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The Random Selection of Victorian New Media

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What is to be the destiny of all this popular literature which is now produced in almost incredible quantities, and of which the so-called “press” is but a single branch? In the whole range of political thought, there is not a subject that at the present moment is half so suggestive.¹

Near the beginning of his three-part survey on periodical literature, E. S. Dallas outlines what he believes to be the essential question of the age. Much was at stake, including, as Mary Poovey argues, the modern form of the literary field: “[t]his issue, made more urgent by the dramatic increase in the number and kinds of printed materials . . . , involved the evaluation and, ultimately, the definition of ‘literature.’”² Mapping her own ideas of the field, Margaret Oliphant declares much of popular literature out of bounds in “The Byways of Literature: Reading for the Million.”³ She recognizes the enormous readership for such productions while displacing them from literature’s main street into the back alleys. Oliphant’s ghettoizing metaphor seems more hopeful than accurate: these ephemeral publications could not, literally, be overlooked; according to a writer in the *Bookseller*, they proliferated to cover the walls and shop windows of England’s “great centres of population.”⁴ One need not even peek into “by-streets or small shops,” suggests Thomas Wright, but visit “the largest booksellers or news-agents of leading thoroughfares” to witness the dynamics of an emerging mass media.⁵ The conspicuous, bustling publishing market was synonymous with the complicated and often worrying concept of the popular. Its influence and dimensions were expanding and uncertain.⁶ Oliphant’s title

casually presumes a million readers; imagining this body as “the unknown public” in an eponymous article in *Household Words*, Wilkie Collins puts the number at three million.⁷ Just who were these readers, “the mysterious, the unfathomable, the universal public of the penny-novel Journals”?⁸ What were they getting from the floods of broadsides and “pennorths” of serial fiction and sensational stories? What was to be the destiny of printed literature and even of print itself?

Such questions fascinated a host of Victorian commentators. Many were paternalistically concerned with sensationalism and its deleterious influence, although by mid-century observers were suggesting that education had changed popular taste for the better, away from, for example, the salacious stories of Edward Lloyd and G. W. M. Reynolds; many conceded that cheap literature posed few threats to morality.⁹ Their concerns are also frequently understood as anxiety “about the unpredictability of reading and its effects” on a new mass public.¹⁰ But reading is only half the story; rather, the entire production-reception complex of popular literature seemed unprecedented, unpredictable, and immense. As summed up by a writer in the *British Quarterly Review*:

More astonishing than Gas, or Steam, or the Telegraph, which are capable of explanation on scientific grounds, is that flood of Cheap Literature which, like the modern Babylon itself, no living man has ever been able completely to traverse, which has sprung up, and continues to spring up, with the mysterious fecundity of certain fungi, and which cannot be accounted for in its volume, variety, and universality by any ordinary laws of production.¹¹

No scientific explanation could account for the explosion of cheap literature, whose expanse and profusion seemed analogous only to the growth of the modern metropolis. This writer offers a development hypothesis of spontaneous generation, identifying in the efflorescence of cheap literature “the mysterious fecundity of certain fungi.” Oliphant, denying that the diffusion of popular literature is due to rational recreation, offers a similar metaphor of extraordinary fungal metamorphosis:

So the [edifying] penny cyclopædias dropped one by one into oblivion, and nobody missed them; and lo, rushing into the empty space, the mushroom growth of a sudden impulse, rapid and multitudinous to meet the occasion, came springing up a host of penny magazines—spontaneous and natural publications, which professed no artificial mission, and aimed at no class-improvement, but were the simple supply of an existing demand[.]¹²

Oliphant reimagines change in early nineteenth-century literary products as the competition and replacement of species.¹³ So doing, she makes a

tidy metaphor from the rhetoric of natural history and Victorian political economy, whose ideologies could be seamlessly stitched by reference to the spontaneous, the sudden, and the self-directed. Oliphant certainly scorns the “cash nexus,” but she and others are more preoccupied with large numbers, chance processes, and the “[*extra*]ordinary laws of production” of new literary phenomena. As the *British Quarterly Review* writer suggests, cheap literature “cannot be accounted for” by (as Oliphant tries to claim) “the simple supply of an existing demand” or other conventional economic models. “[T]he usual distributive agency” does not apply, Charles Manby Smith suggests of the presses of Seven Dials; instead, cheap literature “creates its own market wherever it goes.”¹⁴ Its logic, not only *unusual*, seems adaptable to circumstances entirely local and contingent. Oliphant’s very diction—“million,” “multitudinous,” “mysterious,” “natural,” “spontaneous”—suggests a profound concern about stochastic processes, about the mysteries of sudden, random development as they seem to structure the publishing market and popular texts.¹⁵

Confronted with the spectacle of popular literature, a cohort of Victorian commentators set out to explore its byways. Their curiosity about its mushroom-like profusion and spontaneity manifests in their very approach to this material: each takes random samples to investigate and classify. They grab handfuls of ballads or pick any new miscellany to read through, reporting their findings in essays that adopt the classificatory rhetoric of natural history. The profusion of print media required a mode of knowing beyond a reader’s capabilities of perusal; statistics and numbers came in handy, but in anticipation of “distant reading” they glossed over the textual particularities that made all the difference for judging the popular mind.¹⁶ As Dallas says of his lengthy survey, “[i]t would be easy to heap up statistics, but, unfortunately, statistics are signs rather than ideas.”¹⁷ If reading provided more robust ideas, that task was stymied by the sheer variety, inconsistency, and ephemerality of the textual objects to be somehow generalized and exemplified. The most fundamental problems were where to begin and what to select. Many commentators concurred with Dallas: “[i]t is impossible to pick and choose. Selection can only proceed on arbitrary principles.”¹⁸

Such indiscriminate selection looks like the right, impartial strategy to deal with the directionless profusion of popular literature. So frequently repeated, the strategy reveals its motive pattern: to confront the potentially random generation of media forms, markets, and a reading populace. It also has a contemporary saliency to which the end of this essay will return. For we today, witnessing a similar profusion of materials in electronic archives, are better placed than our scholarly predecessors to appreciate what fascinated the Victorians. In their responses to the expanse and seeming randomness of metropolitan print media, we can realize an analog

to the emerging critical insights of the digital humanities. Reflecting on archives now, including the dynamics of remediation, random access, the serendipity of the database, the problems of classificatory encoding, we see in contemporaneous reactions to Victorian popular literature a compelling attention to such contingencies. These writings offer critical analogs for the study of Victorian new media in the new media of our own.

Profusion and Classification

The critic is fairly distracted by the infinite variety that besets and captivates him. The only way, therefore, in such a garden of roses, is to begin boldly, pluck the first flower that comes to hand, and arrange the bouquet as best we may.¹⁹

In this survey of popular broadsides and ballads published in the *Quarterly Review*, Bennett Johns sets out to catalog “The Poetry of Seven Dials”: the anonymous, cheap, one-page one-offs that celebrated national anniversaries, celebrity scandals, executions, dastardly crimes and murders, street accidents and catastrophes, and other such sensations or timely events. While Johns remarks on the sensational elements of these texts, he also notes, explicitly in his descriptions and implicitly through his investigative approach, the randomness permeating their production and circulation. His taxonomy is nearly thwarted as “the modes of treatment are so curious, the metres employed so lawless, the beauties and the blots so many and so unexpected, that the difficulty is where to begin and what to select.”²⁰ The investigator is stymied at the level of his fundamental abstraction: an organizational framework that precedes the data. Judging their contents and material production to be ungoverned by any organizing principles, Johns undertakes a random sample, an approach better suited to the phenomenon of efflorescent texts.

The arbitrary or indiscriminate selection of cheap literature became standard practice for journalists writing on its phenomenal success and mysterious, “lawless” character. Justifications for this approach varied. For writers like Johns, the unprincipled selection of texts seemed like the method, or the explicit anti-method, most appropriate to these “lawless” objects of study. Others including Collins had no guidance or recourse except to buy “hap-hazard”; randomness seemed endemic to the popular literary market. Like Dallas, many claimed that arbitrary selection was the only expedient for surveying a vast amount of material. It was commonplace to remark upon its scope. Oliphant describes the abundance as “wastes of print” and “wildernesses of words.”²¹ According to the *British Quarterly Review*, “the subject [of cheap literature] is too vast to be dealt with as a whole, or to be treated fully”; the best the author can do is

to bring before the reader “incomplete and fragmentary” materials.²² For this writer, perceptions of vastness of “that flood of Cheap Literature” are homologous to an awestruck sense of the city’s expanse: “like the modern Babylon itself, [which] no living man has ever been able completely to traverse.”²³ The familiar metaphors of the city as labyrinth, a hell of endless documents, an uninterpretable Babylon, are easily transferred to the cheap literature plastering its walls and windows.²⁴ According to the *British and Foreign Review*, the “signs in the present literary times”²⁵ are not hard to find: “they stand plainly evident in the highways” and speak loudly to add to “all that Babel of mingled discord and harmony” that echoes through England and its great centers of population.²⁶ To discover or read the signs, one needed to take to the streets and take in, *inter alia*, *street signs*; as Dallas suggests: “The most vivid idea of the enormous diffusion of periodical literature will be obtained by a visit to any flourishing newsvender” in the metropolis.²⁷

The metropolis, most often its seedier localities, and its print media were assumed to share qualities of chaos and randomness. J. Hepworth Dixon turns the perusal of cheap literature into a stroll through the slums: “Their virtues and their vices . . . are in no way referable to the same standard. The ethics which flourish in the inferior hemisphere of thought, sufficiently differ from those which are recognised in the upper, to startle the accidental intruder into the unaccustomed domain.”²⁸ Somewhere beyond standards, customs, or ordinary laws lay darkest London and its mysterious, popular texts. Johns and Dixon deploy figures of ungoverned chaos and the labyrinth that characterized descriptions of the neighborhood: “what involutions can compare with those of Seven Dials?” asks Boz, who takes the perspective of “[t]he stranger who finds himself in ‘The Dials’ for the first time,” just as Dixon goes slumming as an intruder into its literature.²⁹ Dickens made that very neighborhood (in)famous for the strange and surprising encounters that Johns and Dixon adapt as a bibliographic procedure, an accidental approach to the collection and evaluation of metropolitan media.³⁰ From the “infinite variety” Johns will “pluck the first flower that comes to hand”: a metaphor that ironically prettifies the encounter with these texts for sale on London streets, especially as products of the dingy urban labyrinth of Seven Dials. As if tidying up the mess, Johns arranges his “bouquet” according to the loose style of social taxonomy that Dickens so comically deploys in *Sketches by Boz*.

Commentators on popular literature joined a wave of scientific investigators whose primary resource for understanding was the taxonomy. “[T]he heroic age of scientific classification” was in full bloom.³¹ With its push for systematic taxonomies, natural history offers a background discourse for investigations into the unknown regions of popular print. With the profusion of specimens from Britain’s military and commercial expeditions

especially into previously unexplored territories, “the discovery, naming, and classification of new species was a routine feature—indeed the staple employment—of natural history.”³² Lynn Merrill points out additional reasons for its popularity: almost anyone could set out to identify species and doing so could generate celebrity.³³ New species were celebrated in the shows of London as well as in the press; the first issue of *The Penny Magazine* includes an article on a few remarkable specimens from the Zoological Gardens.³⁴ Like journalists writing on popular media, Victorian naturalists were fascinated with how particular specimens fit into a teeming mass.³⁵ Further, classification engendered an “awareness of the tenuousness, the impermanence” of each singular example.³⁶ Naturalists and commentators on cheap literature were fascinated with how ephemeral specimens, profuse and seemingly chaotic, could aggregate into their own dynamic systems.

In his *Dictionary of Natural History*, William Martyn describes the challenge of classifying “the sublime disorder of Nature herself, too prolific to enumerate or arrange,” terms familiar to contemporaneous investigations of other teeming, tangled banks: the metropolis and its print media.³⁷ The rhetoric of classification was deployed in the urban jungle, as in naturalists’ field studies, to subordinate chaos to its principled order of things. If the advertised goal was to sort and understand, a taxonomic approach also segmented and striated an otherwise undifferentiated “mass” of the populace whose potential for collective insurgency was yet unmeasured. Partly as a result, classification flowered in early-Victorian urban sociology; its application to popular literature was a logical offshoot. Henry Mayhew does both at once. In such chapters as “Of the Publishers and Authors of Street Literature” in *London Labour and the London Poor*, Mayhew uses the same rhetorical framework for the professionals and their wares alike: “Specimens [of street literature] will be found adduced, as I describe the several classes [of salesmen.]”³⁸ Mayhew makes the equivalence through his orthodox faith in an influence model of reading. He argues for “the history and character of our street and public-house literature” as important political phenomena: “I say, *important*; because the street-ballad and the street-narrative like all popular things, have their influence on masses of the people.”³⁹ Many writers went beyond an influence model to argue for cheap literature as a veritable index to the popular mind. Oliphant reads it as symptomatic of a mass psychology: the “multitudinous public . . . opens its own mind to us, all unawares and unconsciously, by means of those penny papers.”⁴⁰ Perusing the reading for the million, she claims to read as many minds. Charles MacKay agrees that the masses testify through their popular poetry: “What a faithful index to the national mind may be found in the songs which delight the people!”⁴¹ This presumed indexical relationship allows the classification of reading materials to apply to readers.

Further, the thorough subdivisions of popular literature seemed to overlay the societal striations of increasingly specialized professional classes and a diversifying reading public. Dallas was struck with the extent of specialization in the popular press: “the great point to be kept in view is that periodical literature is essentially a classified literature. No matter on what principle the classification proceeds, the result is still the same—to divide and subdivide this kind of literature more and more.”⁴² Tracing the dividing branches becomes an exercise, as Mayhew attempts, in understanding the working and non-working populace.

The naturalists’ imperative to identify and sort new species appears frequently in journalistic investigations of popular literature. In “The Unknown Public,” Collins plays with the taxonomic approach as he seeks, collects, and sorts “these all-pervading specimens of what was to me a new species of literary production . . . this locust-flight of small publications.”⁴³ Such classification is at once an exercise in genre theory and a mode of knowledge that flattens its objects into types: “small publications” for display in a cabinet of journalistic prose. Thackeray collects “a dozen specimens” by walking into a shop in Paternoster Row.⁴⁴ In his investigation “Popular Serial Literature,” Coventry Patmore selects “specimens of an immense and increasing body of publications, in many respects peculiar to our own times.”⁴⁵ Oliphant constrains her investigation to a mere fraction of “that reading for the million which has become so multitudinous. We have not even attempted to notice the countless swarms of serial stories.”⁴⁶ Collins similarly stresses the peculiarity of these “new specimens” of literary production as a “locust-flight” with the capacity to become “all-pervading specimens.” Like Oliphant among the mushrooms, Collins expresses some concern for the demolition of other literary harvests. The locust metaphor clarifies the potential insurgency of popular literature (and by extension the reading populace) which these taxonomies attempt to discipline: sudden, exponential growth; swarming behavior; voracious consumption. By metonymy, these specimens seem to index huge numbers of absent readers about whom Collins cannot find any “positive information.”⁴⁷ The language of specimens—mushrooms, locusts, flora—allows these authors to transpose the “immense and increasing body” of the unknown public and its literature into knowable objects, subordinated to a hierarchical taxonomy; and also allows their removal to a position of critical authority beyond the popular swarm.

Random Selection and Diffusion

Collins plays many roles in “The Unknown Public,” including the amateur natural historian or meditative Rambler out to discover new species.⁴⁸ His ramble also follows the idling path of the urban flâneur. Collins’s interest in

an “unknown public” derives not from encountering the public as persons, but from passing shop windows with the latest penny journals on display. He adopts the role of Dixon’s “accidental intruder” into the “unaccustomed domain” of the literature of the lower orders. Collins intrudes into the domain the “literary Other”⁴⁹ for his own particular purposes including, as Andrew King would have it, to seek “exotic artifact[s] from a dark continent ready for cultural colonization and exploitation.”⁵⁰ He is also window-shopping: an urban performance independent of purposeful purchasing or utility, as Rachel Bowlby has described.⁵¹ Similarly, the chance encounters and accidents of a city stroll allow Collins to defend his experiment as impartial. In collecting penny journals to read, Collins claims to sample randomly: he buys “five specimen copies, at five different shops” and each sample copy was “bought hap-hazard”:⁵²

I have not maliciously hunted them up out of many numbers; I have merely looked into my five sample copies of five separate journals,—all, I repeat, bought accidentally, just as they happened to catch my attention in the shop windows. I have not waited for bad specimens, or anxiously watched for good: I have impartially taken my chance.⁵³

Accident works both as a method of discovery and a characterization of popular literature’s inchoateness to which Collins will bring orderly knowledge. Collins’s whole approach to the penny journals (and by extension the unknown public) depends on the accidental opportunities of flâneurism and the market for these texts. He describes the principles of popular literature attuned to the city’s consumerist rhythms of, not supply and demand, but glance and opportunity.

In each shop, Collins impersonates a member of the mysterious unknown public (dubbing himself “Number Three Million and One”) and approaches the shopkeepers for advice on what to buy, hoping “to hear a little popular criticism, and to get at what the conditions of success might be” in mapping the unfamiliar genre of the penny journal.⁵⁴ Thus disguised and seeking knowledge, Collins plays a disciplinary role as an undercover detective, carrying out Dixon’s imperative that “the springs of this literature should be well watched.”⁵⁵ But, as the *British Quarterly Review* points out, “the sources, nature, [and] extent” of cheap literature are beyond the scope of any single investigation.⁵⁶ To his frustration, Collins fails to discover the wellsprings of popular literature, finding himself instead upon a floodplain without a compass. His interviews are of no apparent help. He provides a sample conversation with a salesman, a dialog between buyer and seller:

Number Three Million and One.—"I want to take in one of the penny journals. Which do you recommend?"

Enterprising Publisher.—"Well, you see, some likes one, and some likes another . . . Take 'em all the year round, and there ain't a pin, as I knows of, to choose between 'em. There's just about as much in one as there is in another. All good pennorths."⁵⁷

Try as he may, Collins cannot extract any other opinion concerning these journals save that one is as good as another; he might as well choose haphazardly, for they are "[a]ll good pennorths." Just as Johns struggles with "where to begin and what to select," "there ain't a pin" of distinction by which Collins can disaggregate the mass. Venturing into another shop, he notes of its keeper: "[h]e had a perfect snow-drift of penny journals all over his counter—he snatched them up by handfulls, and gesticulated with them cheerfully; he smacked and patted them, and brushed them all up in a heap, to express to me that 'the whole lot would be worked off by the evening.'"⁵⁸ Rather than a careful, page-by-page handling of a book, the shopkeeper shovels and piles texts as a kind of maniacal manual labor, turning not leaves but compost.⁵⁹ Piling up like snowdrifts in their quantity and flying out the door in careless commerce, these journals circulate according to the indiscriminate and self-organizing logic of a market.

In "The Byways of Literature," Oliphant mocks the instabilities of the popular literary market as well. She writes of a family holiday trip to a cathedral town, an occasion for which they "invested a sixpence in a most miscellaneous and varied collection of literature."⁶⁰ Contrasting with the "decorum and dignity" of the great, gray cathedral in the background, the miscellany represents to Oliphant all the sins of the commercial world: vanity, inconstancy, ignorance.⁶¹ Cheap literature's ephemerality contrasts with the gradualist aesthetics embodied by the cathedral: "It is so many hundred years since, chapel by chapel, and pile on pile, that fair old minister rose into the poetic perfection of its present moment."⁶² Such sentiments line up with the traditional Tory defense of the English constitution, whose own contingency is ameliorated by its longevity.⁶³ Oliphant considers popular literature as ephemeral as daisies in the grass. Reclining upon the lawn, she notes: "scattered over the daisies, with the wind among their leaves, lay the unauthoritative, undignified, unlearned broadsheets."⁶⁴ In the familiar pun on leaves/pages—"the wind among their leaves"—Oliphant whispers her contempt for the modishness, transience, and fatuity of the broadsheets. The texts are "scattered" on the grass in haphazard array. Chance carries no literary authority for Oliphant; in her follow-up article "New Books," she derides a popular travelogue by William Hepworth Dixon whose "little accidental information" is gleaned only "here

and there by chance.”⁶⁵ Of its author Oliphant says “[p]erhaps he tossed up [a coin] before he set out on his journey to decide which country it should be.”⁶⁶ The market for popular literature, if self-organizing, does not organize itself toward quality.

“The Byways of Literature” suggests that rational recreation no longer structures (if it ever did) the reading habits of the lower classes.⁶⁷ Oliphant challenges assumptions, popularized by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, about the value of reading for its own sake and faith in individual tendencies of self-improvement.⁶⁸ For Oliphant, “diffusion” of reading and knowledge operates according to other, abstract laws, first revealed to her through statistics: “the horrid numerals of a statistical account disclosed to us the fatal certainty that the multitude, like ourselves, loved amusement better than instruction.”⁶⁹ The charitable phrase “like ourselves” belies the contempt Oliphant declares for the multitude of readers who “share with the children and the savages a certain absolute and first-hand contact with things and facts, which throws out philosophy.” These groups share an anti-philosophical “principle of mind,” a common denominator which is simply a “love of stories” for their own sake.⁷⁰

More interesting than Oliphant’s derisive claim is how she gets there: she argues that the social and material conditions of working-class lives structure their receptiveness as readers: the working class are constrained to an identity dictated by circumstance alone; they lack leisure for thinking; have no conceptual horizon for sustained narrative or intellectual inquiry; live lives not of contemplation but of activity: “all these accidents of their condition give colour to the character of the masses, and are faithfully reflected in the literature they patronize.”⁷¹ They must want active, engaging literature, and “the qualities of mind concerned in its production are quite a secondary consideration.”⁷² The *primary* circumstances of its production, like its reception, must also be “brief and rapid” and outside of the essentials of philosophical contemplation. Philosophical non-essentials are accidents in the Aristotelian sense; in rhetorical terms, they do not rise above the level of mere description. Such a preference for the accidental or the descriptive fits with how working-class tastes seem conditioned by the “accidents of their condition.” Oliphant understands the logic of their literature as the erupting mushroom, the swarm, the sudden and fascinating and soon over.

Oliphant’s distaste for the “undignified, unlearned” should not obscure, however, what seems her primary concern: the changeable, uncertain logic within the production and reception of popular literature: in other words, its potentially *random* diffusion. This sense of the potential randomness of mass literature was what came to bother Victorian authors more invested in the ideologies of literary design.⁷³ Though Oliphant attempts to contain this logic to simple and simplistic formulae, supply and demand and the

baseline childish/savage love of stories, these fail to address the complexities she surely recognizes in the “varied and fluctuating mass . . . uncertain and changeable,” of popular literature.⁷⁴ Some strange catastrophism is reshaping the literary landscape; some unscrupulous species is overpopulating the terrain. Oliphant finds, scattered across the daisies, texts whose ephemerality and miscellaneity reflect the seemingly lawless processes of mass phenomena.

As appears from their evolutionary metaphors, these authors sense profound changes, which they do not well understand, or which they willfully misunderstand, in the modes of literary production, access, and reading. For instance, after the “unknown public” becomes a commonplace phrase, Thomas Wright in 1883 reveals it to be a complete fabrication. Collins could never discover this public, Wright argues, because it never existed. Presuming a reading populace coextensive with penny journals, Collins misunderstands the relation of cheap literature to potential readers: “Their appetite . . . , though not discriminative—perhaps *because* not discriminative—is omnivorous.”⁷⁵ Nor can Collins (or Oliphant) decipher the logic of miscellaneity, which, as Dallas points out, is the textual condition of omnivorous reading: “it is a necessity of [a periodical’s] popularity that it should also be to a very large extent miscellaneous.”⁷⁶ What is “unknown” about the reading public, about the “destiny of all this popular literature” is not necessarily a mystery; instead, the “unknown” represents a condition of unknowing, a contingent, even insubordinate approach to reading and cultural literacy. The “unknown” is a variable in an equation beyond solution, describing the random diffusion between texts and readers. Wright reveals himself as a member of the so-called unknown public, explaining that he read light literature as well as shelves of classic and contemporary texts.⁷⁷ There is no clear demarcation between domains; readers and texts intermingle in ways that do not presume distinction or design. As Jonathan Rose describes the “promiscuous mix of high and low” in the intellectual lives of the British working class, “[t]heir approach to literature was a random walk.”⁷⁸ Collins himself takes random walks to sample the miscellany of popular literature, but he and others disdain randomness as a means of accessing and understanding the immense print resources of Victorian culture. Altick finds a “deep-seated prejudice against random reading,” against “a random flitting from one subject to another” to which he traces “much of the opposition to free libraries and cheap periodicals in the second half of the century.”⁷⁹ At the beginning of the twenty-first, the advent of free libraries of electronic resources and databases are reviving those prejudices yet also significantly challenging them.

Victorian New Media; or, Print 2.0

While Oliphant may be offended at popular literature's evolution into rhizomatic species, scholars have recently come to celebrate the possibilities of spontaneity and randomness in how we encounter cultural materials in new media. Randomness is a keyword in current critical conversations about the remediation, collection, and accessibility of cultural materials in electronic archives and databases. For Jerome McGann, digital humanities invites a "stochastic critical process," a self-critical reflection of the contingencies of the cultural past: "This is a place where we glimpse the intellectual authority of chance and randomness, those swerves from orderliness that order itself demands—as Lucretius argued so long ago."⁸⁰ In her groundbreaking book on remapping genre, Wai Chi Dimock hopes for "an archive that is as broad-based as possible, as fine-grained as possible, an archive that errs on the side of randomness rather than on the side of undue coherence."⁸¹ James Mussell and Suzanne Paylor, among the editors of the *Nineteenth-Century Serials Edition*, are challenged and encouraged by the "unexpected cross references, echoes, and subjects that occur across the edition, coupled with the potentially endless ways in which readers can navigate" their electronic archive.⁸² These sentiments are echoed by Ed Folsom, one of the co-editors of the online *Walt Whitman Archive*, in his keynote essay for a *PMLA* forum on "Database as Genre: The Epic Transformation of Archives."⁸³ Folsom is delighted by the serendipitous discoveries and accidental insights that electronic collections make possible, a kind of "random access" of cultural memory aided by machine. He cites Lev Manovich's *The Language of New Media* to suggest how narrative knowledge is ceding to database, scrambling our inherited equations for coherence. Manovich imagines the two terms as antagonists: "As a cultural form, the database represents the world as a list of items, and it refuses to order this list. In contrast, a narrative creates a cause-and-effect trajectory of seemingly unordered items (events)."⁸⁴ Manovich severely simplifies the definitions and relationship of database and narrative, and several of Folsom's respondents attempt corrections.⁸⁵ However, this simplification may illuminate Oliphant's and others' concerns for the Victorian "new media" of popular literature and its uncertain readership.

I do not mean to confirm Manovich's binary or his progressivist story. Instead, I mean to suggest how such a simplified opposition between database and narrative informs responses to new media at least since the 1820s and probably before.⁸⁶ Cheap literature in its indiscriminate abundance represented to commentators like Oliphant and Collins something of, as Folsom would have it, "the first stirrings of the attack of database on narrative."⁸⁷ They willfully misunderstood popular literature as a kind of database, an index to the popular mind, whose abundant component

objects could be flattened into indiscriminate equivalence. Collins derides the weekly papers for their scrappy variety, replete with “[p]ickings from *Punch* and Plato,” noting sarcastically that “all appear in the most orderly manner, arranged under separate heads, and cut up neatly.”⁸⁸ The text becomes a tabular index of arbitrary pickings from which he can pick arbitrarily, a process that parallels his haphazard sampling of publications on a grander scale. The “random access” credited to databases and digital media became a robust feature of cheap literature with the unprecedented magnitude, distribution, and affordability of periodical and other print forms. It recasts the disorderly revolution in the production and distribution of Victorian media as what might be called “Print 2.0.”

Victorian commentators as well as contemporary scholars describe nineteenth-century print media as a revolution in information technology in terms that uncannily prefigure (and probably structure) discourse about the Internet, networked information culture, and Web 2.0. In crediting “Gas, Steam, and the Electric Telegraph” as signal innovations of the nineteenth century, the *British Quarterly Review* includes “the Art of Printing amongst modern acquisitions, since, although moveable types were invented in a former age, the discovery of their full capability belongs to our own . . . it is a hundredfold more astonishing than the original discovery, or invention of types.”⁸⁹ It is notable that these are prefatory remarks to a survey of “Cheap Literature.” On the proliferation of “literary rubbish” and ephemera, Dallas argues that “by the mere fact of that increase, it has introduced new processes and habits, and it inaugurates a new era.”⁹⁰ “Literature,” for Dallas, can no longer be defended as an exclusive category but includes every cultural atom⁹¹; nor can “authorship” be reserved for a select few: “Everybody is reading, every class is writing.”⁹² Prefiguring heated claims about the Internet’s potential for radical politics and free culture, the *Penny Magazine* celebrates how “ready and cheap communication breaks down the obstacles of time and space” and “greatly reduces the inequalities of fortune and situation.”⁹³ Victorian celebrants of “our literary democracy”⁹⁴ squared off with more conservative critics citing a version of what Yokai Benkler explains as the Babel objection to networked information culture: profusion tends to chaos.⁹⁵ In countering that argument, Benkler points to the regional and local clusters, rather than undifferentiated mass, that can be shown to structure the Internet and its topology of cultural influence. This response too has its Victorian anticipation, when Dallas insists “that periodical literature is essentially a classified literature” whose dividing and subdividing branches roughly map the topology of Victorian professions and leisure interests. Dallas also elucidates the necessary connection between the robustness of popular media and miscellaneity.⁹⁶ In sum, Victorian popular media have their own versions of niche markets, long tails, and the characteristics of

superabundance and miscellaneity that David Weinberger credits to Web 2.0 in his book *Everything is Miscellaneous: The Power of the New Digital Disorder*.⁹⁷ The disorderly alleys of Victorian literature were tantamount to an information superbyway.

As King and Plunkett suggest, “[w]ays we discuss media influence today are often developments of nineteenth-century models.”⁹⁸ Mussell and Paylor extrapolate this observation when they compare the “similar problems of plenitude” in navigating the “mighty maze” of Victorian periodicals for readers then and scholarly editors and researchers now.⁹⁹ As Benkler and others characterize networked information culture, Mussell and Paylor note that nineteenth-century print forms are “exceptionally malleable and fragmentary.”¹⁰⁰ They also realize, as does virtually everyone who has worked on the digital markup of texts, the almost hapless enterprise of “classifying” objects (whether phrases, physical features, genres) through metadata.¹⁰¹ The attempt to impose on texts a schema of tags, elements, and attributes, necessarily rigorous so that the encoded text will jibe with the informational structures of its host archive(s) and search engine(s), reveals instead radiant textuality and the already rhizomatic features of genre. Analog(ous) classification problems bothered Victorian natural historians, as “the profusion and variety of the world” continually challenged their basic classificatory schema and elements.¹⁰² The painstaking work of description (taxonomic markup) paradoxically impeded the efforts to recognize new species as they proliferated.¹⁰³ Remarkable family resemblances to these problems appear in Victorian efforts to classify textual media. Considering its strategies and its instabilities, the enterprise can be seen a precursor to hypermedia. Mussell and Paylor offer the example of W. T. Snead, finding metaphors for humanities computing in his cataloguing of the “the vast and multifarious world of periodical literature” in *Index to the Periodicals of the World* (1893): users would need help navigating the informational maze; librarians would provide “living fingerposts to the literature of the world.”¹⁰⁴

There are compelling homologies in contemporary new media and the media that seemed to Victorians radically new. We perceive them better because, as McGann suggests, digital access to cultural materials helps us realize the extent to which such processes were active in the past. Dimock reminds us that genres have always been as fluid and interconnected as celebrants of “database” have recently suggested. The digital era only exposes this insight:

The links and pathways that open up suggest that knowledge is generative rather than singular, with many outlets, ripples, and cascades, randomized by cross-references rather than locked into any one-to-one correspondence . . . The input network here is vast, washing up a largely unregulated mass of material, blurring the line between intention and accident.¹⁰⁵

Dimock's phrases echo many of the responses to Victorian popular media, that "largely unregulated mass of material" whose model of knowledge diffusion did not correspond to directed, rational recreation but rather emerged in the course of a reader's "random walk" through its superabundant, classified materials. The seemingly spontaneous, random generation of popular literature undermined its status as a stable object of knowledge, blurring "the line between intention and accident" in the logic of its production and reception.

If there are correspondences between approaches to new media then and now, there are also risks in following them too closely. Oliphant, Collins, Johns, and others feign impartiality in their experiments; they deploy (or displace onto these publications) a rhetoric of randomness that masks their own particular modes of navigating and arranging their materials. The problem recurs in Manovich's metaphor of the database because the seeming equivalence of its data renders invisible the structured ways of accessing data, modes which are fundamentally programmatic.¹⁰⁶ In thinking about the potential of electronic scholarship, we must not fail to recognize, though it is less easily seen or conceptualized, the "computer imagination" as our own critical prosthesis. Random access is not accidental; it is stamped into silicon, coded into algorithms, structured by search queries and electronic navigation. As McGann reminds, "[b]ecause our computer tools are models of what we imagine we know—they're built to our specifications—when they show us what they know they are reporting ourselves back to us."¹⁰⁷ In other words, digital Victorian studies disclose Victorian culture and the digital culture of Victorianists alike. Mussell and Paylor are particularly sensitive to the "bibliographic intervention" of their electronic edition: "[i]t is incumbent upon researchers to recognise that the digitisation process enforces a reconfiguration of material and that the process of marking up texts is simultaneously one of re-making them."¹⁰⁸ Fortunately, re-making—digital remediation¹⁰⁹—offers some extraordinary opportunities that may help, in Andrew King's phrase, to "[return] the reading of periodicals at least partially to the dispersion, disruption and seriality" which characterized their Victorian encounters.¹¹⁰

Electronic archives link us to Victorian culture not only through *what* we can read but also *how* we encounter the materials in "the endless reaches of the Library of Babel."¹¹¹ The Babylon of the English metropolis saw a profusion of materials whose cataloguing seemed utterly beyond reach and instead invited other modes of access. Victorian readers took random walks; commentators made random samples, amazed at the stochastic potential of the popular literary marketplace; popular texts absorbed the miscellaneity and accidentalness of metropolitan experience. With the advent of projects like the *NCSE*, databases of British newspapers, periodicals, and broadside ballads, and electronic archives of cultural objects,

Victorian print materials are accessible now as at no time since their original publication. They have been remediated electronically, but the dynamics of remediation were already present in the production and reception of popular literature. Such contingencies can inform electronic scholarship on Victorian popular media at the same time as they provide insights on our critical interventions.

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NOTES

1. E.S. Dallas, "Popular Literature.—The Periodical Press [Part 1]," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 85 (January 1859): 99.
2. Mary Poovey, "Forgotten Writers, Neglected Histories: Charles Reade and the Nineteenth-Century Transformation of the British Literary Field," *ELH* 71.2 (2004): 433.
3. Margaret Oliphant, "The Byways of Literature: Reading for the Million," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 84 (August 1858): 200–16.
4. "Illustrated Periodical Literature," *Bookseller* 4 (30 November 1861): 681.
5. Thomas Wright, "Concerning the Unknown Public," *Nineteenth Century* 13 (February 1883): 283.
6. Scholarship has complicated Victorian assumptions about the existence, composition, extent, and cultural ramifications of such a public. For a brief overview of the complexities of the cultural and educational developments of the working class and the reactions they inspired, see Brian Maidment, "'Penny' Wise, 'Penny' Foolish?: Popular Periodicals and the 'March of Intellect' in the 1820s and 1830s," in *Nineteenth-Century Media and the Construction of Identities*, ed. Laurel Brake, Bill Bell, and David Finkelstein (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), 104. See also the useful survey of perspectives on the popular in Andrew King and John Plunkett, *Victorian Print Media: A Reader* (Oxford; New York: Oxford UP, 2005), 165–69.
7. Wilkie Collins, "The Unknown Public," *Household Words* 18 (21 August 1858): 218. Thomas Wright put the number even higher.
8. Collins, 217.
9. Patrick Brantlinger thinks that Collins was in the critical minority for taking this view; see *The Reading Lesson: The Threat of Mass Literacy in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1998), 17–18. However, it was widely present in reviews of popular literature as a few examples might suggest. Oliphant finds very little objectionable content in her purchased miscellany, and "no one who is minded to repeat the experiment need fear a contrary result" ("Byways," 212). As the *Bookseller* suggests: "in the majority of our present periodicals there is nothing to shock and but little to alarm the most moral and fastidious"; "Illustrated Periodical Litera-

- ture,” 682. Charles Manby Smith concludes that even the presses of Seven Dials publish materials which “are neither so rancorously seditious, nor so grossly indecent as we can recollect them to have been in times past”; “The Press of the Seven Dials,” in *The Little World of London; Or, Pictures in Little of London Life* (London: A. Hall, Virtue & Co., 1857), 266.
10. Brantlinger, 17.
 11. “Cheap Literature,” *British Quarterly Review* 29 (April 1859): 316.
 12. Oliphant, “Byways,” 203.
 13. Studies of “new” media are often drawn to the development paradigms of natural history, “applying the evolution paradigm to media generation.” Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 68.
 14. Smith, 264.
 15. These writers are concerned with different kinds of popular print: Oliphant and Collins with penny journals; Smith with broadside ballads; Dallas and the *British Quarterly Review* with periodicals at large. While it is certainly important to note the distinctions between forms of popular print media, Victorian commentators were themselves reacting to (or imagining) such collective entities as apparently embraced all forms: “cheap literature,” “popular literature,” “reading for the million,” and “the unknown public.”
 16. Franco Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature,” *New Left Review* 1.54 (Jan–Feb 2000). 26 February 2008. <<http://www.newleftreview.org/?view=2094>>
 17. Dallas, “Popular Literature—The Periodical Press [Part 1],” 101.
 18. *Ibid*, 96. Random sampling had contemporaneous parallels in the mathematics of probability. For Laplace and Gauss, random observations were the means to discover order within apparent chaos and large data sets; according to the “bell curve” or Central Limit Theorem, “the sum or mean of a great number of *independent random observations* is approximately normally distributed.” Deborah J. Bennett, *Randomness* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1998), 99.
 19. Bennett G. Johns, “The Poetry of Seven Dials,” *Quarterly Review* 122 (April 1867): 385.
 20. *Ibid*, 385.
 21. Oliphant, “Byways,” 202.
 22. “Cheap Literature,” 316, 345.
 23. *Ibid*, 316.
 24. See Lynda Nead’s introduction to *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven; London: Yale UP, 2000). J. Hillis Miller sees the trope of documents as fundamental to London as revealed in *Bleak House*: “a document about the interpretation of documents . . . an imitation in words of the culture of a city.” *Victorian Subjects* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), 179.

25. The allusion is to scripture as well as Carlyle's 1829 *Edinburgh Review* essay "Signs of the Times." His sweeping invective against a materialist, mechanized age includes an observation about "mysterious" change that resonates with other observations about the press: "[t]he casual delirium of a few becomes, by this mysterious reverberation, the frenzy of many." *Victorian Web*, 25 March 2008. <<http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/carlyle/signs1.html>>
26. "Popular Literature of the Day," *British and Foreign Review; or, European Quarterly Journal* 10 (January 1840): 435.
27. Dallas, "Popular Literature—The Periodical Press [Part 1]," 101. Thackeray's survey of cheap knowledge opens with such an excursion and an ironically "judicious" purchase: "A walk into Paternoster Row, and the judicious expenditure of half-a-crown, put us in possession of the strange collection of periodical works [. . .]. We know not how many more there may be of the same sort; but, at least, these fifteen samples will afford us very fair opportunity for judging of this whole class of literature." "Half a Crown's Worth of Cheap Knowledge," *Fraser's Magazine* 17 (March 1838): 279.
28. J. Hepworth Dixon, "Literature of the Lower Orders," *Daily News*, October 26, 1847: 3.
29. Charles Dickens, *Sketches by Boz: Illustrative of Every-day Life and Every-day People* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987), 69.
30. So too does it transfer certain class anxieties about working and non-working urban poor into their seemingly disordered spaces and "lawless" literature. Consider where, for instance, Collins "discovers" the unknown public: "I made my first approaches to [this discovery], in walking about London, more especially in the second and third rate neighborhoods." "The Unknown Public," 217.
31. Harriet Ritvo, *The Platypus and the Mermaid, and Other Figments of the Classifying Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997), 10.
32. *Ibid.*, 10.
33. Lynn Merrill, *The Romance of Victorian Natural History* (New York: Oxford UP, 1989), 87. Merrill identifies such accessibility as one of several reasons for the emerging split between descriptive natural history and the "hard" biological sciences during this period. In terms of celebrity, Boz made his name in part by "identifying" social species like the "shabby-genteel."
34. Paul Lawrence Farber, *Finding Order in Nature: The Naturalist Tradition from Linnaeus to E. O. Wilson* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2000), 30.
35. Merrill, 53.
36. *Ibid.*, 52.
37. William Frederic Martyn, *A Dictionary of Natural History* (London: Longman et al. 1806), iii; quoted in Ritvo, 24.

38. Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (London: G. Woodfall, 1851), 220.
39. *Ibid*, 220. Original emphasis.
40. Oliphant, "Byways," 204.
41. Charles MacKay, "On Popular and National Poetry," *Bentley's Miscellany* 3 (March 1838): 251.
42. Dallas, "Popular Literature—The Periodical Press [Part 1]," 102.
43. Collins, 217.
44. Thackeray, 280.
45. Coventry Patmore, "Popular Serial Literature," *North British Review* 7 (May 1847): 111–12.
46. Oliphant, "Byways," 214.
47. Collins, 210.
48. Merrill, 37.
49. Lorna Huett, "Among the Unknown Public: *Household Words*, *All the Year Round* and the Mass-Market Weekly Periodical in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 38.1 (Spring 2005): 63.
50. Andrew King, "A Paradigm of Reading the Victorian Penny Weekly: Education of the Gaze and *The London Journal*," in Brake, Bell, and Finkelstein, 80. King and Plunkett suggest Collins's essay "must be read with enormous suspicion," explaining how Collins strategically wrote "The Unknown Public" to defend his friend Mark Lemon after his firing from the *London Journal*. *Victorian Print Media*, 13. Huett finds "an inherent ambivalence" in "The Unknown Public"; she argues that Collins, while seemingly focused on a lower-class readership, is "employed in simultaneously addressing and creating a middle-class audience for [*Household Words*]." Huett, 61. As Collins investigates the "unknown public," so the narrator in Poe's story tries to identify "The Man of the Crowd," who ultimately represents his own alienated self; in the same way, Collins identifies only his own preconceptions.
51. Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola* (New York: Methuen, 1985). Bowlby argues that window shopping or "just looking" becomes possible by mid-century because of the intertwined transformations of display architecture and conceptions of commodities that shift from use value to exchange value. To this she traces "the episodic structure of naturalist novels" and, suggestive of the random method Collins employs, the coincidences of their plots: "a necessity implicit in the irreconcilable doubleness of what Lukács identifies as the modern alternation of monotony and novelty, whereby events and changes cannot but seem random." *Ibid*, 13, 15.
52. Collins, 217.
53. *Ibid*, 219.
54. *Ibid*, 210.

55. Dixon, 3. Brantlinger characterizes "The Unknown Public" in similar generic terms to Collins's fictional work: "a mystery story, with Collins as literary detective." The detective exposes his author for anxieties about his own authority: "[t]he emergence of the detective seems to be linked to a weakening or defaillancy of narrative authority." *The Reading Public*, 17, 146.
56. "Cheap Literature," 316.
57. Collins, 218-19.
58. *Ibid*, 219.
59. Reminiscent of the rag-and-bottle shop in *Bleak House*; its shopkeeper, the illiterate Mr. Krook, similarly cannot discriminate among the textual contents of his mercantile chaos. Smith has a similar experience to Collins while visiting a Seven Dials press, "turning over a massive bundle" of the "five thousand different samples [kept] constantly on hand." Smith, 253. The Victorian depiction of hands and "manual" labor is a surprisingly consistent index to social distinctions, as Peter Capuano explores in "Novel Hands: Manual Activity and Victorian Fiction" (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2009).
60. Oliphant, "Byways," 200.
61. The implied contest between the cathedral and the periodical press shows up in Trollope's *The Warden* (1855) as the aged warden Mr. Harding is attacked by the newspaper *The Jupiter*, which disturbs his sanctuary and ruins his reputation.
62. Oliphant, "Byways," 201.
63. In *The English Constitution*, Bagehot makes the connection explicit: "[the constitution] contains likewise historical, complex, august, theatrical parts, which it has inherited from a long past . . . Its essence is strong with the strength of modern simplicity; its exterior is august with the Gothic grandeur of a more imposing age." Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution*, ed. Miles Taylor (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001), 10-11. Other examples include Edmund Burke in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) and Coleridge who affirms the constitution as an idea gradually realized through history in *On the Constitution of the Church and State* (London: William Pickering, 1839), 17-19.
64. Oliphant, "Byways," 201.
65. Oliphant, "New Books," 172.
66. *Ibid*, 168.
67. Michael Hancher points out that the "march of the intellect" was already being satirized in the 1820s before the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge got underway. "From Street Ballad to Penny Magazine: 'March of Intellect in the Butchering Line,'" in Brake, Bell, and Finkelstein, 93.
68. Newman provides another perspective when he attacks the triumvirate of Sir Robert Peel, Bentham, and the Brougham Society for the secularist

- assumption that increased knowledge of the physical sciences necessarily leads to moral improvement: “the veriest of pretences which sophist or mountebank ever professed to a gaping auditory. If virtue be a mastery over the mind, if its end be action, if its perfection be inward order, harmony, and peace, we must seek it in graver and holier places than in Libraries and Reading-rooms.” John Henry Newman, “The Tamworth Reading Room,” in the *Newman Reader* (National Institute of Newman Studies), 268. 27 February 2008. <<http://www.newmanreader.org/works/arguments/index.html>>
69. Oliphant, “Byways,” 203.
 70. *Ibid.*, 204, 205.
 71. *Ibid.*, 215.
 72. *Ibid.*, 205.
 73. On the other hand, Victorian writers like Thackeray were turning to the “accidental” or spontaneous sketch genre to displace their concerns about designing works for a literary marketplace. Alison Byerly, “Effortless Art: The Sketch in Nineteenth-Century Painting and Literature,” *Criticism* 41 (Summer 1999): 349–64.
 74. Oliphant, “Byways,” 214.
 75. Wright, 218. Original emphasis.
 76. Dallas, “Popular Literature—The Periodical Press. [Part 1],” 101.
 77. Cheap imprints of classics and masterpieces became increasingly available after 1847. Richard Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800–1900* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1998), 308.
 78. Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2001), 371. A “random walk” refers to a mathematical model of movement through a temporal sequence of random steps. The concept has been used across many disciplines to describe stochastic processes, including diffusion models and Brownian motion.
 79. Altick, 133.
 80. Jerome McGann, *Radiant Textuality: Literature After the World Wide Web* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 19, 83.
 81. Wai Chi Dimock, *Through Other Continents: American Literature across Deep Time* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2006), 79.
 82. James Mussell and Suzanne Paylor, “‘Mapping the Mighty Maze’: The Nineteenth-Century Serials Edition,” 19: *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 1 (2005). 2–3. 30 January 2008. <<http://www.19.bbk.ac.uk>>
 83. Ed Folsom, “The Changing Profession: Database as Genre: The Epic Transformation of Archives,” *PMLA* 122.5 (October 2007): 1571–79.
 84. Manovich, 225.

85. McGann identifies this as an “easy binary” that “install[s] the progressivist story that underpins *The Language of New Media*”; “Database, Interface, and Archival Fever,” *PMLA* 122.5 (October 2007): 1589. Meredith McGill suggests that Folsom describes “not a transformation but a ‘remediation’ of archives”; “Remediating Whitman,” *PMLA* 122.5 (October 2007): 1593.
86. For example, random access has a prehistory as a mode of reading reaching back to the *Sortes Virgilianae*, *Sortes Homericae*, and *Sortes Sanctorum*—forms of bibliomancy in which one opens a book (the *Aeneid*, *Odyssey*, and Bible, respectively) to a random page and accepts its contents as divination. Charles Hartman, *Virtual Muse: Experiments in Computer Poetry* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan UP, 1996), 89–90.
87. Folsom, 1574.
88. Collins, 221.
89. “Cheap Literature,” 315.
90. Dallas, “Popular Literature—The Periodical Press. [Part 1],” 97.
91. *Ibid.*, 96.
92. Dallas, “Popular Literature—The Periodical Press [Part 2],” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* 85 (February 1859): 188.
93. “Preface,” *Penny Magazine* 1 (December 1832): iv. For comparison, see John Perry Barlow’s libertarian manifesto “A Declaration of Independence of Cyberspace” (1996). Manovich suggests that such a “California ideology” may ignore the potential totalitarianism of networked surveillance and the subjective interpellation into a network that we misrecognize as our own creation. Manovich, 61.
94. Christian Johnstone, “On Periodical Literature,” *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine* 3 (1 July 1833): 491.
95. Yokai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2006), 10, 237.
96. Dallas, “Popular Literature—The Periodical Press [Part 1],” 102, 101.
97. David Weinberger, *Everything Is Miscellaneous: The Power of the New Digital Disorder* (New York: Times Books, 2007).
98. King and Plunkett, *Victorian Print Media*, 36.
99. Mussell and Paylor, 3. The phrase “mighty maze” comes from W. T. Snead’s introduction to his *Review of Reviews* (January 1890). It resonates not only with print media but with the perennial metaphor of the labyrinthine metropolis. Mussell and Paylor do not mention it, but, as I have suggested, the labyrinth was one of several tropes used to characterize both mass media and the cityscape.
100. *Ibid.*, 18.
101. The fullest articulation of these issues can be found in McGann’s *Radiant Textuality*. See also Folsom, 1576.
102. Ritvo, 87.
103. *Ibid.*, 88.

104. Quoted in Mussell and Paylor, 1.
105. Wai Chi Dimock, "Introduction: Genres as Fields of Knowledge," *PMLA* 122.5 (October 2007): 1378.
106. For a thoughtful discussion of the invisibility of codes of composition, transmission, and access, see Alan Liu, "Transcendental Data: Toward a Cultural History and Aesthetics of the New Encoded Discourse," *Critical Inquiry* 31.1 (Autumn 2004): 49–84.
107. McGann, *Radiant Textuality*, 143.
108. Mussell and Paylor, 2, 18.
109. The term "remediation" was coined by media theorists Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin to characterize the representation of one medium in another. This produces, they argue, a dynamic between immediacy and hypermediacy, or between efforts towards media transparency and the proliferation of media interfaces. While they offer remediation as a primary characteristic of the digital age, I am suggesting that a similar dynamic can be found in Victorian popular print media. Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).
110. King's essay, while a print undertaking that appears in print, seems very much in the spirit of the digital humanities with its "non-successive" approach that aims to "fragment" the periodical and expose its references to discourses outside itself. King, "Paradigm," 81, 80.
111. McGann, *Radiant Textuality*, 181.