fashion actors and actresses have to give up their essential humanity if they are to reach the heights. Or, as James puts it in his 1908 preface to *The Tragic Muse*: 'the trade of the stage-player, and above all of the actress, must have so many detestable sides for the person exercising it that we scarce imagine a full surrender to it without a full surrender, no less, to every immediate compensation, to every freedom.' Among which, presumably, is the freedom to fall in love as does Isabel with Kendal, and as the artistically tougher Miriam declines to do with Peter Sherringham.

There is no question that *The Tragic Muse* is by far a better novel than those that it seems to be answering, and censuring. Taking the three works together offers a glimpse into the master–apprentice relationships underlying the production of Victorian novels (relationships in which, for complex reasons, masters could be provoked into rivalrous reaction). The three texts also offer an insight into the ways in which Victorian novels conversed with each other. Miss Rooth is a richer and more interesting creation in company with her generally disregarded predecessors, Miss Bretherton and Miss Brown, but they are all three sisters under the skin.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Victorian Novelists: Who were they?

AWARENESS of Victorian fiction as an industry is uncommon, even at the level of parenthesis or historical backing to scholarly discussion of canonical texts. And generalizations about 'the Victorian novel' (which are common enough) are often hobbled by their being restricted in range of reference to the dozen writers designated as 'major' by the *New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*—writers whose extraordinary literary distinction renders them necessarily unrepresentative. Despite fifty years of intense, academically-sponsored research into the form, we still make do with only the sketchiest sense of the infrastructure of Victorian fiction—how the bulk of it was produced; who originated, reproduced, distributed and consumed the product. For most critics, commentators and readers, the Victorian novel is something that appears quite magically on the library shelf, or in the 'Literary Classics' section of the bookshop, found, as it were, under the gooseberry bush, the fruit of Dickens's 'genius' or George Eliot's 'moral sensibility' or Thackeray's 'satire' or Henry James's 'art'.

Statistics are an initial area of vagueness. In his monumental *Nineteenth-Century Fiction, A Bibliographical Catalogue* (5 vols, 1982–86), R. L. Wolff estimates that there are some 42,000 published Victorian novels of which—aiming at completeness—he contrived to collect 7,000. The annual statistics of the trade journal the *Publisher's Circular*, 1837–1901, suggest that total book production rose annually from 2,000 to 8,000 new titles over the Victorian period, and that the proportion of fiction concurrently rose from around 12 per cent to about 25 per cent (the increase being largely explained by the recruitment of new reading publics, particularly after the Education Act of 1870). Assuming exponential progressions for both figures over the 64 years, one arrives at a probable total output of around 50,000 novels. But exactness is impossible, given the fuzzy borders of fiction where it shades into religious-tract, educational and ephemeral periodical reading matter. Around 50,000 is, however, at this stage, a good ball-park figure to start from. When the promised 'History of

the Book in Britain' project has done its work we shall know more precisely.[1]

This chapter is concerned less with bibliometrics than with the human infrastructure of Victorian fiction, namely the novelists, those largely invisible masses that Dickens called 'my fellow labourers'. Given an average output of 17 novels per novelist (for the justification of this figure, see below), a work-force of around 3,500 may be hazarded. Given an average working life for novelists of around 32 years (see below again), and the fact that many novelists qualify with only work of fiction, it is a fair guess that two such working forces would populate the period, with the necessary chronological overlaps and a progressive upward scaling to take account of the production increase over the 64 years. At the end of the century, Walter Besant (in his capacity as founder of the Society of Authors) reckoned that there were some 1,200 novelists at work, of whom 200 were entirely self-supporting by their writing. This seems somewhat on the low side and may be biased (especially as regards the self-supporting figure) by Besant's ineradicable gloom about the treatment of the creative writer by philistine English culture. But it is roughly in line with my estimates if one adds the amateurs and one-novel wonders who would have been beneath Besant's notice.

Most of these estimated 3,500 Victorian novelists will never emerge from the obscurity of the statistical mass. Even the most exhaustive investigations can turn up no worthwhile biographical (or sometimes even reliable bibliographical) data. The cult of anonymous authorship which persisted well into the late Victorian period is an often impenetrable screen. Another source of obscurity is the sheer human insignificance of the very minor Victorian novelist. In personal terms, they were of no more consequence than the cabby who drove Dickens to the *All the Year Round* office, or the chambermaid who cleaned the room at the 'Priory', where George Eliot wrote *Felix Holt, the Radical.*

I would guess that some bio-bibliographical profile (dates of birth, death, career details, marital status, total number of novels published) can be readily retrieved for about 1,200 Victorian novelists. For another purpose than this chapter, I have gathered such material on some 878 of them. These represent authors whose records lie close enough to the surface for one to discover salient facts using the resources of the British Library.[2] It is, I think, probably the largest database yet assembled. (The *New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, for instance, has entries on under 200; this will

probably be rectified in the third *Cambridge Bibliography*, currently in production.) A lifetime's work could probably turn up a few hundred more, but the majority of Victorian novelists have, I suspect, sunk for ever without trace.

As a sample, 878 cases out of 3,500 is more than substantial enough for statistical analysis, if the sample is not too skewed. But, one must assume, it is manifestly skewed in favour of the 'noteworthy' writer. To have left any record is, in itself, a mark of egregiousness. If the condition of the Victorian novelist is obscurity, to be known is to be in some degree exceptional and to be at all famous (either to one's contemporaries or posterity) is to be a very rare bird indeed. Nevertheless, with the necessary qualifications, 878 novelists is a solid starting point. What I intend to do here is make some preliminary interrogation of this data with the hope of arriving at a set of initially serviceable generalization about the Victorian novelist, *en masse.*

II

CLOSE UP, the corps of Victorian novelists is bewildering in its variety and diversity. All Victorian life seems to be there: from servants, errand-boys and criminals to High-Court judges, generals, admirals, bishops, prime ministers and marquises. In the general catalogue they may, like Macbeth's dogs, be cleped novelists, but what rational points of congruence can one find, say, between the following pair?

LENNOX, Lord William [Pitt] (1799–1881). Born at Winestead Abbey in Yorkshire, Lennox was the fourth son of the fourth Duke of Richmond. His godfather was William Pitt and one of his cousins was Charles James Fox. While still a thirteen-year-old boy at Westminster school, he was gazetted to a cornetcy. He then joined Wellington's staff as an aide-de-camp, remaining in the post until three years after Waterloo. He missed the battle itself, though in Brussels his mother threw the ball for him which is commemorated in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, Byron's *Childe Harold* and Charles Lever's *Charles O'Malley.* If not the author of good literature himself, Lennox was the cause of good literature in others. Lennox sold his commission in 1829, and served as a Whig MP from 1832 to 1834. He was, however, more interested in sport (particularly flat racing) and literature than in public service. The young lord went on to write extensively for the journals and was the author of fashionable novels, which hit the taste of the day but which look very feeble to the modern eye. In his later years, he was a sadly broken-down figure willing to hire himself out for lectures on the theme of 'Celebrities I have known'. Nonetheless his volumes of reminiscences, published in the late 1870s, are lively. His fiction includes:

Compton Audley (1841), *The Tuft Hunter* (1843), *Percy Hamilton* (1851), *Philip Courtenay* (1855), *The Adventures of a Man of Family* (1864). There are thirteen novels by Lennox deposited in the British Library.

LEVY, Amy (1861–89). Levy was born at Clapham into a cultured and orthodox Jewish family who actively encouraged her literary talents. She was educated at Brighton, and at Newnham College Cambridge, where she was the first Jewish girl to matriculate. At university in 1881 Levy's first volume of poems was published. Entitled *Xantippe* (after Socrates' fabled shrew of a wife) the work indicated her feminist sentiments. The details of Levy's subsequent life are tantalisingly mysterious. She may have taught, or even have worked in a factory from idealistic motives. She was a friend of Olive Schreiner and of the socialist novelist Clementina Black. Her novel *Reuben Sachs* (1888) is the story of a sexually unscrupulous politician. Its depiction of Jewish life in London as grossly materialistic caused a furore, and was widely taken as a race libel, as was Julia Frankau's similarly anti-Semitic *Dr Philips* (1887). Levy's subsequent novel, *Miss Meredith* (1889) was less tendentious. It is the story of an English Governess, who falls in love with the son of the Italian household where she is employed. Its lightness of tone suggests that it may have been written some time before actual publication. Levy also wrote the shorter fiction *The Romance Of A Shop* (1888), in which four sisters set up their own business. A prey to melancholy, Levy committed suicide by suffocating herself with charcoal fumes shortly after correcting her fifth and last volume of poems for the press. There are three novels of Levy's deposited in the British Library.[3]

Both these are, in their ways (more particularly in their failures), fascinating and instructive cases. Lennox, if we confuse fact and fiction, was actually *there* when George Osborne made his reckless proposal to Becky Sharp on the night before Waterloo. In fact, as the central figure of that actual ball, he survives for posterity only as one of the far background props in its most famous fictional representations. The pathos of his hawking himself around London as a kind of raree show or literary Prufrock is a parable on the treacherous evanescence of fame. And his career is a powerful reminder of the rule that interesting lives do not, inevitably, make for interesting novels. Lennox's is not, of course, a harrowing end, as is Levy's, even in the starkly skeletal form of a dictionary entry. Her Roman death (accompanied by the final act of literary duty) is an almost unbearably poignant indictment of the cruelty of the sensitive Victorian novelist's lot.

Regarding Levy and Lennox as co-professional writers ('two Victorian novelists'), what can one reasonably claim that they had in common, other than that both lived in nineteenth-century England and wrote what the generic record calls fiction? Clearly, the differences make more sense than the similarities. And the main difference I would draw attention to is that Levy began writing early in life as a direct (almost reflexive) career option. Lennox, by contrast, came to novel writing late and indirectly. He ricocheted into it from an earlier, more promising career in the military (cut short by an inconvenient declaration of peace) and from his clear incompetence in fulfilling his expected class destinies in Parliament (possibly due to the equally inconvenient Reform Bill of 1832). This ricochet route into novel writing is, I suggest, a typical male pattern. The direct route into authorship that Levy followed is, by contrast, typically female. In many ways, the archetypal female novelist is Daisy Ashford (1881–1972), who began writing at the age of nine and had four novels complete by the age of thirteen, when she was packed off to convent school, never to write fiction again. The archetypal male novelist, by contrast, would be William de Morgan (1839–1917) who began life as an art student, worked with William Morris, rediscovered medieval techniques for staining glass, set up a successful ceramics factory at Fulham and retired in 1905. In his retirement, aged 65, he began a successful career writing Victorian (in all but date) novels with *Joseph Vance* (1906). He was initially encouraged to write by his wife, who was worried by his depressed state of mind. De Morgan followed this bestseller with five more, and left two works of fiction incomplete at the time of his death. At its bluntest, one may say that men tended to have lived, loved and worked before writing fiction, women often the other way round.

This is not to say that women could not turn their hand to fiction late in life, if they had to; more particularly if it was the only way they could put bread on the family table. One can cite, for instance, the case of Mrs Trollope (1779–1863) who, finding herself let down by her bankrupt husband in the early 1830s, set to at the age of 55 and wrote 35 sprightly works of fiction to keep the Trollopes in middle-class respectability. As resourceful was Amelia Barr (1831–1919), whose husband dragged her off to America and then died of yellow fever (together with three of his daughters), leaving the widow Barr on the streets of New York with $5 in her purse and three surviving daughters

to support. At the age of 54, Mrs Barr set to and went on to write 64 popular novels (among them *Remember The Alamo*, 1888, elements of which resurfaced in the 1960s John Wayne movie). A sizeable band of these resourceful ladies can be assembled who, had the wolf not been at the door, would never have put pen to paper, and certainly not in their grandmotherhood.

Something that one may deduce as having been shared professionally by Amy Levy and William Lennox is a sense of guilt and shame. It must have been wormwood for Lennox to pocket his paltry guineas for lecturing on the celebrities he, anything but a celebrity, had known. What the guilt was that drove Levy to suicide one can only guess. But clearly the male, Lennox, was more able to survive than was the female, Levy. This is a pattern one sees elsewhere in the ranks of the profession. Suicide is uncommon, but pseudonyms and anonymity, for instance, were often used to mask shame at being a novelist. Thus Julia Wedgwood (1833–1914, an offspring of the Wedgwood–Darwin dynasty) wrote one of her two novels anonymously and one pseudonymously (as 'Florence Dawson'). Evidently her first (*Framleigh Hall*, 1858) was written without her father's knowledge; her second (*An Old Debt*, 1859) was published only after he gave her his patriarchal imprimatur, having read and censored the manuscript. Thereafter, parental disapproval inhibited Julia Wedgwood from writing fiction altogether. Hugh Stowell Scott (1862–1903) ran into similar paternal opposition. His father, a prosperous shipowner in Newcastle upon Tyne, decreed that his son should follow the family business. Ostensibly dutiful, young Hugh complied. But secretly he began writing and publishing novels, at first anonymously, then under the pseudonym 'Henry Seton Merriman' (the overtones of hedonistic release implicit in this pen name—'the merry man'—are striking). The difference between Scott and Wedgwood is that he did not finally crumple into filial silence. He went on to write 18 bestselling works of fiction. (He also turned his duplicity to good effect in later life by serving as one of the early clandestine agents of the British secret service.) This greater resolution and independence of the male novelist in the face of the stigma attached to writing fiction is generally borne out by mass survey.

Skimming the bio-bibliographies of 878 Victorian novelists yields any number of suggestive primary observations. Not least, the inadequacy of the term 'novelist', implying as it does both someone

who merely wrote a novel and someone who devoted their life to (and won their bread by) fiction. It is said that the Eskimo has twenty words for snow. It would be useful to have a similarly discriminating sub-vocabulary for 'Victorian novelist'. As it is loosely applied, the term can legitimately cover someone like Grace Kimmins ('Sister Grace of the Bermondsey Settlement', 1870–1954), whose philanthropy expressed itself primarily in charitable work in the East End, and who in furtherance of that work wrote one successful novel with a purpose, *Polly Of Parker's Rents* (1899). 'Victorian novelist' equally covers the similarly philanthropic, but exclusively literary Miss Evelyn Everett-Green (1856-1932) who has no less than 254 works of fiction deposited in the British Library (many written for the Religious Tract Society). It is hard to imagine that given a 24-hour day and an 76-year life-span Everett-Green ever had time to do anything but write fiction. If quantity means anything, she was a novelist of a quite different stamp from one-shot Grace Kimmins.

A feature that stands out from a cursory scanning of the 878 bio-bibliographical capsules is the clear link between novel writing and certain historical conjunctions. Sea captains in the 1830s, for instance, were recruited in large numbers into the profession (the names of Marryat, Howard, Chamier, Barker, Glascock, and Neale come to mind). Clearly peace, half-pay, and national nostalgia for the Great Victorious War all played a part. But so too did the training and discipline of the officer's life at sea, which was quite different from that of the land-based soldier. Naval service in the early nineteenth century entailed long periods of boredom unmitigated by drink or women. And, unlike their military counterparts, naval commanders were expected to write as a central part of their duty, keeping the log-book being a daily ritual (soldiers, by contrast, were notoriously illiterate). This state of affairs holds up only to the mid-1850s after which (following Crimean reforms) soldiers became better penmen (and more of them wrote novels). With the advent of steam, sailors had less time to spin yarns, in both senses of the term. Apart from the 1830s and 1840s, sea captains rarely feature as active novelists.

Another fact that strikes the casually enquiring eye is the dynastic effect of the great Victorian novelist on those around him/her, particularly close relatives. Thus, for instance, Thackeray had one daughter, Anne Thackeray Ritchie, who went on to be a considerable novelist in her own right. His other daughter was the first wife of

Leslie Stephen, father of Virginia Woolf. The woman with whom Thackeray had his (possibly) adulterous love affair in 1851, Jane Octavia Brookfield, went on after 1868 (Thackeray dying in 1863) to write 4 novels. And her son, Arthur Brookfield, went on in his turn to write 5 novels. A Thackeray cousin, Blanche Ritchie, wrote a novel and so did her husband, Francis Warre Cornish (both narratives were pseudo-Thackerayan in tone). To have 6 novelists clustered so closely around a major novelist is a much higher than chance rate. The same clustering phenomenon is found among the Trollopes. There is Anthony, who wrote 47 novels, his mother Frances Milton who wrote 35, his sister Cecilia who before dying of consumption wrote one, a couple of cousins who wrote about a dozen between them. Finally there was Anthony's brother Thomas Adolphus, who wrote 20 novels, and Thomas's second wife, Frances Eleanor Trollope, who wrote 60-odd. Altogether, Trollopes accounted for some 170 Victorian novels, or 0.3 per cent of the Victorian total. Add his present-day descendant, Joanna Trollope, and the total on the dynastic scoreboard soars out of sight.

Frances Eleanor Trollope's maiden name was Ternan, and she was the sister of Dickens's mistress, Ellen Ternan. Dickens's son Charles Jr did not write novels (although he commissioned many, as the editor in succession to his father on *All The Year Round*). But Angela Dickens, Charles Jr's daughter (1863–1946), went on to write nine novels (all noticeably morbid in tone) and she was aunt (I believe) to the twentieth-century novelist, Monica Dickens. Dickens's daughter Kate married Charles Allston Collins, author of two novels and brother of Wilkie, author of 30. Altogether, this Dickens constellation accounts for some 60 Victorian novels.

Charles Kingsley wrote 10 novels of the first rank. Only slightly less far behind in critical standing was his brother Henry Kingsley, with 20. A daughter of Charles, Mary St Leger, whose married name was Harrison and whose pen-name was 'Lucas Malet', wrote 12 novels. A younger sister, Charlotte (married name 'Chanter') wrote a bestseller, *Over The Cliffs*, in 1860. Altogether, this Kingsley constellation accounts for 45 works of Victorian fiction, all of very high literary quality. Of the 11 children of Frederick Marryat, 4 daughters and one son wrote Victorian novels, running up a family score of around 100 titles.

One could follow these genealogical, or free-masonic, connections much further than I have done here. But it is clear that one of the main predisposing factors to writing Victorian novels was to have a close relative, or intimate acquaintance, who wrote Victorian novels.

III

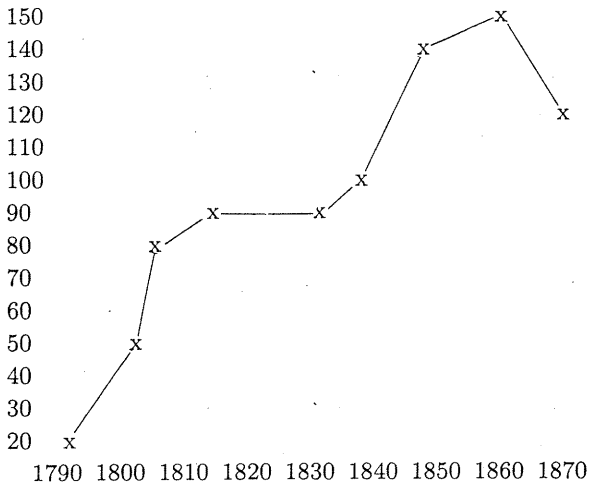
LOOKING AT individual cases is delightful, yielding the same kind of pleasure as turning over the pages of old photograph albums. And clearly enough it is instructive as well as perplexing to get to know the personnel behind the novels. But I want now to move to quantitative and more systematic analysis of my 878 cases. The questions to which initial answers are sought are: (1) How many Victorian novelists were seriously professional, and how many were amateur or sideline novelists? (2) Given the fact that Victorian fiction was unique in being a profession/industry/hobby in which males and females took part in equal numbers, is there any observable difference in the ways in which men and women were drawn or recruited into writing novels? Put more simply—what made the Victorian a Victorian novelist, and was the process different for men and women?

For multi-factorial research about 40 different fields can be covered by my data, including such factors as class origin, education, religious background, illness or handicap at significant periods of life, career activities, marital status, and so on. For my purposes here, I have collected responses on the following questions: (1) When was s/he born, and when did s/he die? (2) How many novels did s/he write? (3) At what age did s/he start writing? (4) Was there a career previous to writing novels?

Novel writing, I have said, was unique in Victorian society in being a public and professional activity open both to middle-class men and middle-class women on more or less equal terms. Nevertheless, given the social role forced on them, women naturally tended to be more of a modestly submerged component than their male partners. There was clearly more inhibition on women revealing themselves in the public activity of publication, hence they made more use of the pseudonymity and anonymity conventions afforded by the profession. Revealingly enough, their pseudonyms tended to be sexually neutral, or trans-sexual as in the following: 'John Oliver Hobbes' (Pearl M. T. Craigie), 'George Egerton' (Mrs Chavelita Bright), 'G. E. Brunefille' (Lady Colin Campbell), 'Lucas Malet' (Mary St Leger Harrison), 'Lucas

Cleeve' (Adelina Kingscote), 'Cecil Adair' (Evelyn Everett-Green), 'Leslie Keith' (Grace Johnston), 'Michael Fairless' (Margaret Barber), 'Maxwell Gray' (Mary Tuttiett), 'John Law' (Margaret Harkness), and, most famously, Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell (the Brontë sisters). The process is almost entirely one-way. Although men often used pseudonyms, for a variety of reasons, I have discovered only one male using even a vaguely female pen-name, the obscure nautical novelist Alexander Christie (1841–95), who wrote as 'Lindsay Anderson', an amalgamation of his mother's and his wife's maiden names.

The total of 878 yields 566 men and 312 women. As I suggest above, I imagine this is a function of greater reticence about declaring identity among women writers. Altogether, these 878 authors account for 15,490 fiction titles. At first glance, this looks like an impressively large fraction of the 50,000-or-so hypothetical total. But it needs to be qualified. Given the fact that Victorian authors were, regrettably enough, not all born in 1837 and overlap both ends of the period, the 15,490 figure should in prudence be reduced by as much as a third. The following graph shows the birthdates of the 878 novelists, from 1790 to 1870. Many of those born at the very end of the period continued writing, in some cases up to the mid-twentieth century.



Demographically, the sample reveals no great surprises. The average life expectancy of the male novelist was 66; the female novelist slightly longer, at 68.5 years. The average length of writing career (first novel

to death) was 29.9 years for men, and 35.2 years for women. The average age of starting to write was 36 for the male novelist, 33 for the female. (Given the difficulty of determining when a writer actually broke into print, I suspect this figure should be adjusted downwards by about 5 years.)

The per-author lifetime total breaks down to 17.6 novels per writer. Sexually, women novelists averaged 21 titles against men's 15.7. This is a high amount in all categories and suggests that the practice of fiction was thoroughly professionalized. At an average payment of around £250, 16–21 novels would make a useful contribution to a life's income and in many circumstances would constitute its bulk. Given the average career lengths, it gives a novel for every 24 months of professional activity. But the per-author output figures rise even higher if one breaks them down. Thus:

878 (100%) wrote 1 novel or more (15,490 titles, or 100%)
553 (63%) wrote 5 novels or more (14,542, or 93%)
400 (45.5%) wrote 10 novels or more (13,352, or 86%)
212 (24%) wrote 20 novels or more (10,651, or 68.7%)
141 (16%) wrote 30 novels or more (8,883, or 57.3%)
95 (10.8%) wrote 40 novels or more (7,277 or 46.9%)
67 (7.6%) wrote 50 novels or more (5,992, or 38.6%)
45 (5%) wrote 60 novels or more (4,159, or 30.7%)
29 (3.3%) wrote 70 novels or more (3,713, or 23.9%)
24 (2.7%) wrote 80 novels or more (3,344, or 21.5%)
19 (12.1%) wrote 90 novels or more (2,932, or 18.9%)
18 (2%) wrote 100 novels or more (2,837, or 18%)

It is evident from this sample that Victorian fiction was largely the product of a relatively small, active component within a fairly large loosely participatory community (i.e. 7 per cent producing a third of all titles). It is evident too that the canonical novelists could make do on smaller than average outputs (Dickens 15, Gaskell 15, Thackeray 9, Eliot 10) because their work was rewarded more highly than average. And Anthony Trollope, with his 47 fiction titles, is not—given the production rates of the profession—as fertile a writer as commonly believed. Almost half of all Victorian novels seem to have been produced by authors clocking up 40 or more titles.

I have not analysed the class backgrounds in the sample, or other predisposing factors such as higher education. But the prior, or concurrent profession field throws up interesting results. Among the male novelists, all but 57 can be allocated at least one (and in many

cases more than one) previous or other gainful line of work. In over half the cases, these are lines of work in which the embryo Victorian novelist has not notably succeeded. The principal stepping-stones to a Victorian man's writing fiction were as follows:

Law (predominantly service at the bar) 110
Journalism 82
Business, civil service 75
Church 57
Army 50
Teaching 37
Navy 21
Medicine 21
Manual, menial 17
Book trade 11 Total = 481

The dominance of law as an entry point into novel writing is the striking feature here. Put simply, one in five (male) Victorian novelists was a lawyer, and in the vast majority of cases a failed barrister. 'Called to the Bar but never practised' is thus the commonest prelude to a career in writing novels. And if one adds lawyer fathers (or, for women, lawyer husbands) the coincidence of a training in law with the Victorian novel is even more pronounced. Nor is it just hacks who turned from law to fiction. Among the great novelists one can cite are: Thackeray (failed barrister), Dickens (articled as a solicitor's clerk in Gray's Inn), Blackmore (called to the Bar but never practised), Stevenson (studied law at Edinburgh), Charles Reade (called to the Bar but never practised), Meredith (articled to a solicitor for a while), Wilkie Collins (called to the Bar but never practised), Harrison Ainsworth (studied law at the Inner Temple).

Some reasons for the law-fiction link may be guessed at. To read for the English Bar, it is necessary to have family money, contacts and (usually) an Oxbridge education. To practise at the Bar was, and is, a top job and one from which the working classes are generally excluded. And, for complex reasons, the British aristocracy have never encouraged younger sons to follow law, directing them instead to the army and the Church. None of this is, however, a convincing explanation of the wide bridge connecting Victorian law and Victorian fiction. A more likely factor is the closeness of the Inns of Court to Fleet Street—journalism often being the transitional stage between law and writing novels. But geographically, some of the main teaching

hospitals are even nearer Fleet Street. Yet failed doctors did not drift into novel writing in anything like the same numbers as young lawyers.

The critical factor was, presumably, the peculiar nature of legal training. Reading for the Bar centres on two activities: (1) reading, self-evidently; (2) dining; the law, even more than Parliament, being one of the best clubs in London with the difference that taking dinner a certain number of times is obligatory on trainee barristers. Moreover, the study and practice of law is punctuated by absurdly long vacations. Young doctors, especially during internship, are routinely overworked for 50 weeks of the year. And they do not just read up their professional expertise, which is largely a matter of manual and interpersonal skills. Unlike the newly-qualified doctor, the young barrister emerged from his training without any clear next step. He waited, hopefully, for briefs. Often they were slow in coming. Typically, in this awkward interval, the lawyer would marry, incurring new debts. And typically, in this interval, the drift to writing would occur. Finally, although it is a hard link to discern, there is probably an affinity between the mentalities of jurisprudence and Victorian fiction, shaped as both were by the study of individual cases and the canons of (poetic) justice.

Only 32 of the 312 women can be given alternative professional, business or trade activities. Those with no other vocational attribution than 'married woman' or 'spinster' hugely predominate:

Married women 167
Spinsters 113
Journalists 9
Teachers or governesses 8
Actresses or artists 6
Doctors or nurses 4
Book trade 4
Business 1 Total = 312

Not surprisingly, perhaps, the Victorian spinster author was the most productive single category of writer, with an average output of 24 titles.

These findings are very preliminary, and in many cases simply confirm what common sense would anyway suggest. And even where the conclusions are instructive (as in the male-professional and female-amateur finding), they should he treated with some caution. The principal uncertainty can be expressed as a question: do the 878

cases examined mirror the profession, or are they a superstructure of the most successful practitioners self-selected by being that much better than the rest? Granted the sample is probably unrepresentative it is less unrepresentative than the invariable dozen or so novelists who furnish the staple material for the study of 'Victorian fiction' in higher education. Beneath that elite handful my 878 novelists form a reasonably sound and now fairly visible foundation. Beneath these 878 is a still invisible sub-stratum (of several thousands) composed, one suspects, of failures, rank amateurs, third-rate hacks and utter nonentities. Some future literary archaeological tool will have to be devised to investigate these lower reaches.

Plot Summaries

Chapter One

Henry Esmond, William Makepeace Thackeray, 1852, 3 vols, Smith, Elder. (The full title of the work is, *The History Of Henry Esmond, Esq., A Colonel In The Service Of Her Majesty Queen Anne, Written By Himself.*) The work is a third person autobiography with an occasional artful lapse into 'I narration'. Henry is the supposed bastard son of Thomas Esmond. In fact, Thomas married the Flemish girl who was Henry's mother and the boy is legitimate although he is not aware of the fact. Thomas Esmond inherits the estate of Castlewood and is created Viscount. Henry is appointed page to the absurd Lady Isabel Castlewood. At this stage of his life he first encounters the Jesuit Father Holt, a man who profoundly influences Harry's later life. The Castlewoods support the Jacobite uprising, and the Viscount is killed at the battle of the Boyne. The estates and title pass to the good-natured and apolitical Colonel Francis Esmond. Henry attaches himself with what is to be lifelong fidelity to his patron's beautiful young wife, Rachel. As a young man, Henry brings smallpox into the household; Rachel is infected and her looks are damaged. She and her husband are increasingly estranged (his boorishness is partly due to his knowledge that Harry is the true heir). Harry goes to Cambridge, and on his return finds the Viscount has fallen in with the villainous Lord Mohun. An aspersion is made against Rachel's honour, and Castlewood fights a duel with Mohun in which he is killed, but before dying he tells Harry the truth of his birth. Harry is imprisoned for a year for his part in the duel, and Rachel unkindly blames him for her husband's death. Once released, Harry serves as a soldier on the Vigo expedition. On his return, he is reunited with Rachel at Winchester Cathedral, and forgiven by her. He meets her daughter, Beatrix, now full grown, and falls in love. Harry is swept up in the War of the Spanish Succession, and is wounded at Blenheim. After the battle of Wynendael, Harry fights a duel with Mohun in which neither party is killed. Rachel learns of Harry's sacrifice for her family (particularly her son, the present Viscount Frank) and comes to love him even more. Harry, meanwhile, is entranced by the dazzling Beatrix, the toast of fashionable London. But her lover, the Duke of Hamilton, is killed in a duel with the fateful Mohun who also dies of his wounds. Largely to win Beatrix, Esmond engineers a plot to return the Young Pretender to the throne of England. This almost succeeds, but at the last minute fails when the young Prince delays in order to seduce Beatrix. Finally disillusioned,