

**Charles Dickens and International Literature
in the Nineteenth Century**

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Figure 1: "Dickens' Dream," by Robert W. Buss (1804 – 1875).

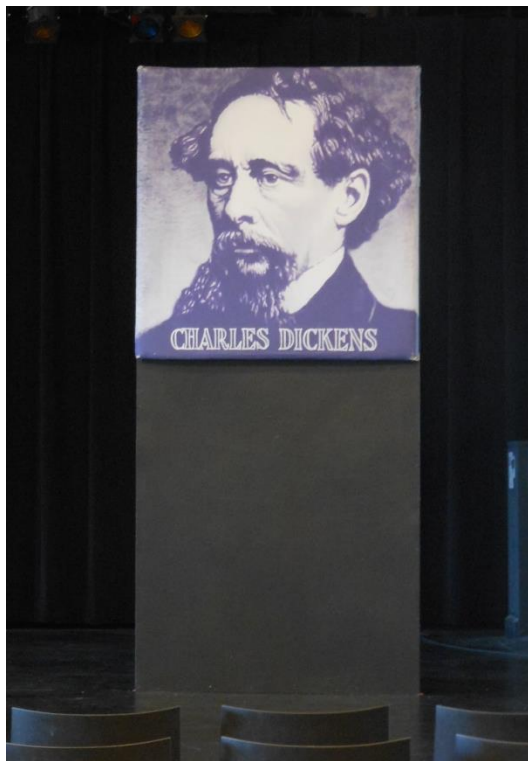


Figure 2: The "purple man" canvas at the Dickens Universe 2016.

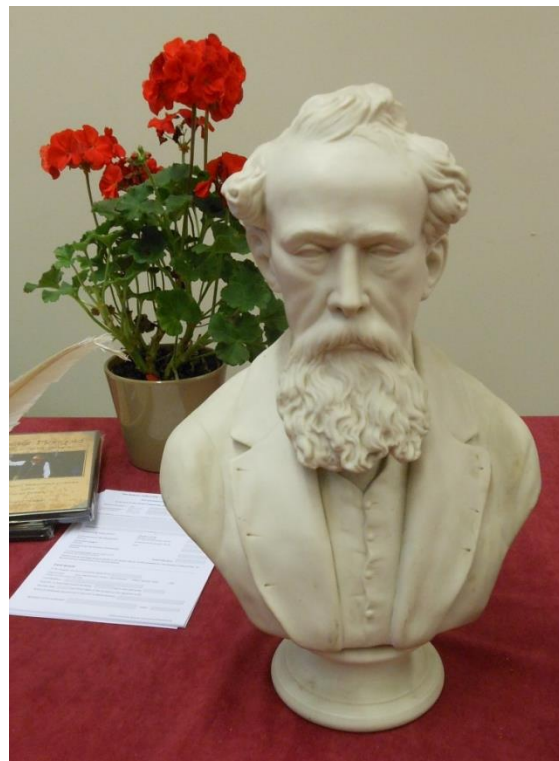


Figure 3: Paired with red geraniums, Dickens' favorite flowers, a bust of the author at the 2016 International Conference of the Dickens Fellowship.

I

Among the most popular authors of his era and the most celebrated Victorian novelists today, Charles Dickens received little critical attention for a surprisingly long time. Works like *Great Expectations* and *Bleak House*, which now represent a watermark of Victorian literature, had already gained international fame during Dickens' lifetime. Yet the novels of Charles Dickens were late arrivals to the English literary canon. Many scholars in the first half of the 1900s doubted the complexity of their vibrant characters and episodes. Dickens' whimsy and sentimentality – qualities admired in Robert W. Buss's famous rendering of the writer – contributed to his reputation as inventor and “dreamer,” rather than formidable novelist (Figure 1). The Johns Hopkins *News-Letter*, coincidentally enough, speaks to the rise of contemporary Dickens studies. “[O]nly recently has the world of literary criticism acknowledged the presence of [depth and balance] in Dickens,” reads an article from 1975.¹ Today, Dickens enjoys iconic status among academic and casual readers (Figures 2 & 3).

Serial fiction at large has seen similar patterns of reception. All of Dickens' texts were serialized – published as installments in journals or periodicals, or issued as independent monthly numbers. Part publication refers to a variety of ways in which nineteenth-century novels were produced and defines the print culture of the period. Much of the Victorian canon saw serialization in some form, but the expansion of both the newspaper press and the market for fiction gave rise to a contentious literary genre in the 1860s. Sensation novels relied on fantastical plot devices, cliff hangers, and archetypical narratives to retain readers across a period of staggered publication. As such, some of the most popular serial texts and novelists left complicated legacies. Recent scholarship has revisited the full scope of serialization – a lucrative print mode that nevertheless catalyzed the reading revolution of the 1800s.

¹ Hirsch, Alan. “It Was the Best of Times, It Was the Worst of Times...”

The explosion of the market for literature lends itself to two important readings, as it were, of Victorian literary history. By one account, the commercialist reputation of the industrial age applies to the literary sphere. The unmistakable intimacy between serialization and patterns of supply and demand locates literature among the characteristic products of the period. Printers and publishers were seen to capitalize on the expansion of reading, whether by abusing copyright laws, culling sensational material, or starting new print ventures. As a commodity, literature circulated between nations, social classes, and sectors of production as texts were pirated, adapted, and advertised among popular goods.

The commodification of literature during the 1800s thrived on an unprecedented readership. Namely, nineteenth-century England realizes “the democracy of print” as “a revolutionary social concept.”² In his masterful study of the “English common reader,” Richard Altick writes that the “three great requisites of a mass reading public – literacy, leisure, and a little pocket-money” – grew prevalent over the course of the Victorian period.³ Essentially, more people gained access to more affordable texts more often. For the first time on a comparable scale, literature was not a luxury – a development that owed much to the cheapening cost of the commodified text.

Victorian England, then, provides the setting for the arguably negative process of commodifying literature and the nominally positive birth of the democratic text. Equally relevant to the nineteenth-century revolution in reading practices, commodification and democratization generate the ambivalent literary history of the Victorian age. Specifically, the parallel growth of economic and cultural capital during the 1800s produces friction between claims for democratic reading and against “low” forms of literature.

² Altick, Richard Daniel. *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800 - 1900*. Chicago: U of Chicago, 1963. Print. p. 1.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 306.

Charles Dickens' career affords a unique negotiation of literary and market value. As a novelist, editor, and journalist, Dickens engaged directly with both the book industry and the periodical press. His productive oversight of *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* – weekly “family periodicals” begun by Dickens himself – attest to his entrepreneurial knack and identify him with the middling class of readers. His fidelity to the serial novel form cultivated the democratic appeal of his works. In fact, the publication of Dickens' first novel, *The Pickwick Papers*, in 1836-37 innovated and popularized serialization during the mid-Victorian moment; *Pickwick* was the first work of novel-length, original, and contemporary fiction issued in monthly installment form. Perhaps the most enduring link between Victorian literature and commerce involves the misconception that Dickens was paid by the word.⁴

The nineteenth century also saw the market for literature explode across national borders in response to advances in transportation and industry as well as to heightened demand. Dickens became active in, namely, the transatlantic literary exchange in a commercial capacity – as an advocate for international copyright. Dickens' first trip to America in 1842 provided material for *American Notes* and *Martin Chuzzlewit*, the primary texts for the 2015 Dickens Universe. One of the keynote lectures delivered during the conference located the reality of the Anglo-American print trade within mass *reprint* culture, piracy, and profiteering in the absence of copyright regulation.⁵ Meredith McGill addressed “Dickens's importance to antebellum American thinking about literary property” in a treatment of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, a text informed by Dickens'

⁴ Because serial novels often went to press before being concluded, Victorian writers are popularly charged with writing for profit. While serialization did involve production deadlines and page quotas – and could determine narrative structure or development – it bears less directly on the stereotype of the thick Victorian novel. Furthermore, Dickens consistently stayed ahead of each monthly press date and rarely over- or under-wrote.

⁵ McGill, Meredith. “Dickens and the Press of Philadelphia, or, What Mrs. Hominy Said.” Dickens Universe. University of California Santa Cruz. 4 August 2015. Keynote Lecture.

disillusionment with America's landscape, press – and politics.⁶ McGill elaborated on the actually political facets of nineteenth-century print culture in aligning democratic reading with notions of national identity.

The 2015 International Conference of the Dickens Fellowship – themed “Dickens, the Travelling Man” – provided an ideal introduction to Dickens and print in a global context. The complex literary exchange between America and London evokes the dynamic between Spain and another locus of nineteenth-century publishing: Paris. When Fernando Galvan and Paul Vita write, in “The Spanish Dickens,” that, “as usual, France was the main channel that brought Dickens to Europe,” they invoke the commercial and political circumstances of literature on the European continent.⁷ Ultimately, the spread of the reading habit and the proliferation of print raise concerns over quality literature compromised by popular taste and national literature endangered by – consumer culture. The juncture between literature, commerce, and politics evinces the controversial implications of the nineteenth-century reading revolution and comes to the fore in the study of nineteenth-century print on an international scale.

II

Productivity in the literary sector exploded over the course of the Victorian period for a number of reasons that realized the unprecedented availability of print. Mechanical advances in printing, paper-making, and illustration reduced the cost of the resources and labor involved in the print industry. Richard Altick points to practical factors that kept books expensive during the early 1800s, referring to circumstances like the paper shortage occasioned by the Napoleonic

⁶ McGill, Meredith L. *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834-1853*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003. Print. p. 113.

⁷ De Sousa, Maria Leonor Machado. “Dickens in Portugal.” *The Reception of Charles Dickens in Europe*. Vol. II. Ed. Michael Hollington. London: Continuum, 2013. Print. p. 197.

Wars.⁸ The development of transportation networks – especially, railroad expansion in the 1830s and ‘40s – accelerated the distribution of both raw materials and printed texts across a wider area. In *Charles Dickens and His Publishers*, Robert L. Patten writes, “Now that...printers could get larger supplies of paper faster, and print more quickly, they had the technological capacity to issue much larger editions” of books.⁹ As well as larger print runs, the Victorian book industry issued more published titles given the “proliferation of revenue” for writers and the professionalization of authorship, two trends that Patten acknowledges.¹⁰ Rising literacy rates, motivated in part by education reform, and sheer population growth also fostered the mass reading public – but the increasing affordability of books and periodicals cannot be underestimated.

Literature in book form grew ever more marketable to the common reader during the Victorian decades of the nineteenth century.¹¹ The release of Constable’s Miscellany, a series of non-fiction reprints priced at 3s. 6d. per volume and appearing every three or so weeks, helped prepare what Altick deems “one of the most exciting periods in English publishing history and, in the long view, one of the most fruitful.”¹² Launched in 1825, the venture departed from the industry standard for popular literature – between 5 and 6s. per volume – and coincided with similar serial runs of practical, non-fiction texts. The first cheap book craze, as Altick calls the uptick in affordable literature between 1827 and 1832, inaugurated the six-shilling, single-volume reprint that delivered democratic reading into the mid-1800s, when book and periodical

⁸ Altick, p. 262.

⁹ Patten, Robert L. *Charles Dickens and His Publishers*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1978. Print. p. 57.

¹⁰ Patten, p. 27, 20. According to *British Novelists and Their Styles*, an 1856 study by David Masson, 26 novels were published in Britain in 1820. The annual yield quadrupled to 101 books in 1830 and remained fairly constant into Masson’s time. Masson, David. *British Novelists and Their Styles*. Cambridge: Proquest LLC, 1999. Web.

¹¹ Though agreement among literary scholars is less unanimous, historians date the Victorian period from 1837, the year of Queen Victoria’s coronation, to the Queen’s death in 1901.

¹² Altick, p. 273.

sales truly accelerated.¹³ The democratization of the book trade, nevertheless, was a gradual process that unfolded even as the 31s. 6d. triple-decker continued to dominate the publishing supply chain. Readers of tolerable means subscribed to circulating libraries for the latest fiction and arguably monopolized “respectable” literature until the later decades of the century.

As books came slowly within the reach of buyers, in addition to borrowers, efforts to reduce periodical prices also mobilized a broader reading public. The establishment of “cheap respectable newspapers” and “cheap family periodicals” created an alternative to seditious or salacious journalism that accommodated the middle-class sensibility. The productivity of the radical press at the turn of nineteenth century elicited legislative attempts to regulate the periodical industry. The so-called “Taxes on Knowledge” – which included taxes on printed advertisements and paper and introduced the newspaper stamp – escalated in 1819, when only religious or charitable publications and part-issues of works originally released in volume form were exempted from the newspaper stamp duty.¹⁴ An inadvertent product of the intended reform, the penny journal of sensational, Gothic fiction further compromised the reputation of the press. *Chambers’s Edinburgh Journal* and the *Penny Magazine* ran miscellaneous pieces and even, in the former case, weekly short stories early in the “War of the Unstamped Press” and were important, according to Altick, for elevating journalism above “rabble-rousing politics and crude sensationalism almost exclusively.”¹⁵ After the advertisement tax, the mandatory newspaper stamp, and the paper duty were abolished in 1853, 1855, and 1861, respectively, periodical circulation thrived on working- and middle-class demand.

In *Serializing Fiction in the Victorian Press*, Graham Law refers to the 1860s for the “simultaneous erosion” of the “autonomy of the proletarian market” – the site of the penny

¹³ Ibid., p. 332.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 328, 321.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 339.

bloods and the hack press – and of “bourgeois prejudice against the weekly serial” – a predominantly lower-middle-class purveyor of fiction.¹⁶ Law ventures a consciously economic treatment of fiction in installment form. During the Victorian period, he writes, monthly serialization in “relatively expensive, low-circulation formats, produced as petty commodities for the bourgeois market by the book publishers,” yielded to weekly serialization in “relatively cheap, high-circulation formats, produced as commodities for the mass market by newspaper proprietors.”¹⁷ His attention to the rise of the sensation novel, newspaper syndication, and the culmination of the cheap book and cheap journalism movements in the late 1800s reprises N. N. Feltes’ argument in *Modes of Production of Victorian Novels*.

Feltes had identified “the moment” of Dickens’ *Pickwick* with “the production of a commodity-text.”¹⁸ In *Modes of Production*, he approaches the Victorian context for literature with Dickens in 1836, when the *Pickwick* phenomenon determined Dickens’ literary success. Feltes describes the serial novel’s significance for the transformation of literature into an item of consumption during the nineteenth century: “*Pickwick Papers* marks the transition...from the petty-commodity production of books to the capitalist production of texts.”¹⁹ He traces the ideology of capital throughout the actual narrative, but *Pickwick*’s publication history speaks for itself. Having capped at a discouraging 500 copies during the first four installments, circulation figures reached 40,000 by the fifteenth of twenty numbers.²⁰ *Pickwick*’s popularity inspired hats, coats, cigars, and soaps celebrating the novel’s eponymous hero. Moreover, the first release of new, novel-length fiction on the monthly installment plan inspired the serialization of many

¹⁶ Law, Graham. *Serializing Fiction in the Victorian Press*. Houndmills; New York: Palgrave, 2000. Print. p. 23.

¹⁷ Law, p. 14.

¹⁸ Feltes, N. N. “The Production of a Commodity-Text: The Moment of *Pickwick*.” *Modes of Production of Victorian Novels*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986. Print. pp. 1-17.

¹⁹ Feltes, p. 3.

²⁰ Altick, p. 279.

Victorian works in independent monthly numbers between the 1830s and the 1870s. All but three of Dickens' fifteen novels appeared over the course of twenty months, in octavo issues of 32 pages of text and two illustrative plates bound in Dickens' signature blue-green wrapper (Figure 4). With circumstantial exceptions – such as George Eliot's adapted pattern of serialization or identifying differences among installment wrappers – *Pickwick* set the precedent for monthly installment fiction.

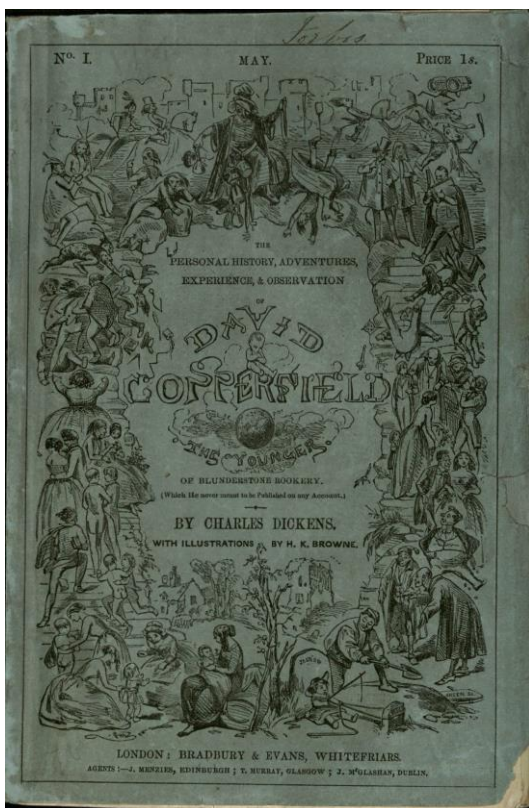


Figure 4: The first monthly installment of *David Copperfield* (1849-50), published in London by Bradbury & Evans. Image courtesy of the Sheridan Libraries Rare Books and Manuscripts Department.

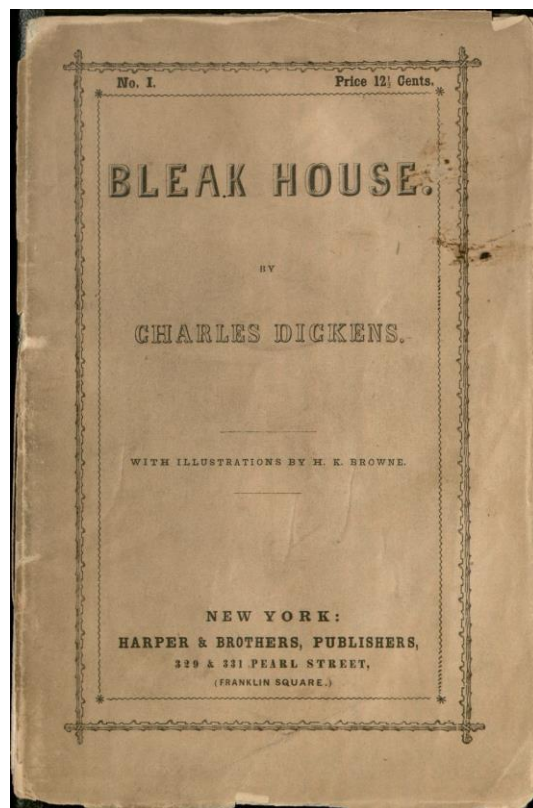


Figure 5: The first monthly installment of *Bleak House* as it was released in America by Harper & Brothers in 1853. Image courtesy of the Sheridan Libraries Rare Books and Manuscripts Collection.

From Altick to Patten, even critics less aligned with Feltes' investment in commodification agree that *Pickwick* innovated Victorian literary culture.²¹ It represented a material hybrid between the book and the periodical while the triple-decker and the serial novel were socially stratified forms of print. Lower-middle- and working-class readers could meet *Pickwick's* shilling-a-number cost, often by pooling resources and reading collectively. The monthly installment shared the ephemeral materiality of the newspaper and provided similar avenues for advertising – but the habit of binding installments into volumes after a completed run also approximates the serial novel to the distinguished triple-decker. The monthly serial narrative, furthermore, circulated independent of periodical features; each monthly number sold on the appeal of fiction alone. Appropriately, then, monthly installment fiction waned as single-volume reprints catered to the common reader and magazine serials secured more privileged audiences by the late 1800s. It represents the transition to integrated readership during the century that democratized literature.

III

Dickens' personally anticipated trip to the United States took place five successful years after the publication of the *Pickwick Papers* and disenchanted the author with American ideals. His political liberalism was “tempered and refined,” reads Michael Slater's deft biography, by his impressions of the American press and legal system.²² Likewise, many of Dickens' readers were offended by his criticism – for profit – of the nation's political, cultural, and literal landscape in *American Notes*. Dickens had already stirred controversy during his tour of the eastern states – namely, over the question of international copyright.

²¹ Robert Patten writes that “the prodigious success of *Pickwick* in parts signals a revolution in publishing.” Patten, p. 46.

²² Slater, Michael. *Charles Dickens*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. Print. p. 198.

Audiences reacted against the self-promotional, commercialist implications of Dickens' particular defense of authorship. He spoke publicly at banquets held in his honor in Boston, New York, and Hartford, urging American support for a transatlantic copyright agreement that finally transpired in 1891.²³ To many of his listeners, Dickens appeared ungrateful for his enthusiastic reception in the States by broaching such a "potentially explosive topic."²⁴ Furthermore, Slater admits, his remarks would have seemed less than conscientious given America's ongoing economic depression. Nevertheless, the issue of international copyright derived directly and inevitably from the newly commodified literary text. Nineteenth-century global networks for literary exchange were more extensive and efficient than ever, to the effect that profiting from periodical circulation, book sales, and adapted texts in the absence of copyright protection became easy. Dickens' advocacy for *international* legislation was effectively intrinsic to the nineteenth century, when the acceleration of literary production and circulation actually disadvantaged British and American authors. In fact, Harriet Beecher Stowe would find herself mistreated by the transatlantic market some ten years after Dickens' American tour. Recently dubbed "[a]n American analogy" to the *Pickwick Papers* by virtue of its enormous popular appeal, Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* circulated in around 40 British editions within a year of its release overseas in 1852; Stowe received royalties from none of them.²⁵ Dickens invoked

²³ Ibid., p. 180, 182, 183. The United States was, in fact, comparatively late in ratifying international copyright law. Agreements had been reached in the 1840s and '50s between Britain and France, Belgium, and Spain. The 1886 Berne Convention signaled further progress, but America was not among the signatories. 55 – 56 in Oxford Trans. Hist.

²⁴ Slater, p. 180.

²⁵ Lund, Michael. *America's Continuing Story: An Introduction to Serial Fiction, 1850-1900*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993. Print. p. 16. In *The Publishing History of Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Claire Parfait compares the versions of consumer culture inspired by *Paul et Virginie*, published in France in 1788, *Pickwick*, and *Uncle Tom*. Parfait, Claire. *The Publishing History of Uncle Tom's Cabin, 1852-2002*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007. Print. p. 62, 108.

American authorship in his memoranda on international copyright – although he channeled what may not have been identical interests.²⁶

Popular British texts became quintessential bestsellers – a designation coined in late-nineteenth-century America, as Claire Parfait observes – once they arrived on the American market for literature.²⁷ In *America's Continuing Story*, Michael Lund writes that “[a]n expanding readership, cheaper paper, more efficient printing methods, rapid railroad distribution, and a developing economy provided the framework for a growing book market and an exploding magazine trade” in the mid-century United States.²⁸ Lund’s description conforms to British accounts of change, but America’s publishing industry outperformed its transatlantic twin. Richard Altick notes that cheap publishing was more advanced in the United States, and John Sutherland affirms that “[c]opy for copy American publishers vastly outproduced English.”²⁹ Serial fiction, moreover, figured prominently within a model of extensive, thriving, and unchecked periodical distribution. Meredith McGill parses transatlantic literary commodification: “Dickens seems not to have understood that his popularity in America was in part a function of the lack of international copyright, the system of reprinting he continued publicly to attack.”³⁰ Both McGill and Lund read political resonances into the freedom with which texts were reissued and disseminated in the United States, suggesting a democracy of the press consistent with American national character. Whereas Lund indicates that the “wide distribution of literature” and “the variety of magazines seemed to many an extension...of constitutional democracy,” McGill notices “Jacksonian resistance to centralized development”

²⁶ Slater, p. 185, 187.

²⁷ Parfait, p. 67.

²⁸ Lund, p. 44.

²⁹ Altick, p. 300. Sutherland, John. *Victorian Novelists and Publishers*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976. Print. p. 17.

³⁰ McGill, “Circulating Media,” p. 113.

on the 1830s and '40s print market.³¹ Just as American reprint culture seemed to have liberated the commodification of the text, it recast the connotations of democratic reading.

Yet while its press aligned with its politics in idiosyncratic ways, America's strictly literary identity was arguably at stake. John Sutherland continues, in *Victorian Novelists and Publishers*: "[T]itle for title English novelists vastly outproduced American. In America the nineteenth century may have been a 'gilded age' of publishing but it was certainly not a golden age of fiction."³² Whatever the credence of his claim against American literature, Sutherland evokes the real prevalence of British texts on the American market (Figure 5). Harper & Brothers, which surpassed every London publishing house in size, premiered *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* with serial novels from the likes of Dickens and Thackeray in 1850.³³ Literary historians have suggested that the popularity of foreign writers in the States – and the editorial impulse to ply their commercial appeal – stifled native authorship and marginalized emergent American novelists. Lund writes that the 1870s realized the assertion of American literary identity as periodicals like *Harper's*, *Putnam's*, and the *Atlantic* sought to promote autochthonous fiction.³⁴ Whereas Dickens forfeited both agency and revenue on the transatlantic exchange, American advocates for international copyright represented potentially unique interests related to national literary heritage.

The evolution of French and Spanish literature during the nineteenth century provides a compelling analogy to Victorian fiction in political, economic, and artistic flux as it develops in England and travels overseas. Spain's negotiation of national identity intersects with its appropriation of French novels and literary modes in the mid-1800s, during the moment of the

³¹ Lund, p. 112, 49. McGill, "Circulating Media," p. 109.

³² Sutherland, p. 17.

³³ Claybaugh, Amanda. "The Victorian Novel and America." *The Oxford Handbook of the Victorian Novel*. Ed. Lisa Rodensky. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Print. p. 232. Lund, p. 47.

³⁴ Lund, p. 105.

novela de entregas – literally, the “novel of parts” – and the periodical serial, the *folletín*.

Accordingly, Elisa Martí-López posits translation as the “first form of modern Spanish literature” in her study of *Borrowed Words*, while other scholars submit that “[t]he history of the novel in Spain in the nineteenth century [...] is very much the history of Spain’s literary reliance on, reverence for, and, less often, rejection of French aesthetics.”³⁵ The period between 1840 and 1870 saw the popularization of installment fiction in England as well as its two continental neighbors. In fact, the first contemporary novel to appear serially in a French newspaper – the first *roman-feuilleton* – was Balzac’s *La vieille fille*, begun in the groundbreaking *La Presse* just seven months after *Pickwick*’s launch from Chapman & Hall.³⁶ The debut of the “penny paper” in 1836 precipitated the French transition in reading patterns over the middle decades of the 1800s. Falling prices and mounting interest in reading among the lower classes culminated in the beginning of the mass press with *Le Petit Journal* in 1863, on the cusp of British newspaper syndication.³⁷ Fiction, moreover, catalyzed the movement away from political journalism in mid-century France as in early and pre-Victorian England.

Internationally, then, the commodification and the democratization of literature refer to mutually enforcing trends. The affordability of print facilitated its increasing accessibility even as new genres and print forms catered to the range of readers’ means. Yet comparative analysis reveals the nuanced texture, so to speak, of the nineteenth-century reading revolution and begs a clearer definition of “democratic” print culture. The birth of the French popular press, for instance, segregated the audience for fiction; “cultivated” readers subscribed to literary journals

³⁵ Martí-López, Elisa. *Borrowed Words: Translation, Imitation, and the Making of the Nineteenth-Century Novel in Spain*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2002. Print. p. 78. Galván, Fernando, and Paul Vita. “The Spanish Dickens: Under Cervantes’s Inevitable Shadow.” *The Reception of Charles Dickens in Europe*. p. 169.

³⁶ Adamowicz-Hariasz, Maria. “From Opinion to Information: The *Roman-Feuilleton* and the Transformation of the Nineteenth-Century French Press.” *Making the News: Modernity & the Mass Press in Nineteenth-Century France*. Eds. De la Motte, Dean, and Jeannene M Przyblyski. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999. Print. p. 163.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

or reviews known as the *grands journaux*.³⁸ Even in America, writes Michael Lund, “quality monthlies” resisted competition from “newer, less expensive magazines thought to be pandering to the untrustworthy tastes of the lower classes.”³⁹ Nineteenth-century responses to the recycled ingredients and formulaic composition of sensation novels and *folletines* prefigure contemporary rhetoric on paraliterature, a term that describes some non-canonical texts and popular genres.⁴⁰ To what extent is the democratic text paraliterary? Did the commodification of literature expose more people to the *same* forms of fiction? Nineteenth-century print history promises seminal insight into the commercial and political suggestions of literary value and identity.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 180-81.

³⁹ Lund, p. 49.

⁴⁰ Maria Adamowicz-Hariasz cites Daniel Couégnas’ *Introduction à la paralittérature*. Adamowicz-Hariasz, p. 166, 166n.