A Companion to The Victorian Novel

EDITED BY PATRICK BRANTLINGER AND
WILLIAM B. THESING

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A Companion to the Victorian Novel

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Patrick Brantlinger and William B. Thesing

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Introduction

Patrick Brantlinger and William B. Thesing

The aim of this *Companion* is to provide contextual and critical information about the entire range of British fiction published during the Victorian period. It offers students, teachers, and general readers at all levels original, accessible chapters written from current critical and theoretical perspectives. In part I, each chapter provides an overview of one central context or issue, including the publishing world, education, social class and economics, nineteenth-century psychology, race and empire, religion, science, technology, the law, gender and women's rights, the fine arts, and the theater. In part II, the chapters survey the various forms of the Victorian novel: Newgate novels and detective fiction, historical fiction, the sensation novel, autobiographical fiction, Victorian versions of Gothic romance, regional fiction, industrial and "condition of England" novels, fiction for children, and science fiction. Part III deals with the reputations and canonization of such major authors as Charlotte Brontë and Charles Dickens; Victorian, modern, and postmodern theories applied to Victorian fiction; postmodern rewritings of Victorian novels; and film and television adaptations. The detailed and, we hope, conveniently constructed index will enable cross-referencing and study of a broad spectrum of authors, novels, themes, and controversies. Bibliographies following each chapter offer both a list of "References" detailing works cited directly in the text and a list of "Further Reading" containing helpful recommendations of recent criticism and scholarship that, while diverse and innovative, are accessible to the general reader.

In his consideration of prose fiction as a "rational amusement," Anthony Trollope declared: "we have become a novel-reading people, from the Prime Minister down to the last-appointed scullery maid." Indeed, not only was one of Britain's great Prime Ministers, William Gladstone, a novel-reader; so was Queen Victoria, despite an education from which novels were banned – and another of her great premiers, Benjamin Disraeli, was a novel-writer. John Sutherland estimates that between 1837 and 1901 some 60,000 novels were published in Britain – roughly 20 percent of all book production – and that these figures perhaps double if religious tracts and magazine serials that did not appear in bound volumes are added. Further, some 7,000 Victorians "could legitimately title themselves 'novelist'" (Sutherland 1989: 1). In studying Victorian culture, no matter from what disciplinary perspective, it is difficult not to feel that it was all novels, or at least that it was all in novels.

In part because of the very dominance of the novel in Victorian culture, novel-reading was as controversial as television-watching is today. For example, although we now take for granted that libraries should have novels in their collections, for the Victorians, whether or not the first public libraries should acquire works of fiction was hotly debated. During the parliamentary hearings on the Library Act of 1850, there was much testimony that libraries, together with schools and literacy in general, would wean working-class readers from booze and crime. But opponents sometimes turned that argument around. In his history of public libraries, Thomas Greenwood cites a number of commentators who alleged that libraries encouraged idleness, and one who even declared he would "rather see a young man hanging about a public-house than spending his time in these places" (quoted in Greenwood 1891: 82). If they offered novels, public libraries were frequently also said to encourage romantic fantasies (and, hence, sexual misbehavior) in female readers. Thus, another opponent of libraries invoked the figure of the "Female Quixote": "Many are the crimes brought about by the disordered imagination of a reader of sensational . . . rubbish, whilst many a home is neglected . . . owing to the all-absorbed novel-reading wife" (quoted in Greenwood 1891: 82).

The phrase "Female Quixote" comes from Charlotte Lennox's 1752 novel of that title. As early as the 1600s, novel-reading was often identified as a female activity, especially hazardous for impressionable young women. In the 1700s, many of the customers of the so-called circulating libraries were women, and many of the books they read were novels. As private businesses, the early circulating libraries could not be accused of squandering public money, but they were often accused of undermining public morality. In Richard Sheridan's 1775 play *The Rivals*, novel-reading turns the head of Lydia Languish, causing Sir Anthony Absolute to say that "a circulating library in a town is an ever-green tree of diabolical knowledge."

Despite such objections, novels became one of the mainstays of nineteenth-century publishing. Increasing demand did lead to the writing of a lot of trashy novels – the sort published by the Minerva Press, for example. These include the Gothic romances parodied by Jane Austen in *Northanger Abbey*, featuring Catherine Morland as Female Quixote. Besides Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*, which Catherine reads, most of the titles mentioned by her novel-neurotic friend, Isabella Thorpe, were published by the Minerva Press. Among those on Isabella's list are *Midnight Bell*, *Necromancer of the Black Forest*, and *Horrid Mysteries* – all of them, to use Isabella's term of high praise, "horrid novels."

Much of the fiction produced between the 1760s and 1830s was condemned not because it had any serious purchase on the world, but for just the reverse reason: because it was frivolous entertainment. Evangelicals, Quakers, and some other religious groups prohibited novel-reading within their flocks, and prohibitions also came from sober, secular utilitarians such as James Mill – and the caricature of the utilitarian pedagogue, Mr. Gradgrind, who prohibits fiction in Dickens's 1854 novel *Hard Times*. Thomas Carlyle held that novel-reading was usually a waste of time, an opinion also expressed by later social critics including John Ruskin, Matthew Arnold, and William Morris.

These hostile attitudes affected even the greatest novelists, who before George Eliot, at least, had trouble taking their own imaginative productions seriously. Thus, most of Thackeray's early works are mock-novels, parodies of other people's fiction, as in his "Novels by Eminent Hands" series for *Punch*. Thackeray also mocked himself: a key metaphor for his 1847 masterpiece, *Vanity Fair*, is that of the puppet show – the novel as mere child's play. Thackeray also recalled how, as a "lazy, idle boy," reading a good novel seemed to him as "sweet and delicious as the raspberry open-tarts of budding boyhood" – not much different from the "intellectual gingerbread" condemned by an eighteenth-century critic. And Trollope, Thackeray's great emulator, declared that the public consumed novels "as men eat pastry after dinner, – not without some inward conviction that the taste is vain if not vicious." At least Thackeray's and Trollope's gustatory metaphors do not treat novels as poisonous – just fattening.

Despite the anti-novel attitudes even of novelists, by the 1840s novel-reading was growing more socially acceptable. One reason has to be the sheer imaginative pleasure of reading a good novel. Another is that many novels without the least hint of impropriety were readily available – novels by Jane Austen, of course, and by such lesser lights as Fanny Burney and Maria Edgeworth. Also crucial were Sir Walter Scott's phenomenally popular "Waverley" novels, approved reading in some households from which all other novels were banned. Ironically, perhaps the most important single factor in the growing respectability of fiction was a circulating library. Established in 1842, Mudie's Select Circulating Library dominated the trade in novels down to 1894. It did so both by sanitizing fiction and by guaranteeing publishers predictable sales of first editions, just so long as these came in the standard format of the famous three volumes or "triple-decker." After its library run was over, a popular novel was typically reprinted in a single-volume edition. Although many novels first appeared in monthly parts or as serials, and only later in bound volumes, between the 1840s and the 1890s most first editions came in three volumes, priced out of the range of the average reader, who was thus forced to subscribe to Mudie's. For decades, triple-deckers cost 31s. 6d. each; but anyone who paid a guinea a year to Mudie's could borrow a volume at a time, or, for an additional guinea, all the books she wanted.

Mudie's really was "select," moreover, even censorious. Charles Edward Mudie personally screened novels before buying them from the publishers to make sure that they would not, as Dickens's Mr. Podsnap puts it, "bring a blush to the cheek of the young person," especially the female young person. Novelists often grumbled about Mudie's dominance, though they put up with it. Thus, in 1860, George Eliot wrote to her publisher, John Blackwood, that there should "be some authors and publishers strong enough to resist his tyranny, which threatens to thrust poor books down the throats of the public, and to strangle good ones" (quoted in Griest 1970: 65). But both Eliot and Blackwood were delighted when Mudie's bought large quantities of *Felix Holt* and *Middlemarch*. Mudie's Mrs. Grundyism, though constraining what novelists could say (especially about sex), helped make novel-reading an acceptable family activity for many Victorians.

From the first decades of the nineteenth century, there was great concern about how the working class in particular was using or abusing its gradually increasing literacy. Continuing James Catnach's tradition of downscale street literature – "broadsides" such as gallows confessions – Edward Lloyd and the Salisbury Street publishers produced hundreds of "penny dreadfuls" or "bloods." Melodrama, Gothic horror, violent crime, and sexual titillation were the main ingredients, as in Thomas Prest's *Sweeney Todd* and *Varney the Vampire*. These elements, coupled with radicalism, characterize the novel that may have been the biggest bestseller of the Victorian era, and was certainly the most-read work of English fiction by Indian readers prior to World War I. This is G. W. M. Reynolds's multi-volume *Mysteries of London*, first published in penny numbers in the mid-1840s. Imitating Eugène Sue's *Mysteries of Paris*, Reynolds provided a muckraking tourguide of London's underworld and nightlife, with illustrations of muggings, burglaries, brothels, "boozing kens," and even loaded dice. Throughout, the message is that the corruption of the aristocracy reaps its just punishment from the criminal brutality of the poor. Reynolds did a considerable amount of poaching – if not outright plagiarism – from Dickens, even down to illustrations. But, then, perhaps Dickens returned the favor: a key figure in *Mysteries* is the Resurrection Man or grave robber, whose grisly trade is pursued several years later by Jerry Cruncher in *A Tale of Two Cities*. Further, Dickens's late novels – *Bleak House*, *Little Dorrit*, *Our Mutual Friend* – all belong to the "urban mysteries" genre (see Maxwell 1992).

Through the 1840s, novels and novel-reading gained in respectability. Trollope recalled that, when he was growing up in the 1820s, "the families in which an unrestricted permission was given for the reading of novels were very few, and from many they were altogether banished." But Trollope's success – a rags-to-riches story resulting, as he proudly announced in his 1883 *Autobiography*, in a fortune of £70,000 – is obvious evidence of changing attitudes toward fiction. Dickens's rags-to-riches story was even more spectacular, and also abetted the sense that prose fiction was a substantial, respectable kind of writing, if not precisely great literature on the order of the Greek and Roman classics.

For both commercial and artistic reasons, upscale novelists were anxious to control how their work was circulated and interpreted. Dickens and many others were keen advocates of stricter copyright laws. They were also frequently reviewers and critics of each other's work, and sometimes influential evaluators for publishers. Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope, Eliot, and other novelists also edited journals – and, in Dickens's case, owned them as well. After an early editorial stint with *Bentley's Miscellany*, in which both *Jack Sheppard* and *Oliver Twist* first appeared, and a brief attempt at his own fiction journal, *Master Humphrey's Clock*, Dickens established *Household Words* in

1850 and, nine years later, *All the Year Round*. He serialized his own novels – *Hard Times* in *Household Words*, *Great Expectations* in *All the Year Round* – as well as other authors', including Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* and Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*.

Beginning with *The Pickwick Papers*, Dickens's novels first appeared either as weekly or monthly part-issues or as serials, wonderfully illustrated by George Cruikshank, Hablot Browne, John Leech, and other artists. Much as we value these today, in Gaskell's *Cranford*, Miss Jenkyns, worshipper of Dr. Johnson, peers down her nose at Captain Brown's delight in the part-issues of *Pickwick Papers*: "I consider it vulgar, and below the dignity of literature, to publish in numbers," she says; to which the Captain responds: "How was [Dr. Johnson's] Rambler published?" By 1870, however, part-issuing was giving way to serialization and triple-deckers.

Another way Dickens tried to control his fiction is evident in his public readings, which allowed him both to strike a theatrical posture and to make direct contact with his readers. And he kept up a steady correspondence with fans, sometimes altering the course of a part-issue or serial according to their reactions. The assiduity with which Dickens and other Victorian novelists cultivated forms of intimacy with their readers bespeaks anxiety about what Wilkie Collins called, in an 1859 essay, "The Unknown Public" – that is, the anonymous masses, who were consuming novels in ways the novelists could not control or even know. And, of course, mediating between the novelists and the ever-growing reading public were publishers, reviewers, booksellers, and Mudie's, as well as smaller circulating libraries.

Through the mid-Victorian decades, many of the alternatives to Mudie's triple-deckers continued to be viewed as more or less disreputable. There were, for instance, the so-called "yellowbacks," predecessors of our own paperbacks; frequently translations or reprints, from the midcentury onward they were sold at railway stalls by Mudie's chief competitor, W. H. Smith – and consequently were also known as "railway novels." In the 1870s, Matthew Arnold wrote of "the tawdry novels which flare in the book-shelves of our railway stations, and which seem designed . . . for people with a low standard of life." When original fiction appeared in this format, it was typically by minor authors. Like *Mysteries of London*, the yellowbacks bordered, at least in their cheapness, on the even more disreputable "penny dreadfuls" and "shilling shockers," which were increasingly aimed at boy readers and which continued to be roundly condemned by those who worried about copycat crimes or the prospect that you become what you read.

The popularity of "penny dreadfuls," with their often criminal heroes, led to a number of endeavors in the 1860s and 1870s, typically by the religious, to provide adolescent readers with more wholesome fare. These include much of the great outpouring of imperialist and military adventure fiction for boys that begins with Captain Frederick Marryat in the 1830s. The Religious Tract Society founded *The Boys' Own Paper* in 1879, and by 1900 there were twenty-three such journals. Novels like R. M. Ballantyne's 1858 *The Coral Island* and G. A. Henty's 1884 *With Clive in India* aimed at inculcating patriotism and pluck in the boy reader, who was definitely not supposed to be the loafing office boy of the public libraries. The emergence of fiction directed at both boys and girls is also an indication of increasing specialization in publishing.

Of the many protests by novelists against Mudie's "tyranny," the angriest came from George Moore in his 1885 pamphlet, *Literature at Nurse*. After Mudie rejected his first novel, *A Modern Lover*, Moore fought back, declaring that the "strength, virility, and purpose" of English literature was being "obliterated to suit the commercial views of a narrow-minded tradesman":

> literature is now rocked to an ignoble rest in the motherly arms of the librarian. That of which he approves is fed with gold; that from which he turns the breast dies like a vagrant's child; while in and out of his voluminous skirts run a motley and monstrous progeny, a callow, a whining, a puking brood of bastard bantlings . . .

Those "bastard bantlings," of course, include many examples of what we now study and revere as great Victorian novels. Moore's assault on Mudie's and its three-volume system did not single-handedly cause its demise, though he contributed to that result. In 1894, after negotiating with W. H. Smith and others, Mudie's abandoned the three-volume format. This led to a slow decline for Mudie's, but also to an expansion of alternatives for novelists, pointing the way toward literary modernism and "December 1910" when, as Virginia Woolf famously declared, "human character changed."

One-volume novels, unmediated and unblest by Mudie's, rapidly became standard after 1894. Shorter forms of fiction came to the fore, as in H. G. Wells's science fiction and Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories. With the renewal of Gothic romance in such works as Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Oscar Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray*, and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, came as well, especially in the 1890s, versions of Zolaesque naturalism, as in George Moore's *Esther Waters* and the novels of George Gissing, Thomas Hardy, and Arthur Morrison. Naturalism also influenced the "new woman" fiction of that decade, as exemplified by Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins* and *The Beth Book*, Gissing's *The Odd Women*, Mary Augusta Ward's *Marcella*, and George Egerton's *Keynotes*. There were also new forms of elite publishing such as *The Yellow Book*, produced by John Lane's Bodley Head Press. Associated with aestheticism and the so-called decadent movement, *The Yellow Book* foreshadowed modernist "little magazines" as venues for experimental, avant-garde fiction and poetry.

At the end of the century, in "The Decay of Lying," Wilde mocks the ongoing controversy over the moral effects of reading the hundreds of popular crime stories that were published throughout the Victorian era as "penny dreadfuls" and "shilling shockers." Vivian declares that "Life imitates art far more than Art imitates Life":

> The most obvious and the vulgarest form in which this is shown is in the case of the silly boys who, after reading the adventures of Jack Sheppard or Dick Turpin, pillage the stalls of unfortunate apple-women, [and] break into sweet-shops at night . . . The

> boy-burglar is simply the inevitable result of life's imitative instinct. He is Fact, occupied as Fact usually is, with trying to reproduce Fiction, and what we see in him is repeated on an extended scale throughout the whole of life.

As Wilde understood, nothing more clearly indicated the worrisome centrality of novels to modern culture than the many efforts to control their production, dissemination, and indeed inclusion in the first public libraries. In Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Algernon says, "it is absurd to have a hard-and-fast rule about what one should read and what one shouldn't. More than half of modern culture depends on what one shouldn't read." In other words, nothing better promotes a form of culture than attempts to curtail or censor it. *Madame Bovary*, *Nana*, *Jude the Obscure*, *Ulysses*, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* – the list of novels made famous partly because they were subjected to censorship is a long one.

For many reasons, the Victorian novel has influenced and will continue to influence modern and now postmodern culture and society. We believe that this *Companion* will enhance the understanding and appreciation of that pervasive influence, as well as of individual works by Dickens, Thackeray, the Brontës, Trollope, Eliot, Hardy, and many other Victorian novelists.

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PART I

Historical Contexts and Cultural Issues

1

The Publishing World

Kelly J. Mays

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

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

As Trollope recognized, however, this picture of the "prose labourer" and his publisher as professionals whose success depended upon "industry," "perseverance," and a keen business sense would have been anathema to both earlier and later generations. On the one hand, while the tremendous popularity and profitability of Scott's "Waverley" novels did much to inspire and shape the efforts of Victorian novelists and publishers, Scott saw himself as a professional only because he was a lawyer, referred to publishers as mere "retailers," and refused to acknowledge for most of his life that he wrote novels; instead, he bankrupted himself in the effort to use the funds raised through his (secretive) labors as a novelist to become a landed gentleman. On the other hand, the generation of writers coming of age at the time Trollope's *Autobiography* was published were no less horrified than Scott likely would have been by the vulgarly commercial attitudes it reflected. In Thackeray's *Pendennis* it is the heroic George Warrington who describes himself as a humble "prose labourer," and it is setting out to "earn [his] bread" "with [his] pen" that helps to turn Pendennis himself from "worthless idler and spendthrift" to hero (1986: ch. 32, 357). In George Gissing's *New Grub Street* (1881), however, it is the unheroic Jasper Milvain who declares, "Literature nowadays is a trade . . . your successful man of letters is your skilful tradesman" who "thinks first and foremost of the markets" (1998: ch. 1, 8–9). As this suggests, any account of Victorian publishing must distinguish between the 1830s through the 1870s – the era of Trollope, Thackeray, Charles Dickens, and George Eliot – and the 1880s and 1890s – the age of Gissing, George Moore, Walter Besant, and Marie Corelli.

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

Starting with Scott, all of this began to change. While new novels remained expensive, Scott's tremendous popularity helped to reveal hitherto undreamed-of possibilities in terms of both the size of the potential audience for fiction and the profits to be made from it. While early in the century novels were printed in fairly small editions of 500–750 (and while the norm for first editions remained fairly low throughout the century), Scott's novels sold in the tens of thousands: 1,000 copies of his first novel, *Waverley* (1814), sold within a few weeks, and 2,000 more were purchased within three months; by 1829, 40,000 "cheap editions" had been sold. More importantly, the numerous "Waverley novels" that followed sold equally well: the first printings of *Rob Roy* (1818) and *Ivanhoe* (1820) sold 10,000 copies each, while 7,000 copies of *The Fortunes of Nigel* (1822) sold on the morning of publication (Altick 1999: 292). When Scott's publisher, Archibald Constable, failed in 1826 for around £250,000, leaving Scott himself £120,000 in the red, the very size of their debts revealed just how large the potential profits and the potential risks were in the high-stakes game of fiction publishing – a lesson reinforced by the fact that Scott eventually published his way back to solvency.

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

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

The "busy spirit of enterprise and competition" that drove these young publishers made them remarkably active managers who negotiated directly with authors, printers, and booksellers; solicited, read, and often commented elaborately on manuscripts; and encouraged writers to undertake particular topics, genres, and formats and to steer clear of others. As a result, individual publishers did much to shape the content and form of Victorian fiction and even of particular novels. While Charles Lever's first novel – *The Confessions of Harry Lorrequer* (1839) – was still being serialized in the *Dublin University Magazine*, for example, Richard Bentley was one of four publishers to make overtures to the young novelist, offering both a contract for his next novel and advice about what subjects he should tackle and how he should treat them. Lever eventually took Bentley's advice, making an Irish officer the hero of his next novel, *Charles O'Malley* (1841), and mixing sentiment with comedy in a way he had not done previously (Gettmann 1960: 156). Though more seasoned writers might enjoy more freedom, they were often (and often quite happily) subject to influence of a more subtle kind. Dickens's contract for *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843–4), for example, echoed others of the period by requiring that the novel be "in form, size and price, precisely similar to the *Pickwick Papers* [1836–7] and *Nicholas Nickleby* [1838–9]" – language through which Chapman & Hall tacitly encouraged the novelist to stick to a popular and profitable formula (quoted in Sutherland 1976: 77). If, at its best, such advice could help a novelist to find both voice and audience, it also helped to ensure that particular types of fiction – the "silver-fork" novel, the historical romance, nautical and military novels, etc. – tended to come into vogue, dominate the market for several years, and then disappear rapidly as readerly interest and profits declined (Gettmann 1960: 59). Many mid-Victorian novelists eagerly sought out the advice of publishers, whom they saw as partners in the enterprise of producing novels that might prove popular with readers.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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