the perspective of identity, see Kate Newey “When is an Australian Playwright not an Australian Playwright?”
acts are set in various locations around the small town of Slopperton while the
Parisian events of the novel’s third book are omitted entirely.

Holt’s original title reflects the primacy of the villainous protagonist in the
plot of Braddon’s novel. Booth stresses that “the moving force of melodrama
[...] is the villain” *(English Melodrama 18)*. Holt furnishes Braddon’s malevolent
schoolmaster with asides and monologues at various points in the play that
introduce his history as a foundling and lay bare his scheming and destructive
quest for advancement. The dialogue that formed these speeches was original
to the adaptation as were the majority of the other characters’ lines. The
adapted text afforded Holt two gulls for the villain’s machinations. The
narrative’s hero, Richard Marwell, is wrongfully implicated in Jabez’s robbery
and murder of Marwell’s aged uncle, which happens at the end of the first act.
The villain also hastens the death of his benevolent twin brother in the first
scene of the third act. The critic in the *Era* deemed “the dying scene truly
touching and [the actor playing Jabez’s brother] delivered every line with an
emotional effect that brought tears to many eyes” (“The Philharmonic: Dark
Deeds” 6). The third act concludes with the villain using his brother’s body to
fake his own death in order to facilitate his embezzlement of his employer at
the school. The Creole heiress heroine of the novel is relegated to a minor role
in the fourth act and a more sympathetic composite character named Rose
Tappenden is fashioned as a spirited love interest for the drama’s hero. Holt
devised a scenario where Rose disguises herself as a boy in order to facilitate
Marwell’s escape from the asylum to which he is committed on the murder
charge at the end of the second act. She also plays a key role in engineering the
villain’s downfall in the play’s final scene. The pain Rose endures owing to
Marwell’s plight and her dynamism would almost certainly inspire an audience
to invest emotionally in her progress.

Mr Peters, a profoundly deaf detective, was perhaps the most memorable
character, aside from Jabez, to feature in Braddon’s novel. The *Era’s* reviewer
observed: “we understand the detective who figures in *[The Trail]* is deaf and
dumb. Peters is anything but dumb. He is amusingly loquacious” (“The
Philharmonic: Dark Deeds” 6). The change in characterisation likely originated
in the fact that few members of the audience would understand sign language. The Mr Peters of the novel weds a charwoman known as Kuppins but Holt repositions her as the comic woman of the play. Kuppins’s character in the adaptation embodied a type likely to be implanted in the cultural consciousness of the readers of popular literature. The Era critic described her as “a maid-of-all work of the ‘Marchioness’ school” (“The Philharmonic: Dark Deeds” 6).

Promotion for Dark Deeds underscored the fact that the drama was apparently being produced “by special permission of the authoress” (“Philharmonic Theatre” 12). An adaptation that could present itself as holding the approval of the novel’s author would to a certain extent rise in the estimation of those theatregoers who had derived pleasure from the adapted text. While we shall see that an air of dubiousness could characterise claims of this sort, a shrewd commercial operator like Braddon would recognise the potential secondary sales to be netted from the adaptation of a novel that was at this point over twenty years old. I would contend that a significant proportion of the audience would experience Holt’s play as an adaptation. The Trail of the Serpent had featured in Ward & Lock’s six-shilling “Library”, two-shilling “Cheap”, and three-shilling sixpence “Parlour” collected Braddon series of the 1860s. These volumes were cloth bound or bound in boards; conceivably, they might still be circulating on the second-hand book market of the 1880s. The novel also featured in the two-shilling and the two-shillings-sixpence Braddon “Cheap Edition” series published by Maxwell throughout the 1870s and 1880s (“Miss Braddon’s Novels” 740). While Holt’s drama had premiered provincially in 1881 with a different cast, the piece achieved significantly greater exposure when it opened in March of the following year at the Philharmonic Theatre, Islington, under the title of Dark Deeds (“The Philharmonic: Dark Deeds” 6).

The Philharmonic was a North London house located in a district that in this era was not an especially affluent quarter of the city. It was possible to procure a ticket to a performance of Dark Deeds, which opened the venue’s

31 See Ivy’s “M.E. Braddon in the 1860s: Clarifications and Corrections” for a thorough bibliographical discussion of these publisher’s series.
evening entertainment at 7.30 p.m., for as little as sixpence (“Philharmonic Theatre” 12). *Little Amy Robsart*, a burlesque centring on a caricatured representation of Jumbo the elephant was an afterpiece to *Dark Deeds* (“The Philharmonic: Dark Deeds” 6). A music hall in the 1860s and early 1870s, the management of the Philharmonic Theatre by George Lash Gordon had commenced at the beginning of 1882 (“Theatrical Gossip: The Philharmonic...” 8). Holt’s play was directly preceded by the run of Gordon’s co-authored crime melodrama entitled *London Pride* that was founded on the Tichbourne case (“The Philharmonic: London Pride” 6). The murder and intrigue of *Dark Deeds* was likely to appeal to Philharmonic patrons not conversant with the adapted text but who had previously enjoyed *London Pride*. Gordon had played one of the central villains in *London Pride* (“The Philharmonic: London Pride” 6) and would continue in this vein by undertaking the role of Jabez (“The Philharmonic: Dark Deeds” 6). However, A.H. Forrest, who had been the imposter in *London Pride*, would now portray *Dark Deeds’* hero, Richard Marwell. Similarly, Marie Lindon had appeared as the wretched ingénue heroine in *London Pride* (“The Philharmonic: London Pride” 6) but would subsequently play the more resourceful Rose Tappenden (“The Philharmonic: Dark Deeds” 6). Forrest and Lindon may have been sufficiently accomplished performers to navigate such metamorphoses, but also we cannot discount the possibility that echoes of their prior roles may have carried over partly disrupting the illusion for habitual Philharmonic attendees.

Whilst *The Trail* was over twenty years in print when Holt’s adaptation appeared, it would still strike an audience as quite current. Jabez’s robbery and murder of Marwell’s uncle would perhaps evoke memories of the 1881 Percy Lefroy case. Lefroy had risen to notoriety when he sparked a widely publicised manhunt after he robbed and fatally attacked an older gentleman while they were both travelling aboard a Brighton train (“The Brighton Railway Murder” 466). Braddon’s novel was adapted for the stage in an era when detective fiction was becoming a more notable fixture in readers’ light reading habits. My previous discussion of Routledge’s “Detective Books” highlighted how a great deal of this material originated in other territories.
Chapter 5

Anna Katharine Green’s *The Leavenworth Case* was a significant presence in this wave of detective stories and it was adapted as a three-act drama for the English stage in 1885 by Arthur Shirley and Joseph Fitzgerald Molloy. Imelda Whelehan has stressed that when a text from a print medium is adapted “the stock formal devices of narrative must be realised by quite other means” (“Adaptations: The Contemporary Dilemmas” 9). Dramatizing Green’s novel necessitated dispensing with the distinctive first person narrative voice of Everett Raymond, while the strategy of incorporating fragments of letters and floor plans into the text was another device that would not translate to a representation of this tale in an environment like the theatre. The plot of the drama still turns on the retrieval of a particular epistle but it functions as a prop or object to be unearthed as opposed to a linguistic entity that the audience can decode on a vicarious level with the detective of the tale. There was one especially notable visual link between this 1885 adaptation and the circulation of *Leavenworth* in print form in England that a knowing consumer would almost certainly discern. The cover illustration of the 1884 Ward & Lock one-shilling edition depicted a genteel-looking lady holding a firearm (Figure 38) and the initial moments of the scene that the adapters devised for the opening of the play centres on Eleanore Leavenworth learning how to use a gun.

Although *Leavenworth* originated in the United States and away from the circulating library system, it was nonetheless a characteristic nineteenth-century “loose baggy monster”. This adaptation concentrated on the kernel of Green’s plot. The essence of the narrative centred on the violent death of the wealthy Mr Leavenworth in his own home and the subsequent investigation led by a police detective that unearths the possible culpability of the victim’s nieces, Mary and Eleanore, who live in his household. Lines of dialogue from Green’s novel are reused but notable incidents like the inquest into the death of Leavenworth patriarch, which dominates the opening chapters of the novel, occur off-stage. While New York had formed a distinctive backdrop to the events of Green’s novel, there was no geographical specificity to the adaptation. It did, however, maintain most of the characters’ names. The toponyms referenced in the dialogue suggest that the action is unfolding in the Hartlepool
region in the North of England where the play premiered. The breadth of the narrative canvas was also curtailed with almost all of the action of the stage play now unfolding at the house of the eponymous murder victim.

Therefore, the piece with which theatregoers engaged was a murder mystery that unfolded over the space of several days. Arguably, this remaking of Green’s novel realised what Hutcheon identifies as essential to the success of an adaptation in that it would work as an engaging evening at the theatre for both the knowing and unknowing constituencies of its audience (A Theory of Adaptation 121). Individuals familiar with Green’s work were presented with a novel remaking of the text. The backstory and the incidents reconstructed retrospectively in the novel make up the drama’s first act. The murderer of Mr Leavenworth winds up hoist by his own petard rather than incarcerated. Overall, the play held the potential to be enthralling entertainment for the other constituency of attendees. The tension was derived from the whodunnit scenario surrounding the family patriarch’s death. Prior acquaintance with the plot would diminish greatly the impact of the revelations in the novel’s denouement. Accordingly, the play makes no secret of the fact that Mary Leavenworth has entered into a secret marriage of which her uncle would not approve and that Mr Leavenworth’s amanuensis, Trueman Harwell, is mentally unstable and harbouring a secret unrequited love for Mary. The audience discover in the first act that Mary has secretly married the son of her uncle’s enemy and they then witness her uncle’s initial rejection of his wards when he learns of the union. Harwell’s asides in his opening appearance reveal his attachment and indicate the depths of his psychosis.

In essence, the murder mystery of Shirley and Molloy’s adaptation functioned on two levels. The murder of Mr Leavenworth constituted a straightforward whodunnit for the unknowing proportion of the audience. At the same time, the darkened stage in which the murder scene is played at the end of the first act meant that the knowing members of the audience were teased with the possible culpability of the adaptation’s Eleanore who was nearby in equally close proximity as Harwell immediately prior to the moment her uncle is shot.
While the title under which this 1885 production played and the wording of its promotion signalled the play’s relationship to the novel, it was the names of Arthur Shirley and Joseph Fitzgerald Molloy that were foregrounded in these notices (“Charles Harrington’s Comedy Drama Company” 6). Shirley and Molloy’s drama was written expressly for Charles Harrington’s comedy-drama touring company (“Theatrical Gossip: Mr Fitzgerald” 8). Harrington had assembled this particular cohort of actors in October 1883 for the express purpose of touring the provinces with a production of Shirley’s adaptation of Saved!; or a Wife’s Peril (“Saved!”16). Many provincial theatregoers would be familiar with this successful 1884 adaptation of the French drama, Saved!, which had toured extensively (playing over three hundred nights the ads claimed) in non-metropolitan English theatres (“Theatrical Gossip: Saved” 8).

Patrons who had seen this 1884 play would have engaged with somewhat similar subject matter in the Green adaptation during its stops at locations like Hartlepool, Accrington, and Halifax. Saved! also had centred on the explosive fallout for a household following the exposure of a woman’s clandestine relationship. However, there was no comic man or woman in the 1885 play to act as light to the drama’s shade and Harrington in taking the role of Harwell was playing a very different sort of character in comparison with his part as the husband in Saved!

This 1885 play was a touring production by a minor company. In so far as it is possible to extrapolate information about staging from the directions in the Lord Chamberlain’s playscript, the set against which this adaptation played was not especially elaborate. Rather, the attention of the audience was intended to focus exclusively on the actors, their bodies, and the dialogue exchanged as opposed to scenery or mechanised effects. The sole moment of visually arresting spectacle came at the very end of the play in a burning barn scenario where Harwell starts a fire that he hopes will kill Mary’s husband and destroy key evidence. The adapters procured this finale from an incident in the Mrs Belden subplot of Green’s novel that the play had excised.

Promotion for the Leavenworth drama emphasised that Shirley and Molloy had “adapted [Green’s novel] by special permission” (“Charles
Harrington’s Comedy Drama Company” 6). I would suggest that this claim should be viewed with no small level of scepticism. Green had been experiencing sizeable difficulties with illicit English editions of her novels in this period and it is significant that her name is also omitted entirely from these notices promoting the adaptation, which reference her merely as “the author”. A large proportion of readers’ experiences of Leavenworth would have been obtained via the cheap pirated editions of the novel published by three separate English houses in 1884. Eleanore’s account of her movements the day after her uncle’s death actually reference the moment depicted in the Routledge cover visual where the young woman displays a considerable degree of tenderness towards her uncle’s corpse (Figure 31). There were, as discussed earlier, definite parallels between the plots of Green’s fiction and the novels of Gaboriau. Vizetelly’s English language translation editions of the French writer’s detective stories had been in print for over two years by the period when this adaptation opened, which served to position the play very much in step with the contemporary cultural climate. In the larger context, the importance of issues of female agency and inheritance to the plot of Leavenworth would have lent the drama a significant degree of resonance in England given the passage of the Married Women’s Property Act just two years previously.

The decision of the adapters of Leavenworth to omit the novel’s subplots centring on the Leavenworth cousins’ missing maid and a secretive landlady who holds vital information would have led the question of women and property to assume an even greater significance in the tale. If an adaptation of a lengthy novel like Leavenworth were to succeed with audiences, such decisions were critical. The strategy adopted in isolating the tale’s core conceit and the staging of an imaginative take on familiar scenes had a decisive impact on the reception of the adaptation. To endeavour to be seen to possess the authorization of the writer of the adapted text was an effort to trade on a promise that the transposition from page to stage had been handled adeptly. The nineteenth-century dramatization also needed the capacity to function independently of its bond to the adapted text, which meant that the story also
had to be framed in such a way that would resonate with the theatregoer who arrived a stranger to the novel.

Shirley and Molloy’s drama was not the only effort to dramatize *The Leavenworth Case*; Green and her husband produced an adaptation for the American stage in the 1890s. The staging of the two plays on separate sides of the Atlantic meant they played to two different publics and neither production eclipsed the other. This was not always the case. Rival adaptations were often produced of the same novel, which potentially added another layer to the palimpsest.

2. Divergent Endeavours in Adaptation

A manager who brings out a piece in which the interest of the audience is visibly concentrated on one particular scene, which stands in strong relief to the rest of the action, boasts that he has produced a ‘sensation drama’, and the scene which justifies the use of this term is called a ‘sensation scene’ (“Lyceum Theatre” *The Times* 13 March 1862 12).

The literary and commercial climate of the 1860s meant Le Fanu’s aspiration that his writing be read in the context of Walter Scott’s style of fiction was unlikely to be realised. The fact that Scott audiences regularly had had the opportunity to engage with adaptations of his work in the theatre also represented an important difference between the patterns of consumption associated with the two novelists’ work. *Uncle Silas* was Le Fanu’s greatest success. However, there has been little or no effort by contemporary scholars of Le Fanu’s work to investigate the novel’s afterlife in the late Victorian theatre. Two separate productions played on the London stage after the writer’s death, and the divergent ways in which the two dramas framed the adapted text highlight the dynamics at play in fashioning an adaptation to be consumed by theatregoers.

32 See Cox’s *Reading Adaptations* for a discussion of early nineteenth-century dramatizations of Scott’s fiction.
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While the theatre programme of the earlier of the two adaptations did signal its relationship with *Uncle Silas*, proclaiming “the authors acknowledge indebtedness to a Novel of Sheridan Le Fanu for one of the leading incidents of the drama” (*A Dark Secret: A Tale of the Thames Valley Programme*), this October 1886 production written by John Douglass and James Willing opened at the Standard Theatre under the more highly coloured title of *A Dark Secret: A Tale of the Thames Valley*. The four-act play essentially assimilated the central conceit of Le Fanu’s novel, which centred on an artless heiress falling prey to her villainous uncle’s machinations. However, dramatization did not permit the focalization of the story entirely from the point of view of the heiress and the transposition performed by this first adaptation extended to renaming and sometimes recasting entirely the book’s characters, along with introducing several new personalities. The novel’s eponymous villain is named Jonas Norton and there is no longer any initial moral ambiguity surrounding him as his malevolence is clear from the outset. The evil embodied by the villain’s brutish son and the demonic French governess (who is figured less as a grotesque and more as an adventuress or villain’s henchwoman here) is patently clear from the moment they appear on stage. The play has a dual set of heroines in the form of stepsisters, Nelly Norton and May Joyce. Nelly is the ingénue Maud character. May, who originated in the imagination of the adapters, possesses a comparatively greater degree of initiative that serves as a necessary counterpoint to the passivity of the Maud character. May’s narrative trajectory centres on a quest for justice. A prologue is used to frame the events of the play and it takes its inspiration from the Mr Charke backstory of Le Fanu’s novel. This past murder, which causes a cloud of suspicion to hang over the head of the villain, is rendered a comparatively more heinous crime. The victim, Cecil Raynes, is still a creditor of the villain but the murdered man is a respectable solicitor who runs a side business in money lending and is May’s fiancé.

The macabre dreamworld where Le Fanu’s novel is set envelops the reader with an unrelenting and steadily increasing sense of claustrophobia, which reaches a climax with Maud’s ordeal in Charke’s chamber. Douglass and Willing did not endeavour to recreate this for the audience attending their
adaptation. Occasional moments of levity were introduced as the villain’s sinister neighbours are recast and used as a source of rustic comic relief. The theatre’s band scored the play with a selection of waltzes, polkas, quadrilles, and marches (A Dark Secret: A Tale of the Thames Valley Programme). The backdrops against which scenes were played depicted actual vistas from the area referenced in the production’s subtitle (A Dark Secret: A Tale of the Thames Valley Programme). This 1886 play strove to position itself less as a straight adaptation of Le Fanu and more as a drama in the spirit of Dion Boucicault. The awe-inspiring spectacles of this piece involved water. The second act ended in a boat race where Nelly’s true love competes against Jonas’ son. The theatre programme outlined the sight upon which patrons would gaze. It described it as:

a representation of the Great Annual Aquatic Festival Henley on Thames. [The staging consisted of] a Sculling Contest in Real Water. Real Boats, Wherries, Skiffs, Whiffs, Randans, Outriggers, Canoes (English and Canadian), Dingys, Tubs, Punts, and Real Steam Launches. The Site of the Race is Illustrated by Two Hundred and Thirteen Tons of Real Water on the Stage. Acknowledged by Everybody the Most Realistic Scene ever attempted within the wall of a Theatre (A Dark Secret: A Tale of the Thames Valley Programme).

The third act ended on equally dramatic note where Nelly is almost drowned when she is locked in the rapidly flooding cellar of her uncle’s house.

Unsurprisingly, critics’ reviews afforded a great deal of their attention to the Henley Regatta scene. The Era write-up of the production offered a detailed behind the scenes account of the operation of the large tank used to create the on-stage river (“The Standard: A Dark Secret” 14). The Illustrated London News described the scene as “a pretty picture with changing effects [...] [it is] boldly and bodily annexed to the new drama, which could be played just as well without it. Most certainly, it relieves the gloomy passages of as harrowing a tale

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33 Jackson’s The Standard Theatre of Victorian England offers a chronological history of the productions mounted at this venue and concludes with a history of the staging of A Dark Secret that focuses in particular on the realization of this special effect. Quoting extensively from the memoirs of John Douglass’ nephew, Albert, Jackson offers a plot summary of the piece and illuminates the mechanics of executing the Regatta scene (301-306). This study does not, however, endeavour to consider the production as an adaptation of Le Fanu’s novel.
as was ever conceived by the weird brain of Sheridan Le Fanu” (“The Playhouses” 485). Therefore, this adaptation was endeavouring to situate its appeal for theatregoers in a stirring plot derived from Le Fanu where the emotional force was heightened by moving music, the darkness tempered by periodic levity, and sensational impact bolstered by spectacularly staged effects. This suggests that Douglass and Willing’s drama was looking to appeal to the broadest possible range of tastes.

The production played at the John Douglass-managed Standard Theatre in Shoreditch in East London, which was a lower middle class suburban quarter in this period. This was a theatre with one of the biggest capacities in all of London (Pope “Standard Theatre” 915). It sat three thousand four hundred according to Booth (Theatre in the Victorian Age 61). The broad range of ticket prices to a performance of A Dark Secret, which commenced at 7.30 p.m., made the venue accessible to individuals with varying quantities of disposable income. The house had private boxes costing three pounds three shillings but there also were sixpenny seats available in the gallery (A Dark Secret: A Tale of the Thames Valley Programme). The Era remarked of the drama’s initial run that “the awesome story [had] a fascination about it which affect[ed] even the cultured; and visitors from the West End made pilgrimages to Mr Douglass’s house [...] principally attracted, perhaps, by the wonderfully effected Henley Regatta scene in the second act” (“The Standard: A Dark Secret” 14).

Habitual attendees at the Standard would have had the opportunity to develop an appetite for Willing’s melodramas, which had been playing there over the previous two to three years (“The Standard: The Ruling Passion” 14). To these audience members, the Henley Regatta sensation scene would evoke memories of the equally remarkable foxhunting episode in Our Silver Wedding, which was performed at the Standard earlier in 1886. Not only did the success of A Dark Secret lead to a second run at Douglass’ house in February of 1887 (“The Standard: A Dark Secret” 14) but the piece enjoyed a revival at the West End Princess’s Theatre in November 1895 (“A Dark Secret: The Drama” 11). The popularity of A Dark Secret cast a long shadow and in many respects shaped the reception garnered by the other dramatization of Le Fanu’s novel.
The adaptation of *Uncle Silas* written by Seymour Hicks and Lawrence Irving, which first played in February 1893, situated the narrative in the eighteenth century and dispensed with the initial ambiguity that surrounds Le Fanu’s characters. However, for all intents and purposes, this production simply set about dramatizing in four acts the novel’s most stirring incidents such as the murder of Charke and Maud’s fateful ordeal in the murdered man’s chamber. *The Era* wrote of the three and a half hour production, disparagingly terming it “a curious jumble of the horrible and the ridiculous, with dramatic and literary qualities—on a level with those that may be found in—well, let us say, *Sweeney Todd*” (“Uncle Silas: A New Drama” 10). Seymour Hicks and Lawrence Irving were both in the early phase of their careers. A significant proportion of the opening of the review of their play in *The Theatre* was given over to recalling the delights of the Douglass and Willing play and its Regatta scene (“Uncle Silas” 163). Critical response in this vein leaves one with a sense that the audience engagement with this adaptation would also have included an additional category of oscillation between the Douglass and Willing drama and the newer production. Arguably, Hicks and Irving’s faithful rendering of the adapted text led to a diminution of the esteem of their adaptation as the critical and commercial success of the earlier play meant their paucity of modification fostered the impression that their work was opportunistic and colourlessly derivative.

*Uncle Silas* (1893) premiered at a matinee in the Shaftesbury Theatre, London. A relatively new venue built only in 1888, it had played host to a number of high profile shows (Pope “Shaftesbury Theatre” 868). The Cuthbert Rathbone-Herbert Basing lease of the Shaftesbury commenced in May 1891 with a well-received production of the Henry Hamilton and Mark Quinton melodrama, *Handfast* (“The Shaftesbury” 7). Autumn 1891 had seen the Shaftesbury become the base for Signor Lago’s Italian opera company with members of the Royal family featuring amongst the attendees at the season of productions (“Signor Lago’s Italian Opera Company” 15). *The Era* observed that
arts and society types comprised a significant proportion of the audience at Hicks and Irving’s premiere (“Uncle Silas: A New Drama” 10).34

Many amongst the audiences of both dramas were likely to experience the plays as adaptations. The very particular connotations evoked by Le Fanu’s name would afford the unknowing contingent a certain sense of what they would witness. The reading context in which the knowing would have consumed Le Fanu’s novel would vary. The 1864 Dublin University Magazine serialisation of Uncle Silas may well have featured in the cultural memory of more mature theatregoers. Those who could afford a circulating library subscription may have read the three-decker originally published in 1864. An interesting link existed between the 1865 one-volume six-shilling reprint of Uncle Silas and the Willing and Douglass adaptation. The frontispiece illustration depicting the French governess rifling through the heroine’s father’s private papers was the same scene upon which the prologue ended. Younger or less affluent patrons could have encountered second-hand copy of this edition. The novel had also been part of the two-shilling “Select Library of Fiction” in the 1870s (Colcough “J.Sheridan Le Fanu and the Select...”). However, individuals were more likely to derive their most immediate acquaintance with Uncle Silas from its 1885 inclusion along with two other Le Fanu novels in the six-shilling “Bentley’s Favourite Novels Series”. The potential market for the latter volumes would certainly have grown as a result of the re-training of attention on to Uncle Silas owing to the staging of two separate dramatizations of the novel.

One cannot help wondering about the frame of mind that the Douglass and Willing adaptation with its sensation scene would have fostered amongst those individuals who it inspired to become acquainted with Le Fanu’s novel. The Illustrated London News had rightly observed that the Henley Regatta scene was tangential to the core plot of the piece. Notwithstanding that, this turn of the drama had served its purpose and furnished the Standard Theatre with a captivating selling point with which to lure patrons to the house. However,

34 This is unsurprising when one considers that the latter was the son of the great Henry Irving. Lawrence led a brief provincial revival of his co-authored adaptation of Uncle Silas in Folkestone in 1895 complete with wardrobe assistance from the Lyceum (“Theatrical Gossip: Mr Lawrence Irving” 10).
spectacle of this sort was at odds with the spirit of Le Fanu’s writing. In essence, this drama fell within John M. Desmond and Peter Hawkes’s classification of the loose adaptation where “most story elements are dropped and the literary text is used as a point of departure” (3). Douglass and Willing’s promotion of their adaptation under an alternative title to the adapted text would to an extent have signalled the degree of distance between novel and play. Correspondingly, Hicks and Irving’s maintenance of the same name announced their adaptation’s affinity. This play was what Desmond and Hawkes term a close adaptation where “most story elements in the literary text are kept [...] and few are dropped and added” (3). Dramatizations of popular narrative called for light and shade. In the theatre-based scenario of a transposition, the interludes of life did not punctuate an individual’s engagement with these highly charged tales, which arguably lessened the impact (and for some, the appeal) of three hours of unceasing excitement or darkness. Furthermore, the medium of the popular stage was a realm where the scope for ambiguous characterisation was more limited and this necessitated a shift in the dynamics of a work like Uncle Silas. In turn, such unambiguity would dilute the intensity of the reading experience afforded by Le Fanu’s novel, which derived a great deal of its power from the fact that its characters are not delineated in absolute terms.

Decades elapsed between the first publication of the adapted text and the opening of the first adaptation of Uncle Silas. While Le Fanu’s novel was a tolerable success in 1864 and the novel had maintained a position on the cultural landscape, it was by no means a runaway bestseller. A novel that soared to become one of the books of the season was promptly adapted for the stage in many instances. An elaborate process of transposition was needed for Uncle Silas to succeed in the theatre; other popular novels were more closely aligned with the stage. However, if a novel of mystery was widely read, a mere scissors and paste dramatization was unlikely to stimulate a knowing audience to any great degree.
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3. The Popular Novel Co-Adapted by its Author

Those who have read the book will go to see the Play, just to ‘see how it is done,’ and those who haven’t read the book will see the Play and then order the novel, so it’s good for the bookseller anyhow (“Letters to Some People” Punch 14 June 1884. 280).

*The Era* opened its review of the February 1888 stage adaptation of Fergus Hume’s debut novel, *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* (1887), with the observation that “[this] shilling shocker from Australia has been selling far and wide, and has been read with avidity by young and old” (“The Mystery of a Hansom Cab” 8). Matthews observed in 1889, “whenever a novel hits the popular fancy and is seen for a season in everybody’s hands [...] the adapter steps forward and sets the story on the stage, counting on the reflected reputation of the novel to attract the public to witness the play” (“The Dramatisation of Novels” 588). Hume’s shilling novels looked to capitalise on the success the fiction of “Hugh Conway” had realised with readers. Readers who had enjoyed *Called Back* and Conway’s follow-up, *Dark Days* (1885), had had the chance to attend stage adaptations of the novels, which opened within several months of the publication of the books. A similar model of consumption was fostered with Hume’s work. The genesis of Hume’s debut novel also positioned it as a text that was eminently suitable for consumption in a dramatic medium. The author wrote in the preface to the 1896 edition of *Hansom Cab*:

> I was bent on becoming a dramatist, but, being quite unknown, I found it impossible to induce the managers of the Melbourne Theatres to accept, or even to read a play. At length it occurred to me I might further my purpose by writing a novel. I should at all events secure a certain amount of local attention (8).

The novel secured Hume attention amongst a public that extended far beyond the theatre managers of Melbourne. The plot of Hume’s 1888 novel, *Madame Midas*, suggests the author produced this book with the prospect at the forefront of his mind that a theatre audience would also soon engage with a transposed version of the narrative.
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The cast of characters of Hume’s 1887 novel already featured the principal archetypes of stage melodrama. There were not one but two villains, Oliver Whyte and Roger Moreland; a virtuous heroine, Madge Frettby; a noble hero who falls victim to one of the villain’s machinations, Brian Fitzgerald, and a pair of competing police detectives. While the novel’s popularity with readers served to elevate the profile of the drama, foreknowledge of the identity of the Hansom Cab murderer and the nature of the Frettby family secret would also dilute the weight carried by the narrative’s anagnorisis and potentially weaken one of the primary attractions of consuming this particular tale. Accordingly, Arthur Law and Fergus Hume’s play replaced the novel’s detective story form, where attention focused on retrospective efforts to illuminate the events that led to the hansom cab murder, with a scenario of dramatic irony that begins in the opening scene. The reviewer in the Era observed “in the book, the secret is well kept to the end [...] In the play, the mystery is no mystery at all, for the adapters, very properly be it admitted, take their audience into their confidence at the beginning” (“The Mystery of a Hansom Cab” 8). The four-act play opens with Oliver Whyte’s attempts to blackmail the Frettby paterfamilias about Frettby’s prior connection to a Rosanna Moore. In her dying moments at the end of the first act, Rosanna will herself narrate to the hero the story of her secret marriage to Mark Frettby. This amelioration of the voicelessness and presentation on stage of Frettby’s first wife represented a significant departure from the novel where Rosanna is figured through the memories of others and her testimony mediated via Brian Fitzgerald. A deathbed scene of this sort was intended to engage its audience on an emotional level.

The audience also witness in the first act Roger Moreland’s murder of Whyte in the eponymous vehicle along with Moreland’s scheme to frame Fitzgerald for this crime. The Melbourne street setting where this incident takes place was another component of the novel that the drama endeavoured to convey on the stage. The Era reported the manager of the Princess’s Theatre where the 1888 adaptation played as asserting that “the production of the dramatic version was delayed only by the necessity of having built in Melbourne, and having sent from Melbourne a Hansom Cab of the real
Melbourne pattern” (“The Mystery of a Hansom Cab” 8). *The Times* recounted that a live horse was also used with the cab (“Princess’s” 8). While the events that take place in this vehicle are the principal catalyst for the plot, its significance also lay in the fact that an illustration of a hansom was the predominant feature of the cover of the 1887 edition of the novel (Figure 39).

While the play did seek to trade on its audience’s prior reading experiences of the novel, it also endeavoured to alleviate the disconcerting quality to the ending of Hume’s novel. The play looked to render less unpalatable the unjust fate suffered by Sal Rawlins, Mark Frettiby’s first daughter and rightful heir, at the novel’s ending. Sal is no longer the victim of a male conspiracy to disinherit her in favour of Frettiby’s second daughter, the well-to-do society belle. Sal instead willingly sacrifices her birthright as she has grown to love Madge, who unwittingly offered her half-sister refuge after Sal fled from her grandmother’s home in the Melbourne counterworld. Booth has emphasised that catholicity of melodrama and the convention of punctuating scenes of serious drama with comic relief (*Theatre in the Victorian Age* 151). The adaptation gave life on the stage to the hero’s hypochondriac landlady who was one of the novel’s most memorable minor characters; it also introduced a couple who resembled a comical version of *Our Mutual Friend*’s Mr and Mrs Lammle. It was the opinion of the reviewer in the *Era* that the audience on the opening night “extracted much more interest from the comedy scenes of the drama than the serious ones” (“The Mystery of a Hansom Cab” 8).³⁵

In light of the commercial success realised by Hume’s novel, a significant proportion of those attending Law and Hume’s play at the Princess’s Theatre would experience the drama as an adaptation. The promotional schemes pursued by the Princess’s Theatre strove to tap into readers’ enthusiasm for the novel while also piquing the curiosity of those who had not yet consumed Hume’s work. The theatre exhibited in prominent metropolitan locations posters depicting figures from the drama while the house’s manager also sent a parade of hansom cabs through London complete with effigies of victim and

³⁵Arthur Law’s background as a writer of comedic drama is one reason why the play’s humorous turns may have registered more strongly than the dramatic moments.
murderer (“The Mystery of a Hansom Cab” 8). Such strategies also had the potential to fuel interest in Hume’s novel. Even if the book had not formed part of an attendee’s personal reading history, Hansom Cab had achieved the requisite level of fame in the late 1880s to situate the basic conceit of the novel’s plot in the ether or as Ellis terms it “the generally circulated cultural memory [of the period]” (3).

The staging of the Law-Hume adaptation at such an auspicious metropolitan setting as the Princess’s Theatre, Oxford Street, elevated the stock of this play and situated the production within a particular dramatic tradition. Booth locates a significant proportion of the public who habitually patronised this house in this era within the lower middle and working classes (Theatre in the Victorian Age 7). The theatre had an illustrious history as it had been the home to revivals of Dion Boucicault sensation drama and Charles Reade stage melodramas like Drink (Diamond 241). The initial years of Wilson Barrett’s lesseeship during the early 1880s had been characterised by a series of critically and commercially successful melodramas like The Lights of London and The Silver King (Pope “Princess’s Theatre” 764). The melodrama of Hume’s novel and the resultant tone of the adaptation made the dramatization, which opened each evening of its Princess’s run at 8.00 p.m., a fitting evening’s entertainment at the theatre for regular attendees of this venue. Mr Balsir Chatterton’s company led a touring production of Hume and Law’s adaptation around English provincial theatres in the summer of 1888. The production at the Princess’s and this Chatterton tour represented merely one of more than a dozen adaptations of Hansom Cab (“Madame Midas” The Era 10). With the publication of his next shilling novel, Madame Midas (1888), Hume sought to minimise the possibility that the official adaptation would have to compete for the attentions of readers and theatregoers with unauthorised dramatizations.

The adaptation entitled Madame Midas: The Gold Queen opened in December of 1888. The play originated in a collaboration between Hume and the Australian actor, Philip Beck. Melodramatic archetypes once again featured prominently in this Hume novel and the trio of principal characters at the centre of the novel’s plot served as the pillars of the drama. The titular heroine was a
wronged wife whose mining successes at Ballarat restore her monetary fortunes following a brief but disastrous marriage to a scoundrel who squandered the wealth she inherited from her father. Madame’s friend, Kitty Marchurst, was an ingénue who is corrupted by Gaston Vandeloup, a malevolent New Caledonia escapee with a murderous past. Hume’s 1888 novel candidly presented from its opening pages the villainous ideas and musings that were Vandeloup’s thought processes. This translated very well into the asides and direct addresses to the audience that were an important part of the characterisation of the villain of stage melodrama. Audiences attending this sort of play were accustomed to a gallant hero yet all of the male characters in the novel were pusillanimous, deceitful, exploitative, or violent. This paucity of testosterone and male honour explains the introduction into the drama of the dashing Dr Noel Yorke who represents a second and more fitting love interest for Kitty and acts as the agent who exposes Vandeloup’s villainy and criminal past.

The transposition to the stage of the novel’s subplot centring on Vandeloup’s seduction and corruption of Kitty meant the audience would also engage with this play as a “fallen woman” melodrama. The adaptation’s characterisation of Kitty employed the fallen woman archetypes of the seduced maiden and the discarded mistress that Sos Eltis has identified as recurring figures in this genre of play (223). Comedic interludes customarily temper the more serious moments of melodrama; an innkeeper minor character from the novel named Miss Twexby is positioned as the comic woman of the stage play who plays out a Beatrice and Benedick-style scenario with her suitor. John has observed that “most melodrama fulfils the infamous definition of fiction supplied by Miss Prism – ‘The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means’” (“Melodrama and its Criticism” 3). Vandeloup does meet what readers would view as a fitting end in Hume’s novel but the Hume-Beck play instead sees him commit suicide with the hemlock he himself has prepared after his efforts to poison his discarded mistress go awry.

The melancholy epilogue of Hume’s Madame Midas had centred on a dramatic exchange between the villain and the fallen woman along the banks of
the river Yarra Yarra. The estranged couple’s physical struggle and the villain’s drowning had the makings of a magnificent sensation scene of the sort that drew audiences to this sort of drama. The visual allure of this particular adaptation was instead situated in the vision of Australian settler life that the production would afford audiences. Promotion for the play laid particular stress on the depiction of notable landscapes and buildings from urban and rural Australia in the production’s scenery. This scenery included a Ballarat goldmine, the remote Black Hill Gully where the titular heroine is attacked by her estranged husband, and nocturnal Melbourne streetscapes such as Bourke Street where the ingénue heroine’s fall is sealed. (”Mr Balsir Chatterton’s Company” *The Era* 4).

The play opened in Devon at Exeter’s Victoria Hall (“Madame Midas: The Gold Queen” 8). While the Law-Hume adaptation was first performed at the Princess’s with its illustrious history of melodrama, the setting for *The Gold Queen* had typically played host to circuses (Cornforth).36 On one level, the Victoria Hall represented a fitting venue when one considers the visual allure of the adaptation’s scenery, especially the gold mine. Yet the fact that the play was opening in such a less eminent venue can in part be explained by the horizontal change the 1888 novel had demanded of readers. The sensation surrounding Hume’s debut novel made it almost inevitable that his subsequent literary effort would elicit a considerable degree of interest. The prospect of a forthcoming stage adaptation formed part of the Hansom Cab Publishing Company’s efforts to attract readers to Hume’s 1888 novel. A lengthy write-up on the copyright performance staged several days in advance of the novel’s publication was featured in the 14 July 1888 edition of *The Era*. While *Madame Midas* reportedly amassed sales of 150,000 copies in two months (”The Author of Madame Midas” 410), which set up a sizeable knowing market for the adaptation, the novel did not succeed on the same level as his debut. Herein perhaps lies the reason why Beck and Hume’s adaptation did not premiere in a

36 While Cornforth’s *Exeter Memories* website is the work of an amateur historian, it has the hallmarks of a reliable, well-curated resource.
Chapter 5

West End theatre as the *Era* promotional piece had promised (‘Madame Midas’ 10).

Nevertheless, a link with the earlier Hume dramatization did exist in the form of Balsir Chatterton. His company had been responsible for the 1888 authorised provincial tour of the Law-Hume adaptation of *Hansom Cab* (“Provincial Theatricals: Halifax” 18) and it was the same troupe that set about bringing to life Hume’s next dramatic project on the stage of the Victoria Hall (“Madame Midas: The Gold Queen” 8). The Exeter premiere was followed by a lengthy tour of the English provinces beginning in January 1889 and encompassing performances in Theatre Royals in cities like York, Sheffield, Halifax, Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Belfast (“Mr Balsir Chatterton’s Company” 4).

Consequently, the Chatterton’s touring production of *Midas* had the potential to capitalise on the constituency of theatregoers who had enjoyed their production of *Hansom Cab* the previous year. Patrons who returned were likely to recognise D’Esterre Guinness and Helen Creswell who played the villain and his unfortunate mistress (“Madame Midas: The Gold Queen” 8) were the very same actor and actress who portrayed Madge Frettlby and Brian Fitzgerald in *Hansom Cab* (“Provincial Theatricals: Halifax” 18). The latter was a very different on-stage pairing but their appearance in two of the leading parts represented a link with the earlier production that would shape audience engagement with the adaptation of *Midas*.

In the larger context, a play like *Midas*, which centred on men’s sexual exploitation of and physical violence against women, was certain to take on added significance owing to the sensation created by the events occurring at Whitechapel during this period. However, the adaptation did seem to self-censor on issues of prostitution where the novel had been more forthright. Not only does the play eschew any possibility that Kitty will have to sink to a life working in the sex industry, only one of the two prostitutes who Kitty meets on Little Bourke street features in the adaptation. Portwine Annie, a lodging house prostitute, cuts a defiant and somewhat comical figure in both the novel and the stage adaptation but a shadowy and rather tragic nameless streetwalker with whom Kitty shares a brief and distressing moment does not feature
whatsoever in the play. Hume’s eponymous heroine who amasses a fortune from the gold mining discoveries at her Ballarat mines that earns her the nickname of Madame Midas was based on the real life story of Alice Cornwell. This woman’s success in the Ballarat goldfields gained her the epithet of “Madame Midas” or occasionally “Princess Midas”. Alice Cornwell had attracted significant newspaper press attention during her business visits to London in the 1887-1888 period; the stage adaptation of Hume’s novel with its replica gold mine could also trade on the celebrity of this pioneering Australian woman.

Hume’s first two novels of Australian life essentially functioned as transmedia commodities, which looked to capitalise on the common reader’s penchant for attending dramatizations of novels that had previously furnished enjoyable reading experiences. Hume’s propensity for populating his novels with the archetypes from melodrama meant that remediated presentations of his writing were attuned to find favour in a popular theatre context. The Australian urban and rural landscape was also a defining ingredient of these Hume novels, which meant that the dramatizations could also anchor their allure in the opportunity these plays afforded to gaze upon a representation of a distant quarter of the colonies. The playwrights’ reframing of the plots of Hansom Cab and Midas as a suspense drama and a fallen woman melodrama respectively meant the plays held sufficient variation to appeal to those theatregoers conversant with the novel while still functioning as an entertaining evening at the theatre for patrons who had not yet read the books. For those amongst the latter constituency who were inspired by the drama to acquire a Fergus Hume novel, they would find in such volumes familiar subject matter but a more cynical tone in the omniscient narrator’s voice and an occasionally far less sympathetic worldview.

Conclusion

The frequency with which stage adaptations recast popular fiction texts in accordance with the conventions of melodrama suggests that there was
something intrinsic to the particular worldview articulated by this genre that struck a chord with the average Victorian theatregoer. An evening at the theatre yielded a blend of exhilaration, mirth, sadness, and awe. Juliet John’s highlighting of the etymology of the term “melodrama”, which, as she points out, literally means “music drama” (“Melodrama and its Criticism” 2) calls attention to the fact that our efforts to reconstruct nineteenth-century audiences’ experiences of these transpositions are disadvantaged in one rather important regard. The music, which scored these various moments of tension, levity, or tragedy, is not something that we can readily retrieve today.

The same is frequently true of the much touted breath-taking effects and scenery present in many productions, which in one sense can be conceptualised as a value-added dimension as the text made its journey from page to stage. The success of a popular novel with readers saw to it that the adaptation would attract a guaranteed level of attendees. The frequency with which texts that had been assimilated into publisher’s series were adapted for the stage highlights the capacity of these collections to extend a popular novel’s shelf life. However, the prior knowledge of the adapted text that these readers brought to the theatre necessitated the infusion of an alternative current of momentum into those narratives derived from “novels of plot” where reader engagement was predicated on an eventual dramatic revelation. Nevertheless, herein may have lain part of the appeal to the Victorian common reader of attending a dramatization of a favourite book. Hutcheon contends that “part of [the] pleasure [of experiencing an adaptation] comes simply from repetition with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise” (A Theory of Adaptation 4). Arguably, this very same impulse begot the subsequent counter-clockwise consumption of the adapted text engaged in by the unknowing attendee.

It was in the realm of the visual that adaptations sometimes endeavoured to realise this requisite familiarity quotient by replicating notable pictorial scenes from the text’s incarnation in print with the presence of distinctive objects or the mounting of particular scenarios. The temporal dynamics of taking in a stage play over say a three-hour period were very different to
reading a novel in phases while one journeyed to and from work aboard public transport or consuming the text as a magazine serial over multiple months. Yet, there were structural parallels in the quasi-episodic shape that resulted from the partitioning of a play into scenes and acts. Nonetheless, the climate in which individuals now construed these tales was fundamentally altered. Reading silently to oneself in a library, drawing room, or train was a solitary exercise in meaning making. To experience the text in a communal environment like a theatre, which in the nineteenth century were not necessarily governed by the code of silent spectatorship that is the rule today, was to also be exposed to the responses of others. While some theatregoers would have been more inured to what was happening front of house than others, this is something that does need to be accounted for, especially when considering drama that played exclusively to the senses.

Chapter 5 List of Figures [CD]


Conclusion

A joint emphasis on cultural recovery and enquiry into the reception of popular literature in the Victorian era has been the driving forces of this project. Sustained critical engagement with the circulation and reception of this study’s particular cluster of non-canonical titles and authors has underlined the inadequacy of conceptions of the field of Victorian popular fiction that focus solely on those works positioned in the critical mainstream. There have been a number of distinct strands to the revisionist perspective that I am articulating. Firstly, I looked to counter the marginalisation of authors like Arthur Griffiths and Anna Katharine Green whose impact in the nineteenth century was relatively substantial but whose output lies largely forgotten today. Griffiths is a typical example of a late Victorian writer of crime fiction whose writing came to be cast in the shade, as authors like Conan Doyle were elevated to a canonical position. Green was a notable participant in the late nineteenth-century transatlantic cultural exchange who gradually fell out of fashion as the twentieth century progressed and is still awaiting a retrieval of any major consequence. Secondly, my aim was to redefine a writer like Fergus Hume as more than simply the “one-book” novelist that standard narratives of literary history characterize him. Hume’s career cannot be summed up merely in terms of The Mystery of a Hansom Cab. Not only was this 1887 book the first part of a trilogy but also Hume’s writing during this initial phase of his career should be conceptualised not as impure or unsuccessful narratives of deduction but rather as examples of trans-media texts. Thirdly, I set out to spotlight the prominence in the nineteenth century of now overlooked but once influential literary trends such as the novels of Emile Gaboriau and “Hugh Conway”. Finally, this study strove to dissect the proliferation of 1860s narratives of deduction like The Notting Hill Mystery and pre-Conan Doyle series of detective fiction like Routledge’s “Detective Books”.
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I would strongly contend, in light of the insights that my enquiry has procured, that establishing the history of a text’s publication and dissemination represents an indispensable foundation in the recovery of the non-canonical. In addition, it is also clear that limiting our study of the circulation of this Victorian popular literature solely to the realm of the textual will result in an incomplete sense of the course such narratives followed. Victorian consumers also engaged with these texts in parallel and associated media; the influence of such experiences cannot but have conditioned processes of interpretation and meaning construction. In looking to contribute to the efforts of historians of the book to chart the history of reading, my approach has been decidedly eclectic. In effect, I have straddled the empirical-theoretical divide that Bonnie Gunzenhauser (1) identifies as the defining methodological binary opposition of this subfield by drawing on artefactual, paratextual, and institutional methods. The insights that I have procured demonstrate there is much to be gained from the pursuit of a blended or hybrid style of investigation that appropriates strategies from a variety of camps.

To this end, using influential frameworks of print culture like Darnton’s communication circuit and Nicholas Barker and Thomas R. Adams’ new model for the study of the book as a template, it is possible to conceptualise in graphical terms the cultural spheres of the Victorian media landscape that my research has endeavoured to map (Figure 40). In essence, the various quarters of this circuit or web sets forth moments where specific demographics consumed distinct varieties of cultural commodity. This structure traces the passage of Victorian popular fiction narratives in their serial, visual, volume, and performance incarnations and also delineates the influences and interconnections that were likely to have determined readers’ experiences. Accordingly, the web that I have charted identifies a particular set of cultural zones. Periodical serial narratives would be consumed dialogically in conjunction with their co-texts. Particular grades of book were affiliated with specific sites of acquisition and consumption. Readers’ encounters with these volumes took place in the context of a distinct nexus of text and sometimes also image. The subsequent reconstitution of these novels as books in various kinds
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of series in turn ensured they might well be read in a precisely configured frame of print and by new constituencies of readers. Ensuing transpositions of these texts’ narratives as dramas performed on the commercial stage elicited a cycle of reader reengagement with a variant on the transposed work or served as a catalyst for individuals’ print encounters with the adapted text.

Hence, the act of tracing the progress of these novels through this web brings to a light a number of core themes. Firstly, contemporary publishing practices suggest that the initiation of a Victorian reader’s encounter with a particular cultural product was to a certain degree contingent on the terms in which the book or periodical was branded. Attempts to secure a consumer’s commitment to acquire a print object or attend a performance were often rooted in framing the product in very specific way. A novel was introduced as “by the author of The Leavenworth Case”, as the latest book in “The Express Series”, or as featuring “six illustrations by B.S. Le Fanu”. A dramatization was billed as a production where the novel was “adapted with special permission of the authoress”. The failure of Fergus Hume’s novel, Madame Midas, to reach the heights of his bestselling debut can in part be explained by the fact the tenor of the 1888 work was, on a number levels, at odds with the branding of the text as “by the author of The Mystery of a Hansom Cab”. Efforts to cast the print commodity in a particular light could also take a comparatively more subtle form. The appearance and constitution of the newly launched periodical was encoded in a way that enabled the publication to trade on its resonance (thematic and ocular) with already existing newspapers or magazines. The serial novel could also serve as the mainstay of the branding of the popular magazine. This suggests that a sizeable number of consumers’ choices were at least in part grounded in the strength of the allure of the prospective narrative pleasures to be derived from a publication.

Secondly, the inclination underlying the acquisition and consumption of the book or periodical in part originated in the potential held by this print object to satisfy a particular need. While this is not to say that the impulse to read would have been borne solely of functional considerations, spells of leisure time and interludes of tedium or inactivity in the daily regimen did beget an appetite
for mental stimulation. An engrossing novel of crime, sensation, and detection like *The Mill Mystery* and *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* or an engaging highly coloured serial narrative such as *The Wyvern Mystery and Fast and Loose* was suitably equipped to fulfil this need. The publishers of the periodical, the serial, and the series, of course aspire toward a scenario where consumption of the most recent instalment, issue or volume will constitute a habitual pursuit embedded in the individual’s or group’s routine. In the case of many middle class readers, a phased engagement may also have characterised encounters with the book. While readers had a greater degree of agency in determining the position of the intervals in comparison with serial reading, their experiences were unlikely to have consisted of uninhibited and unbroken spells of mental activity of the sort that we as critics pursue today in our dissection of these texts. Rather, such consumers’ modes of existence resulted in a partitioning of the reading process, which arguably afforded scope for latent processing of the episodes of narratives that had been read.

Thirdly, Altick has observed of the railway, “perhaps no other single element in the evolving pattern of Victorian life was so responsible for the spread of reading [...] a railway trip meant an hour or a day of enforced leisure” (*The English Common Reader* 89). The public of commuting suburbanites, season ticket holders, and individuals travelling on pleasure were an important constituency of readers. The purveyors of reading matter to these customers ran a very definite line in engrossing highly coloured fare packaged in portable formats. A certain immediacy would have characterised particular works sold for consumption in this environment. For instance, the plot of *The Rome Express* pivoted on a murder committed aboard a train by one of the travellers and the resultant masquerade as a police detective engaged in by this murderous passenger. At an early point in *The Trail of the Serpent*, one of the characters is wrongfully arrested on a railway platform on suspicion of having murdered his uncle. The climax of *Miss Mephistopheles* involved the crushing of the murderer beneath the wheels of a Melbourne express train. Other material marketed for railway consumption like Routledge’s “Detective Books” and the subsequent volumes in “The Express Series” were marked by a more
distant diverting quality with the plots of these works unfolding in foreign locations like France, America, and the Pacific Ocean. The short episodic chapter structure that characterised a significant proportion of the books in the latter series rendered such novels especially suited to the bite-sized mode of reading associated with a twice-daily commute.

Fourthly, while the texts that I have considered largely functioned as entertainment, they did not belong to the realm of trivial vacuous literature. Nevertheless, neither did the majority of this crime writing represent transformative reading matter that made considerable demands of its audience and conveyed them into unfamiliar territory. In essence, a significant degree of the pleasure to be procured from works like *The Trail of the Serpent* and *Miss Mephistopheles* lay in their quotient of familiar character types, narrative conceits and arcs, and foreseeable resolutions. Varying degrees of social comment did feature in Adams, Griffiths, Green, and Hume but on the whole it was secondary to plot and the generation of suspense. One can essentially conceive of the output produced by novelists like Green, Griffiths, Hume, and Morrison as featuring a significant appropriative dimension. Their oeuvre, to borrow Graham Allen’s definition of the intertextual, originated in “systems, codes and traditions established by previous works of literature” (*Intertextuality* 1). For example, the relationships linking Green to Collins and Hume to Gaboriau should be theorised in light of Genette’s idea of hypertextuality. *The Mill Mystery* and *Fast and Loose* were both grafted onto a hypotext. *The Mill Mystery* was grounded in Collins’ *The Law and the Lady* while Griffiths’ *Fast and Loose* had its origins in Gaboriau’s *L’Affaire Lerouge*. If we regard novels like *The Mill Mystery* and *Fast and Loose*, in the words of Genette, as “text[s] in the second degree” (*Palimpsests* 5), it is possible to procure a sense of the kinds of writing with which audiences would draw parallels while consuming the texts. As Prince observes in his foreword to the English language translation of Genette’s *Palimpsests* “all literary texts are hypertextual, some are more hypertextual than others, more massively and explicitly palimpsestuous” [ix]. Arguably, the affinity can also grow less apparent over time. The transtextuality of Adams’ *The Notting Hill Mystery* is more immediately discernible today in
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comparison with the derivation of *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* in Conway’s *Called Back*.

Accordingly, there were sufficient recognizable elements that ensured such novels evoked widely-read material like Collins, Gaboriau, or Conan Doyle. These conventional strands served as a foundation of the reader-text encounter. Most texts also had a measure of imaginative ingredients and plot developments that ensured the text was not a colourlessly formulaic read. Therefore, many of these works were of a hybridized construction. As this sort of material would largely have belonged to the category of non-transformative reading, the difficulty inherent in studying the consumption of such texts is that readers are far less likely to record in documentary form the effects that this sort of literature registered. This limits the potential to canvass the actual historical consumers. Be that as it may, this does not place these light reading experiences entirely beyond historical reach and I have set out to demonstrate that the conditions and the backdrop of such acts of reading can, to a certain extent, be reconstructed. For instance, contextualising a novel like *The Mill Mystery* in its series incarnation illuminates the network of titles with which it was affiliated and the sort of texts with which a significant proportion of the audience were likely to place it in conversation. In addition, one can ascertain how the purveyors of the text looked to frame their product by turning to the visual material in the publisher’s peritext of novel such as *Madame Midas*. Accordingly, it is possible to procure a sense of the perspective from which the reader commenced this recreational encounter.

Fifthly, where such pictorial content did not originally feature in a text’s initial manifestation, the introduction of such elements commonly formed part of a process of reconfiguring a work in order to extend its existence. Clearly, reconstitutions that lowered the text’s monetary cost potentially widened the prospective readership. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that such ventures did not always see the text descend to a lower stratum; the re-styling of Braddon’s *Three Times Dead as The Trail of the Serpent* exemplifies the potential for cultural ascension. The transition from serial to book could significantly recode a work. For example, the circulation of the complete *The
Notting Hill Mystery as a book was a decidedly less meta text than the serial form that appeared in Once a Week. Crucially, endeavours in repackaging were also ideally positioned to capitalise on the natural human impulse to relive or perpetuate the pleasurable moment. Those acts of remaking that involved the transposition of the novel from a print to a performance medium via dramatization for the stage enabled the consumer to re-immerses him/herself in the delights of the story. However, if this experience were to prove fulfilling, the adaptation had to furnish its knowing audience with the prospect of adopting a different perspective on the book while also tapping in to the appetite for spectacle and the pleasures of the visual.

Finally, such exercises in recasting and adaptation were indispensable if looking to prolong the shelf life of the sort of text that belongs to Ruskin’s category of books of the hour. Much of the fiction that I am investigating was situated in this echelon of literature. A core consideration in my efforts to probe the circulation and consumption of these Victorian popular texts has been the question of valuation or value judgements. Gauging the worth a print object was afforded necessitates weighing up a number of considerations. On a symbolic level, the use value that a reader primarily seeking entertainment will accord to the experience yielded by a novel like The Rome Express diminishes once acquainted with the revelations that emerge in the work’s denouement. The production values that characterised certain inexpensive classes of book limited their lifespan, which meant the consumption inherent in the reading process could prove both figurative and literal. Michael Thompson’s Rubbish Theory highlights how value can prove transient and wane over time. The exercise of tracing the progress of this study’s texts through the nineteenth-century web that I have mapped has seen a marked thread emerge. As a text advances from stage to stage, the transition is accompanied by an effort to bestow upon the work a new or revitalised source of allure. This will either imbue the print object with a novel means of eliciting attention (in the process staying its consignment to the status of rubbish) or indeed equip it to cultivate a different constituency or sensibility. In addition to counteracting the inevitable gradual dimming of the product’s sheen and the exhaustion of its literary appeal
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with its initial constituency, this restyling of the text’s material form redefined and/or replenished the aesthetic return to be procured from acquiring (and displaying) this print object.

While I have made substantial historical and theoretical inroads into the reconstruction of the frames of reference that were likely to have informed audience engagement with this material, I would like to advance this research further by unearthing primary sources that detail actual instances of lateral consumption. For instance, how did an ordinary (and knowing patron) regard his/her experience of the transposition of *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* from page to stage? What sort of mental connections did the habitual reader of the Routledge “Detective Books” formulate? What were the experiences of a devotee of Griffiths or Le Fanu who customarily acquired and read these writers’ novels? If such evidence has survived and it was possible to overcome the aforementioned difficulties in isolating it, the insights these sources would offer, while on one level distinctive, would also lend themselves to a certain level of extrapolation. This in turn would permit a juxtaposition of replicated dialogic frames with historical representations of such intertextual processes.

Possibilities for additional research also arise from the topics and concerns with which I have engaged across the five chapters of this study. Firstly, my particular interest lay in a very specific temporal moment in the circulation of *Home News*. However, this is a journal where much of its history remains yet to be unearthed. There would be definite merit in considering this steamship press title in its middle years before the telegraphic threat grew especially grave, along with also charting the shape the newspaper took in its very final years prior to ceasing publication. Secondly, I examined how purchasing decisions at the railway bookstall often owed a great deal to the advice of the employees who oversaw these units. When surveying visual and photographic depictions of these retail sites today, one is instantly struck by the dramatic effect the eye catching promotional notices adorning these places must have occasioned. On a conscious level, this signage would have been very imposing. It was also very likely to have registered subliminally; the persuasive effects of these notices could well predispose consumer selections a certain
way on subsequent visits. This signage might well also register an impression on commuters passing by the stalls. The final chapter of Colclough’s *Consuming Texts* made some initial strides in theorising these ephemera in light of the suggestive dangers it posed to impressionable young ladies of the respectable classes. There would be definite scope for a project that looked to collect and analyse visual representations of these bookstalls in an effort to ascertain the sorts of promotional strategies pursued, which would in turn offer additional insight into the ideology that underpinned reading in these spaces.

Thirdly, I set out to explore how other literature informed Victorian readers’ engagement with the body of texts that lay at the centre of my foray into the lesser-known realms of Victorian popular literature. Yet, this issue might also be explored in reverse. How did these writers’ work shape readers’ consumption of contemporaneous and indeed subsequent literature? In addition, there also remains the question of the potential circulation of these titles in the Edwardian era. For instance, Milne published an edition of *The Rome Express* in 1910 that the house announced on the book’s title page was the forty-fifth thousand copy. Fourthly, with reference to a specific number of collections, I sought to probe the aesthetic return that the reader secured when s/he was persuaded to pursue the “package psychology” impulse associated with the publisher’s series. On a wider level, the principles underlying the location, arrangement, and presentation of printed matter in the middle class Victorian domestic sphere represents an area worthy of further consideration. While Price’s *How to Do Things with Books* with its enquiry into nineteenth-century thinking on the idea of furniture books will have done much to stimulate discussion on this topic, the ideology associated with the organisation of print commodities in zones like the bookcase and the drawing room table is an issue that warrants scrutiny. Finally, as part of my analysis of readers’ experiences of theatrical renderings of the crime novel, I also looked to consider the significance of acts of reading characterised by counter clockwise oscillation between the adaptation and the book. For the most part, Victorianist scholarship has yet to thoroughly divest itself of the characteristic literary studies impulse to view dramatizations of the novel as inherently subordinate.
Conclusion

In light of the frequency with which nineteenth-century prose fiction was remade for the stage, a potentially sizeable research dividend may be procured in further comparative studies that seek to examine how maiden encounters with the novel were informed by an earlier familiarity with dramatic renderings of the text.

In embarking on this project, my aim was to reclaim a space for a body of authors and texts that were deserving of greater levels of critical attention. This is not an objective that can be realised singlehandedly or in a scholarly vacuum and there are limits to what a doctoral study of this sort can realise. Accordingly, while I have already begun to disseminate the fruits of my endeavours in cultural excavation via the channels of scholarly publication, the next logical step in the realisation of my objective would centre on the production of editions of these texts complete with the original visual co-texts, explanatory notes, bibliographical and biographical contextualisation, and other supplementary material. Collaboration with publishing houses like Victorian Secrets and Valancourt Books, which specialise in restoring marginalised fiction to print, represents the conventional means of launching a conversation on non-canonical writing. Yet, I also foresee potential for a project that would make use of the possibilities of the digital. For instance, there would be greater scope to chart the various material incarnations in which the text was circulated and also situate a particular novel in its series context. The study of canonical writing has benefited greatly from such endeavours; projects like the University of Victoria’s Victorian Serial Novels have demonstrated the considerable possibilities the digital humanities can open. In no sense, does such technology constitute a panacea and the potential for decontextualisation and recasting means digitisation can impair as much assist in cultural recovery. Yet, prudently utilised, it can aid in mapping those areas of the print landscape that time and canonicity have eclipsed but merit retrieval and re-examination.
Figure 40: Web Charting Circulation of Victorian Popular Fiction Texts
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