Perceptions of the Press in Nineteenth-Century British Periodicals
Advance Reviews

“This is an invaluable aid to researchers and historians seeking insights into how the various aspects of the press were addressed and written about in nineteenth-century British periodicals. The compilation of sources and annotations collected here allow the modern researcher to gauge how journalism as practiced by many hands in the nineteenth century was perceived.”

—Tamara Baldwin, Chair and Professor of Mass Media,
Southeast Missouri State University

“Anyone interested in nineteenth-century journalism will covet this unique reference work. It is of enormous value to historians considering journalism during the century in which British power and influence reached around the globe. Its concise annotations also offer an absorbing read for anyone interested in knowing how the Victorian-era press established journalism standards still widely accepted in the twenty-first century.”

—Ross F. Collins, Professor of Communication,
North Dakota State University

“Building on her previous outstanding work on nineteenth-century journalism, the author provides us with an incredibly rich and meticulous overview of how journalism was discussed in a wide range of periodicals throughout the century. The result is a treasure-trove of information, a vital insight into the formation of a field of scholarship and a commercial activity.”

—Martin Conboy, Professor of Journalism History,
University of Sheffield

“During the nineteenth century, the British periodical press took the world for its subject. Fuelled by growing literacy rates and advances in techniques in printing and distribution, the press grew exponentially. By turns brilliant, wide-ranging, analytical, opinionated, and informative, the press for the most part managed to avoid that great sin of dullness. It’s hard to think of a major decision or policy in which the press did not play a significant role. And so what the press thought about its role, what individual periodicals thought about their own mission, and how they perceived other papers is central to any attempt to understand both the press and nineteenth-century life more broadly. With Perceptions of the Press, E. M. Palmegiano has given scholars a most valuable tool to understand that extraordinary entity that came, one might almost say, to rule public life.”

—Robert Scholnick, Professor of English and American Studies,
College of William and Mary

“E. M. Palmegiano’s Perceptions of the Press in Nineteenth-Century Periodicals has given the scholar and the curious researcher together a welcome and extremely rich literary treasure which will enhance the comprehension of the role and influence of the historical British Press right to modern times.”

—David R. Spencer, Professor of Information and Media Studies,
University of Western Ontario
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A Bibliography

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Preface

Nineteenth-century British periodicals regarded the press as a phenomenon of the age. Contemporaries considered it ubiquitous, competing everywhere with pulpits and governments to become the voice of the people. Given the approximately 100,000 publications in the United Kingdom and the volume of publications outside, this conclusion was logical. Commentary on press activity matched its productivity. Those penning for serials did not confine their remarks to domestic developments, frequently measuring ones in other areas, albeit with a British yardstick. Although onlookers saw the press from numerous vantage points, everyone cast it as a major player in the culture of a society. Spotlighting the press gave it status, deserved or undeserved. This bibliography shows how writers in the press shaped the discourse on the press by offering a substantial sample of opinion on common concerns, specific journals, and individuals.

What was this press that fascinated so many? Essayists then and this book now categorize “the press” as anything published regularly: annuals, quarterlies, monthlies, fortnightlies, weeklies, and dailies. Catalogers increasingly reserved the term journalism for the newspaper. From the 1820s through the 1890s, the decades mainly covered here, observers recorded at length how and why the press changed dramatically. Nationally, they watched as elite reviews and great London newspapers waxed and waned, legions of specialized monthlies and weeklies opened and closed, penny and then halfpenny gazettes in the country and in the city challenged and sometimes vanquished older ones, and annuals died ingloriously. Columnists noted how intrusions by officials slowed or ceased, how journalists shed the veil of anonymity, how readers increased, and how readership shifted the market. Probes of the international press complemented or contradicted these happenings. Generalizations notwithstanding, dialogue was disparate occasionally in the same organ and regularly from generation to generation. Schooling, sect, penchants, prejudices, and politics surely account for differences, as could occupation. Authors might have full-time positions in the press, but they were as likely to be casual or constant freelancers with or without other employment. Their diversity probably explains the range of their epithets for the press, from the laudatory “palladium of liberty” to the wary “engine of evil” with the neutral “agora” between.

Any bibliography must strive to be comprehensive, but one drawn from nineteenth-century periodicals must acknowledge the limitations inherent in their study. Their numbers and their fluidity, resulting from mastheads capriciously altered, contents mysteriously labeled, and parts lost, complicate inquiry. These factors, together with the bulk of texts on the press and the variety of interpretations of it, make any attempt to encompass everything futile. Hence this book surveys 48 publications, selected because
they embodied sundry political, economic, religious, social, and literary perspectives, and most lacked subject indexes. This roster comprises 15 quarterlies, 22 monthlies, six weeklies, one quarterly turned monthly, one bimonthly, one fortnightly turned monthly, and two weeklies turned monthlies. Among them are relevant ones in *The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals*, chosen because of their availability and utility as sources for research in several disciplines and its indication of editors and omission of a subject index. Since *Wellesley* captions spoke primarily to upper and upper middle/middling class readers, organs that addressed otherwise underrepresented audiences, such as *Chambers’s Journal* and *Hogg’s Instructor*, have been added. Further criteria for incorporation were prominent editors or publishers and/or known contributors.2

An introduction summarizes recurrent issues in the serials, cited alphabetically with title modifications in subheadings. Dates for the *Edinburgh Review*, the *New Monthly Magazine*, and *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine* coincide with the *Wellesley Index*; dates for the rest correspond to the years of their runs between 1824 and 1900. Each caption has a preamble synopsizing editors or owners/sponsors of titles not in the *Wellesley Index*, predecessors and successors, mergers, audience, and themes. Entries are chronological; annotated, with original grammar, spelling, and punctuation in quotations, and signed as printed. Other authorship attributions come from the *Wellesley Index*; Eileen M. Curran, “The Curran Index: Additions to and Corrections of *The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals*” (http://victorianresearch.org/curranindex.html); Anne Lohrli, *Household Words: A Weekly Journal, 1850–1859: Conducted by Charles Dickens* (Toronto, 1973); Ella Ann Oppenlander, *Dickens’ All the Year Round: Descriptive Index and Contributor List* (Troy, NY, 1984); E. M. Palmegiano research. Listings do not include fiction, miscellaneous “notes,” and material on press stances on policies or events unrelated to journalism.

The author index has pseudonyms but not initials. The subject index identifies topics related to the kingdom at large and London. Postings for other English cities, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, the Channel Islands, regions of the British Empire, and those under foreign control are inclusive. Place names refer to the nineteenth century, and indexes, to entry numbers.

Many people have contributed to this book, and I wish to thank all those who have done so. A few deserve special mention. The staffs of the British Library and Newark (NJ) Public Library showed much skill and patience in locating missing periodicals. Saint Peter’s College supported this project by funding time away from teaching, travel to distant collections, and research assistants. The work of these students, Katrina Luckenback, Maria Dela Paz, Thomas Cleary, and especially Nicholas Lambrianou, has been invaluable. Also at Saint Peter’s College, Kerry Falloon and David Hardgrove in O’Toole Library and Maryann Picerno and Carlo Macaraig in Information Technology responded quickly and capably to my countless requests for help. My colleagues Jerome J. Gillen and David S. Surrey very generously shared their expertise with me. My editor Janka Romero exemplified professionalism and kindness. I am grateful to
one and all and to my family and friends who have tolerated with grace my absorption in this venture.

Notes


Introduction

Overview

Contributors to nineteenth-century British periodicals perceived the press as the principal medium of public conversation. Convinced of its real or potential power, they examined it thoroughly. They discovered its roots in ancient Rome, Renaissance Amsterdam, or the English Civil Wars. They described its adolescence in the eighteenth-century western world and delineated its maturity in Britain, if not the empire and foreign realms, during the Victorian epoch. They attested, not always with enthusiasm, to the evolution of the domestic press from an aristocratic to a democratic institution and emphasized its standing internationally, supposedly due to accurate and impartial news gathering and thoughtful commentary. Discussion ranged broadly, but persistent motifs were the nexus between the press and government; changes in newspapers, magazines, and reviews; the definition of journalist and its consequences for training and reward; how these circumstances compared or contrasted with those in other places.

The Impact of Government

Serials of all persuasions noticed Parliament’s history of interference with the press. Pieces surfaced on the stamp duty passed in 1712, the subsequent imposts on advertising and paper, the resistance of Members to admitting reporters, the press curbs in 1819, and the ongoing prosecutions for seditious or blasphemous libel and subventions from cabinets. Writers simultaneously and retrospectively protested or celebrated these actions and similar ones of colonial governors and Continental governments. In this discourse, taxes either inhibited “news” papers for the poor and fattened the treasury, or deterred uprisings; Ireland consistently typified prosecutions and Russia, censorship; India and France inconsistently typified both.

When the campaign to end the “taxes on knowledge” commenced at home, fierce controversy flared in articles from the 1830s until the mid-century abolition of these levies. While Commons had opened its doors before 1801 and some editors had the ear of ministers after, observers nevertheless routinely aired how widely official tentacles reached. Legislation on copyright, partnership, and postal charges; nationalization of telegraphy; bureaucratic leaks and patronage exemplified the effects on content, revenue, and access.
Newspapers

Pundits spotted the hand of authority most often in the newspaper, whose purpose and performance they gauged extensively in the reviews and magazines of this bibliography. Sketches of London’s stamped morning dailies operating since the eighteenth century distinguished them from their unstamped weekly brothers. Earning stature from their rapid and reliable intelligence during the Napoleonic wars, the metros emerged as the paramount sources of news in 1815. With party affiliation fueling subscriptions, editorializing initially appeared as a tool to reinforce loyalty, then for shaping opinion on anything and everything. The notion that journals directed as well as reflected reasoned judgment, a concept *The Times* came to represent, was extremely popular in the 1850s and 1860s. Thereafter the construct of the “newspaper as echo” triumphed, but savants perennially underscored the clout of *The Times*. Because they acknowledged it as the paradigm for the newspaper, they devoted far more energy to it than to its peers.

Much about the newspaper engrossed bystanders. A section that enthralled generations was advertisements, bygone and current. Contemporaries, anticipating today’s economists, sociologists, psychologists, and historians, pictured inserts as a flooding stream of income, a broadcast of human wants and desires, and a master key to the past. Another aspect of the newspaper closely tracked was its connection to technology that hastened production and distribution, chiefly improvements of steam-powered printing and railroads. But the advent of telegraphy, coinciding as it did with the mid-century launch of penny dailies and Reuters, gained greater coverage as the wires transformed the contour and circulation of news.

Awareness of speed went beyond technology. Essays also conveyed how readers feeling “rushed” affected content and layout. As time allegedly became an obsession, newspapers accommodated cursory reading, originally by shrinking paragraphs and stressing terseness, soon replacing words with illustrations and enlarging headlines. Although Victorians applauded brevity, they argued about the intellectual advantages of these adaptations that, many averred, had already corrupted American gazettes. After the enactment of compulsory education in 1870, disagreement sharpened.

Scrutinizers of dailies’ behavior in a highly competitive market deplored or endorsed the race to capture graduates by pirating sensationalism from the Sunday herald and intimacy from the American interview. Scribes bickered about the merits of space allocation, whether papers should reduce details and interpretations of British and international policies in order to grow sports pages and to inaugurate ladies’ pages. Admirers reckoned that this “new journalism” made for a perkier press, but their opposites damned renovations as unworthy of journalists. The gimmickry of the halfpenny capped the conflict, which had raised a fundamental question: was the press primarily a public entity to enlighten the citizenry, or a private enterprise to enrich some citizens?
Columns about weeklies, from the elite to the inexpensive, mirrored their diversity. The first group, said to cater to an educated and affluent but narrow audience seeking weightier literary, political, and social analyses, contained the *Athenaeum*, *Spectator*, *Saturday Review*, and their ilk. Workers’ tribunes, which ordinarily had fleeting lives, apparently drew more readers and certainly drew more remarks. In the early decades of the century, the minority of this press urging lower class rebellion terrified those associated with Tory and Whig organs.

According to chroniclers, pessimists need not have worried since the majority of the unstamped were apolitical, confined by choice or law in their information transfer, and gradually trumped by the generic weekend paper. Working and lower middle class audiences reputedly turned to it because the pressure of labor precluded perusal of a daily, the Sunday highlighted graphic felonies, and the Saturday harbored data of all sorts. Stopping at pubs, reading rooms, and libraries, readers sought guidance passively by scanning and actively by submitting queries on a plethora of subjects, thereby confirming the pontificate of the press.

Evaluators did not overlook the country, where the weekly prevailed until the 1860s. They saluted papers with seniority or cachet, as the *Manchester Guardian*, and welcomed neophyte dailies. After the enlargement of suffrage in 1867, calls for partisan sponsorship of dailies outside London intensified. Narrators nonetheless expected rural weeklies, even those with small staffs, to endure because they monopolized local advertising and news.

Insiders and outsiders outlined how Scotland and England paralleled patterns of development and exchanged personnel; how political and economic crises hamstrung Ireland and linguistic differences, Wales; how the Channel Islands hovered on the journalistic periphery.

**Reviews and Magazines**

Commentators throughout the century hailed the *Edinburgh Review* as the model of quality for its genre. They accepted the review as appropriate for maintaining fidelity to a political party, religious belief, or literary canon when adherents paid the bills. Spewing out scathing criticism of opponents on any of these three fronts and interspersing it with scholarly dissertations, reviews garnered fans and foes until their influence began to evaporate in the 1850s. Then lack of timeliness, lengthy and occasionally labyrinthine articles, and high prices purportedly reduced the review’s sway over powerbrokers and a populace who increasingly opted for monthly and weekly magazines.

From the 1830s people recognized the proliferation of magazines that targeted everything: the trades and the professions, God and mammon, household organization and imperial management, the arts and the races, maternity and quasi-pornography, staid hobbies and hot adventures, and any other topic that would sell. Arbiters conventionally deemed cheap miscellanies dedicated to “instruction” and “amusement” clones of
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the Penny Magazine. The entertaining squibs, poems, and lore that these periodicals cobbled together captivated some referees, but others worried about less wholesome captions full of subtle sexuality and flagrant criminality. When mid-brow magazines such as Temple Bar and the Cornhill arrived in the 1860s, judges extolled their better fiction and trenchant expositions but predicted that the appetite for currency would ultimately doom them as it had the annuals of the 1830s.

Journalists

Ideas about journalists shifted dramatically over the century. Before and after journeyman newspaper editor Gibbons Merle in 1833 labeled their efforts “journalism,” they were an indeterminate lot. What journalism was, profession or trade, vocation or avocation, and what its relationship to literature was seemed clearer to its participants than to observers. They enrolled in its ranks leader-writers, Parliamentary reporters, penny-a-liners, “special” correspondents, critics, illustrators, essayists, editors and their minions, and proprietors. Given this spectrum, it is hardly surprising that a squabble about prerequisites followed. Counselors eventually pitted the university against apprenticeship for newspaper positions but never articulated guidelines for magazine drop-ins, from experts requiring no pay to losers in former endeavors surviving on it.

Sages quarreled too about anonymity, which diminished journalists’ status and salaries but sustained the force of the editorial “we.” While top quarterlies could usually afford talented contributors and London dailies could hire some staff, these persons and their compatriots stood in the shadows because of the custom of anonymity, until William Howard Russell made the war correspondent a star. Although the legions of unknowns far outnumbered the score or so of famous military correspondents, their exploits quickly sparked contention about the scope of reporting in a free society. According to their enemies, they were spies, analogous to the interviewers of “new journalism” in disclosures of secrets.

Stories showcased individuals besides war correspondents. Featured were pioneers from Daniel Defoe to John Wilkes and their heirs. Among the prominent in the nineteenth century were owners and editors of London’s newspapers, as James Perry, William Cobbett, John Walter II, Leigh Hunt, and John Delane, and of pricey magazines and reviews, as William Blackwood, Francis Jeffrey, and John Gibson Lockhart.

Onlookers likewise rescued the anonymous, either by naming them or by elucidating their roles. Commemorated, for instance, were firebrands of the 1830s and wordsmiths in every decade, printers with sideline newspapers, and skippers of underfunded publications. Yet paragraphs on editors of dailies, leader-writers, Parliamentary reporters, and literary and theatre critics predominated. Authors might dismiss the average journalist as a semi-literate ready to pen anything for money, or honor his caste as crusaders and champions for the voiceless. With the cancellation of press taxes, the birth of inexpensive dailies, the sprouting of myriad magazines, and the multiplication
of autodidacts after 1850, press watchers logged the expansion of this job market, particularly the influx of women.

Readers

Who read the press and why they did so stumped nineteenth-century assessors as much as later historians. There were plenty of assertions about which folks read what and how they got the press. But the talk of readership was just that: talk. Few accounts presented hard evidence, probably because audience surveys did not exist. Still these fuzzy attempts at profiling indicate who witnesses guessed constituted audience. They classified readers around the globe under several headings: age, sex, education, employment, faith, and social grade; format preference (dailies to annuals, leaders to letters, visuals to treatises); location (urban, rural, imperial, foreign); interests (politics, business, religion, advertising, advice, fiction, the arts, poetry, sports, gossip, and the affairs of colonials and strangers). These characterizations were neither rigid nor coherent, but they do verify the breadth of readership.

Writers claimed that customers’ creativity in accessing the press demonstrated their fascination with it and its hold on them. Thus, many articles spelled out pathways, among them subscribing alone or in concert, buying or renting from vendors, borrowing from neighbors and distant contacts, utilizing literal and figurative open arenas with news announcers, and consortling with smugglers.

The Press around the World

Serials measured the press outside the United Kingdom by its standards. The products of France and the United States were the pets of columnists who vacillated between complimenting and condemning others. Characterizations of French journalists sympathized with those deprived of liberty in the 1820s and 1850s and castigated those who prioritized political careers, engaged in bribery, and incited or benefited from revolutions in July 1830 and February 1848. Alternatively, the men of the Journal des Débats and the Revue des Deux Mondes won respect whatever the regime. Notes on Americans commended them for their ingenuity in finding news, success in attracting newspaper buyers, and skill in illustrating magazines but decried gazettes’ layouts, editors’ crudeness, and proprietors’ blatant partisanship or raw capitalism. Epitomizing good and evil were Horace Greeley of the New York Tribune and James Gordon Bennett of the New York Herald. Communities to the north of the United States and to the south, from Mexico to Argentina, rated only rare nods.

People did not foreground most Europeans beyond France except for the Germans, Italians, and Russians. Censorship threaded through the compositions on their presses, but otherwise estimates of their output varied. The deeds of Otto von Bismarck distressed appraisers of the German press, the heritage of Rome and Venice impressed