

Introduction

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No story is the same to us after a lapse of time; or rather we who read it are no longer the same interpreters.

(George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, 1859)

Literary scholars of the nineteenth century are committed to a deep understanding of a particular past, one that we read in a particular present. Many new methods and topics have radically shifted the focus of Victorian literary studies over recent decades and have acquired accelerated urgency in the light of recent world events. Empire and race have moved to the center of our concerns, most dramatically with recent political and social developments underscoring the urgency of rethinking our approaches. Climate change has driven an interest in the roots of extraction economies and the history of capitalism. As liberal enlightenment politics and epistemological values are under scrutiny, we return to the high point of industrial capitalism and its politics to understand the roots of inequality, racism, and our failures to understand and manage our shared resources. New materialisms (and a pandemic) have made us attentive to the continuity of human and nonhuman entities and ecologies. Over a somewhat longer period, the history of publishing and its relationship to noncanonical as well as canonical fiction have come to the fore as digital collections and technologies have made many materials newly available. The material turn made us cognizant also of the significance of the structure and textual context of Victorian publishing, long ignored under earlier structuralist and deconstructive emphasis on linguistic issues untethered to the materiality of reading. Our sense of the period's oeuvre has been enhanced as we moved away from the primacy of the three-volume novel to the larger ecology of literary (and dramatic) circulation and adaptation. These more expansive reading practices have also revised our understanding of the 1860s' most significant modes, the realist and the sensational, in both print fiction and

the drama, as well as Golden Age fantasy for children, often situating them within scientific innovations and new ways of understanding psychology and epistemology. This volume addresses new conceptions of traditionally important topics within the period and also shows how urgent issues such as race, disability, environmental issues, and extraction are central to our understanding of those traditional topics today. It shows how international and global concerns are not separate, but integral to an understanding of the 1860s and its literature. And it frames these discussions within their importance to the urgent discussions of the present, too often considered by a wider public to be unrelated both to nineteenth-century literature and scholarship.

Even at the time, the 1860s were understood to be an important turning point. In his Preface to the second edition of *The English Constitution* in 1872, Walter Bagehot looks back to the original publication between 1865 and 1867 as a prior epoch, remarking on the “difficulty” of updating a book that “describes the English Constitution as it stood in the years 1865 and 1866. ... In so short a period there have rarely been more changes.”¹ Politically, the decade is indeed busy. The Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865 and responses to the Eyre controversy consolidate a turn to a harder edged colonial policy and embrace of racist ideas begun in the 1850s. Yet a new liberal polis is taking shape as well; John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty* is published in 1859, *Utilitarianism* in 1863, and *On the Subjection of Women* in 1869. Mill and Carlyle’s dispute over Governor Eyre divides public opinion, setting the tone of discussions around race and politics for decades to come. The abolition of slavery in the US and its Civil War finally end much of the remaining slave trade and change the economies of both the US and Britain. Marx publishes *Das Kapital* in 1867. The second opium war with China ends in 1860, European wars were reshaping what became the Austro-Hungarian empire, and Italian unification had caught the imagination of British poets and theorists of national identity. (Barrett Browning’s final collection *Poems Before Congress* opens the decade, shortly before Mazzini and Garibaldi join forces, and her *Last Poems*, collected and published posthumously in 1862, comments on Italian unification.) Limited liability continues to allow for fraud to impact global and domestic markets (as we see in Dickens’s *Our Mutual Friend*). Post-Rebellion policies in India begun after 1857 are consolidated, with India becoming a Crown Possession under a Viceroyalty in 1858. The new Indian penal code drafted by Macaulay comes into force in 1862. The Maori wars are at their peak throughout the decade. Emigration to Australia continued apace, as British settlers fought for space with immigrant labor from China and

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other nations. The Suez Canal opens in 1869, marking the end of an era in travel around the African Cape, and the beginning of what would become known as the Scramble for Africa. Debates over the second Reform Bill make the expansion of the franchise a central debate: who deserved direct representation as a citizen?

Scientifically, the decade is bookended by Darwin's *Origin* in 1859 and his *Descent* in 1871, and Herbert Spencer's popularization of social theories derived from his own theories of evolution and his reading of *Origin* (including the phrase "survival of the fittest," which is Spencer's, from his 1864 *The Principles of Biology*). Much of the debate around citizenship, the empire, and Britain's role in the world comes to be seen through the lens of social-evolutionary rhetoric. The period also sees the first periodic table of elements, the experiments of Mendel, and Lister's development of antiseptis. The first transatlantic cable is made functional, and dynamite is invented. But perhaps most importantly, the problem of resources comes clearly into focus as coal – and its potential exhaustion – are understood within a growing awareness of the global interdependency on raw materials.

In literary history, the 1860s are an undeniably important decade. Eliot, Dickens, Braddon, Trollope, and Collins are at the height of their powers (Dickens, of course, dies at the end of this decade.) It is arguably the decade that high Victorian realism peaks, coinciding with the rise of sensation fiction, and leading to the naturalism of Gissing and Hardy that would define the 1870s onward. The rise of sensation fiction and drama also reflects the explosive growth of the periodicals press and the continuing impact of weekly fiction publication for middle-class readers that define the decade (Dickens begins *All the Year Round* in 1859). Barrett Browning dies, and Robert Browning continues to write some of his greatest work, including *The Ring and the Book*. Christina Rossetti consolidates her position as an important poet. Tennyson is Laureate and dives deep into myth and legend. Meredith publishes "Modern Love," and William Morris releases *The Earthly Paradise*. The Pre-Raphaelites continue to be influential and Swinburne shocks. Matthew Arnold publishes "Dover Beach." The Golden Age of children's literature arguably begins with *Alice in Wonderland* in 1862. Pater heralds the return of philosophical idealism, as well as the beginning of what would become a new aestheticism in the coming decades. Ruskin continues work on his multivolume *Modern Painters*. French realism begins seriously to influence British authors. Photography becomes increasingly popular, having a significant impact on Victorian aesthetic theories of realism; and new technologies of printing revolutionize literary illustration in periodicals as well, engaging the efforts of major artists.

While this volume cannot take up every possible topic in the period, it aims to frame the historical significance of the decade as it is reflected in the literature of the period and to connect that to present-day foci in literary studies. Unsurprisingly, then, certain themes and works tend to be taken up in multiple chapters: an emphasis on the body and scientific ideas; race, nation, and imperialism; the free market; the modern polis; the history of genre and form; and the environment are important across the volume. Mary Elizabeth Braddon and William Wilkie Collins loom as large here as they did in publishers' receipts of the period, as the "ripped from the headlines" plots of sensation fiction move to the top of readers' concerns. We also see, of course, George Eliot, Charles Dickens, and Anthony Trollope repeatedly referenced, and John Stuart Mill, Charles Kingsley, and Dion Boucicault appear frequently. Algernon Charles Swinburne, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Alfred Tennyson, William Morris, and the American Walt Whitman (in William's Rossetti's British edition of that poet) feature as well, as do Edmund Falconer, Lewis Carroll, Kaliprasanna Sinha, John Ruskin, Janet Hamilton, and Charles Darwin – and a host of other authors, politicians, philosophers, and scientists who appear more fleetingly.

The book is organized in clusters. The first cluster of five essays discusses major modes and genres very important to the decade, while connecting to other themes in the period. Realism is of course the dominant and obvious mode that defines mid-century fiction, continuing from two earlier decades; Rae Greiner, in "Realism and Psychology: Psychophysics, *Mind*, and the Science of Human Nature," explores the emerging significance of embodiment, both in realist aesthetics and theory of mind, more specific to this decade. In this wide-ranging article, Greiner examines the scientific discoveries informing the turn to a realism less focused on the outside world – though still engaged in detailed description – than on the material basis and process of human perception. Placing the development of (especially physiological) psychology alongside the history of the novel, Greiner calls our attention to the way that new theories and technologies of the senses came to ground the realist mode. Greiner notes the extensive relationship of visuality and the technology of photography to realist aesthetics, as painting responds to this turn toward perception with impressionism. Although much prior scholarship has emphasized the undeniable importance of the visual, Greiner moves past this to survey other theories of embodied sensation, including sound and motion, and what E.S. Dallas, in *The Gay Science* (1866), described as "the science of the laws of pleasure."²

Complementary to, and some have argued, a subset or even ultimate expression of realism, sensation fiction is the genre most identified with

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the 1860s. Relying on realist detail and familiar domestic scenes wedded to spectacular, sometimes gothic plots about hidden secrets, bigamy, and sexual transgression, the enormously popular genre is identified as beginning with novels such as Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1860) and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862). Alarmed (and alarmist) critics denounced such novels, but only succeeded in increasing their popularity. Anne-Marie Beller, in "Sensational Bodies: Representations of Race and Disability in Sensation Fiction," moves past an earlier critical focus on gender and subversive narratives in the genre, a principal concern in the 1990s and 2000s, to take up the theme of disability in an intersectional framework with race. Examining works by Mary Elizabeth Braddon and William Wilkie Collins, Beller details the "Octoroon obsession" of the 1860s (including the eponymous play by Dion Boucicault), and the way that disability stands in for, is coterminous with, or simply codes racial difference. The juxtaposition of racial identity with mental disability holds in tension the racist concept of blackness or mixed-race identity as inherently pathogenic with a contrasting understanding that such "disability" as these authors represent is inseparable from historical trauma. Still, it is clear that there is "a shared vocabulary of marginalization and denigration."

Boucicault appears in Sarah Meer's chapter as well, as the author of *The Colleen Bawn*. "Ireland on the Sensational Stage" discusses sensation theatre, a parallel to sensation fiction but also an important 1860s genre in its own right. Meer also explores the theatre in terms of the emerging discourse of Irish nationalism (and terror) that would become a major force in the latter part of the century, and remains topical today. A discussion of adaptation and intertextuality frames her analysis of Edmund Falconer's *Peep O' Day*, which followed the success of *The Colleen Bawn* and spawned many imitations and adaptations – including, in turn, another play by Boucicault. *Peep*, itself an adaptation of a novel, staged older forms of popular culture (songs, fairs, faction fights) in representations of Ireland in the late eighteenth century and the 1798 uprising, both to appeal to the nostalgia of the audience and to gesture – in a temporally displaced and therefore "safer" way – to past political social unrest, specifically "Whiteboy" rural secret societies who performed spectacular acts of violence. Wildly popular, the play ambiguously evoked the threat of current Fenian disturbances and became part of the contemporary discourse on Irish politics. Sensation in the 1860s was often connected to narratives of nation, ethnicity, and violence.

Narrating nation is also central to Marion Thain's "*Palgrave's Golden Treasury*: 'Modern' Poetry and a New Lyric Canon." Thain frames a

significant periodization of nineteenth-century poetry: 1861 saw the first publication of *Palgrave's Golden Treasury*, which was wildly popular and redefined the poetic canon – particularly of the lyric poem – for over a century to come. Just as the critical discourse around the novel at mid-century begins taxonomizing subgenres, *Palgrave's* shapes a definite definition of lyric, which had previously been a far baggier category. It also, Thain points out, repositioned lyric (at least in this anthology) as a particular kind of commodity. In packaging his collection as a giftbook, and likewise in subordinating the actual poems to the aesthetics of the volume (sometimes silently rewriting them in the process), Palgrave, Thain argues, promoted a certain kind of aesthetic taste and a certain version of literary (and national) history. Indeed, the collection marked an effort in the 1860s to define and sum up the history of poetry to that point as part of a national project of self-definition. Yet the same decade also saw the publication (in 1866) of a volume of poetry that was crucial in opening the door to a new and quite different kind of lyric: Swinburne's 1866 *Poems and Ballads (First Series)*. While Palgrave elevated a national, "wholesome" vision of national poetry for a British working class or middlebrow reader, Swinburne framed the future of modern poetry as resolutely elite, aestheticist, global, urban, and modern as opposed to the simple, pastoral, national, and nostalgic vision enshrined in the *Treasury*. Yet both were undeniably powerful in framing the poetry of later decades and rise of modernism.

As Palgrave wrestled with framing a national – and nationalist – tradition in aesthetic terms, the Golden Age of children's literature also took up themes of nation and domesticity. But as Megan A. Norcia shows, these narratives tended to be framed in terms of an anxiety about the larger, global world, often appearing as a setting of adventure, promise, and threat. "Impossible Monsters, Rabbit Holes, and New Worlds: The Unstable Ground of Science and Education in the Children's Fairy Tale and Fantasy Literature of the 1860s" considers fantasy and imperial adventure in the Golden Age of children's literature. Addressing Charles Kingsley's *Water-Babies* (1863), Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), and related texts for adult readers, such as Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" (1862), Norcia notes that the settings of these texts, all quintessentially and domestically English, yield to underworlds – often literally under the feet of the protagonists – which point to "knowledge gaps" in emerging sciences such as geology, archeology, and geography that are themselves thematically connected to imperial expansion. As Greiner shows of 1860s realism, children's literature also was deeply invested in emerging scientific knowledge; given its pedagogical function, this was both a project

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in explication and one connected to the anticipated future role of young readers as citizens and functionaries of empire.

Over recent decades, publishing history has moved into the mainstream of literary studies, as the focus on texts, not only as historically situated, but as material objects with their own histories, constraints, and affordances has become more central. As Thain notes in her chapter on lyric, books were not simply media, but commodities associated with luxury, identity, and taste. Digitization has made these materials vastly more accessible to researchers and has also invited new ways of thinking about literary research in the enormous mass of texts available. The following cluster of two chapters takes up publishing history, which sees important innovations in the 1860s. The first, by Graham Law, focuses on fiction, especially connections between financial changes in publishing and the aesthetics of “the literature of the kitchen” – mass produced literature for the working-class reader which often did not appear as bound books. “Periodicals, Popular Fiction, and the Affordances of Digital Collections” engages with Franco Moretti’s concept of “distant reading” through digital collections to consider the larger trends in genre and publishing format. With the duty on printing paper finally repealed in 1861, the great divide between the expensive and “luxurious” reading materials available to the middle classes and the cheap penny numbers marketed to workers began to close – along with the genre division between the gothic, melodramatic, and parodic working-class fiction and the more highbrow fiction of middle-class readers. Though the divide did not fully collapse, the market diversified – and brought popular sensational fiction into middle-class hands. Exemplary of the authors improving upon this new niche was Mary Elizabeth Braddon, and the general critical reaction was horrified. Braddon, a hard-working and prolific author, wrote for both audiences, but cut her teeth on publications for working-class readers. She moved on to three-deckers and then the editorship of the lower middle class but aspirational *Belgravia*. The later discovery and public brouhaha over her authorship of penny fiction was a telling moment in the class discourse around publishing. Law meditates on the changes wrought by digital humanities research on the way we think about the period and publishing, both in terms of the questions we can ask and the techniques we can use to answer them. The “literature of the kitchen” has become more available to researchers than before, but obstacles still stand to be removed before we can fully access this vast oeuvre.

“Publishing in the 1860s: Technology, Regulation, and Distribution,” by Andrew King, offers a deep dive into the publishing industry so important

to the circulation and marketing of literary – and all other – texts in the period. Focusing on industry serials such as *The Bookseller*, King shows that publishing in the 1860s was a complex, collaborative endeavor involving several interdependent systems. It was also already a well-oiled machine. Although there were a number of important innovations in this period – including the move to paper made of esparto grass which was so significant from an ecological perspective – King shows that the 1860s overall showed a process of “mainstreaming” and consolidation of its technologies of production and distribution. And what was being produced and distributed was, as we also see in Law’s chapter, far more varied than the three-volume novel we most often think of today as the principal form of Victorian fiction. He notes that the *Bookseller* in 1869 counts more books for children than novels for adults published in 1867 and 1868 – and far more “Religious Books and Pamphlets” than either of the above. “Poetry and Drama” together were in ninth place – along with many other topics and categories typically ignored by literary scholars. King is attentive to labor relations, and international legal changes to copyright law and other forms of print regulation, while focusing less on revolutionary changes in publishing than on the steady standardization of an economically and socially central information ecology. But his fascinating exploration of the material culture of the publishing industry reminds us how much is lost when we focus only on certain kinds of texts or only on text as such.

After a period of withdrawal from earlier imperial investments, mid-nineteenth-century Britain had come to see itself as the champion of the free market, opposer of slavery, and promoter of the Pax Britannica around the world. But the 1850s also saw a sobering reckoning. The Crimean War, though Britain and her allies finally emerged victorious, was hardly a decisive rout. Two years later, the Rebellion of 1857 in India and the backlash that followed hardened racist attitudes and shifted many Britons toward a more openly pro-imperial stance. The next group of four essays focus explicitly on particular international and imperial issues and literatures. (Note that race is important in many chapters, both in the international section and others, rather than having its own section, as it is a pervasive concern both at home and abroad, as we saw in Beller’s essay, above. Moreover, empire is here situated within the global, rather than as a subset of British concerns.) As we saw in Marion Thain’s chapter on lyric, nation is an important theme and locus of political and literary activity in this period. Patricia Cove considers the significance of Italian Unification (1861) in “Italy in Transition: Italian Unification and Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Last Poems* (1862)” and traces some of the reverberations of

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those discussions with Britain's own sense of imperial and national identity. Barrett Browning, one of the most visible British literary figures passionately advocating Italian independence, writes extensively about the tempestuous period between the 1859 Second War of Independence and unification in her final published work *Last Poems* (1862). Cove remarks that "civil strife and territorial dissolution remain ever-present undercurrents to nation-state creation" in these poems, as Britons were reminded not only by Italian unification (and its impact on the Austro-Hungarian empire and the Bourbons), but also later by the US Civil War. Though these final poems carried both the weight of EBB's fame and some of the moral authority accorded to last words, the most openly political and patriotic poems about Italy have received less scholarly attention than others. Cove shows that these poems, placed in relation to her poems on the American Civil War, have interesting resonances with Britain's own difficult reconciliation of its complex history with a national narrative.

Though major British authors had a lot to say about Italy's struggles, the response to the US Civil War was far more muted and indirect, despite its enormous impact on the British economy. In "Silent Center, Vocal Margins: British Literary Response to the US Civil War," Linda K. Hughes analyzes the caution characteristic of such writing, despite intense journalistic interest and an uneasy sense of Britain's responsibility for the establishment of slavery in the USA. Looking at a range of canonical and noncanonical works, she finds an overlooked volume of response, including in drama, working-class poetry, and editing. Hughes finds that the causes for this were multiple, including the US President's political rhetoric, conservative commitments to social hierarchies, declining abolitionist sympathy, and the rise in racism arising from new social sciences such as anthropology, as well as popular culture stereotypes imported in minstrel shows from the USA. Hughes finds, however, that there is still a lively conversation in essays and journalism, as well as from more marginal figures such as the working-class Scottish poet Janet Hamilton, and in transatlantic literature such as William Rossetti's British edition of Walt Whitman and African-American speakers and writers in Britain such as Frederick Douglass. Like Law and King, Hughes points to the importance of a broader view of Victorian literature in assessing the period.

Despite the huge direct impact of the Civil War on livelihoods in the Kingdom, far more direct discussions of race, war, and rebellion postslavery took place around the Caribbean. The Morant Bay Rebellion (October 11, 1865) in Jamaica became a flashpoint in racist discourse. What began as a mostly economic protest led by the preacher Paul Bogle turned into

a massacre of protestors by government forces, followed by rebellion. Governor Edward John Eyre declared martial law and killed over 400 Jamaicans of African descent. He had many more arrested and either executed or brutally whipped and imprisoned. Though many shocked Britons called for punishment for Eyre, other prominent figures, including Thomas Carlyle and his notable supporters such as Charles Dickens, backed Eyre. This led to a famous controversy between John Stuart Mill and Carlyle. In “Empire and Evidence in *Armada* and the Morant Bay Rebellion,” Leah R. Rosenberg shows that Collins’s *Armada* (serialized 1864–66) came to comment obliquely on the Rebellion, which occurred in the midst of its serialization. Rosenberg charts the comparison of the mixed-race protagonist, Midwinter, with the mixed-race Jamaican George William Gordon, a local political figure illegally executed by Eyre. Examining the history of Sidney Levien, an English Jew falsely charged with inciting the rebellion, Rosenberg argues that Collins shows the dangers of unreliable evidence in the cases brought against Levien and Gordon. Collins thus leads the novel toward a denunciation of Eyre, and periodicals, juxtaposing coverage of *Armada* and Morant Bay in close proximity, encouraged readers to see these connections critically. Thus, as we saw earlier in Beller’s discussion of the sensation genre’s treatment of race and disability, which also uses *Armada* as an example, race, empire, and slavery continue to be topics in the literature of the day, though often presented in an oblique relationship to present-day Britain. And as demonstrated in the prior section, attention to periodical publication allows us to see connections offered to Victorian readers obscured when we focus on the text in isolation.

But beyond Britain’s own discussions at home, in the larger world, literary cultures continued to develop in reference to their own cultures, hierarchies, and values, sometimes but not always with any attention to that faraway place. In the years following the Rebellion of 1857 in India, Sukanya Banerjee reminds us that in India itself, those events directly affected a small proportion of a very large terrain and population. A rich and complex literary culture continued to develop, often without overt – or any – reference to the events which seemed so cataclysmic back in Britain and which were endlessly discussed there well into the 1860s – and which led to some hardening of racial attitudes which we see highlighted in Hughes’s and Rosenberg’s chapters. For Bengali literary culture, the 1860s have been defined as the site of the emergence of the first “modern” Bengali literature and drama, blending an ongoing concern with social issues and new experimentation with the novel and depictions of daily life. Yet that,