

But before that happened, Thackeray's "man of the world magazine" succeeded because its editor was a man of *two* worlds, both of which were able to leave their indelible imprints on a unique periodical at a critical historical moment.

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#### ENDNOTES

1. Since the original cover of the *Cornhill's* first number is generally missing in bound volumes, the letter is most easily found in *The Letters and Private Papers of William Makepeace Thackeray* (hereafter referred to as LPP): 4: 169.
2. Thompson is quoted in Lady Ritchie's introduction to the eighteenth volume of the *Centenary Biographical Edition* of the works of William Makepeace Thackeray, p. xxxvii.
3. David Marshall makes this point throughout *The Figure of Theater: Shaftesbury, DeFoe, Adam Smith, and George Eliot*.
4. For circulation figures, see John Sutherland's "The *Cornhill's* Sales and Payments: the First Decade."
5. Michael Baker describes the social situation of Victorian actors and actresses, many of whom lived scrupulously careful lives to dispel prejudices, in *The Rise of the Victorian Actor* (see especially Chapter Three, "The Actor's Community," 63-108).
6. See Chapter XI, "Crosscurrents and Countercurrents," pages 350-99.
7. Ina Ferris offers interesting theories regarding Thackeray's difficulties with sustaining realism in "Realism and the Discord of Endings: The Example of Thackeray"; On the quality of Thackeray's late work, Alexander Welsh notes that "the received opinion that Thackeray's achievement diminishes after *The Newcomes* is generally sound" (2). However, I would argue that when these works are examined in the context of their commercial and cultural milieu, questions of textual production and audience consumption become as important as assessments of literary value.
8. I have chosen not to discuss Thackeray's abilities as a businessman or his attention to the more practical matters of editing here. Certainly Trollope created a lingering and damaging portrait of him as both inefficient and indolent in his biography of Thackeray. However, Trollope's pronouncements have been successfully challenged by critics like Robert A. Colby, Edgar Harden, and Peter Shillingsburg, who notes that "it has been altogether too easy to overplay Thackeray in the role of procrastinator, the would-be gentleman of leisure, and to lose sight of the facts concerning Thackeray the businessman and professional writer" (16).

## "Discourses of distinction": The Reception of the *Cornhill Magazine*, 1859-60

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On 24 December 1859, the *Morning Advertiser* introduced its readers to a new "arrival" in the field of periodical literature:

There lies before us one of the lustiest and most promising literary infants it has been our fortune to see in more years of book acquaintance than we care to mention. It is indeed a marvellous shilling's worth, containing, *imprimis*, sixty pages of announcements, primarily literary, which we are told by those versant in such matters, produce to the publishers 11 guineas sterling per page; a godly help towards the 128 pages of contributions which follow them (24 Dec. 1859: 3).

This representative magazine, symbol of the commercial literary marketplace, is the *Cornhill*, the current sensation of the book shop and circulating library circuit, a magazine that quickly assumed almost mythic status as a cultural signifier. The aim of this paper is to investigate the nature of this reputation in the first months of its launch. How was it received when the first issue appeared on 23 December 1859? At a time when observers like the anonymous reviewer for the *British Quarterly Review* marvelled at the "flood" of magazines and papers which had "sprung up, and continues to spring up, with the mysterious fecundity of certain fungi" how far was the *Cornhill* seen as welcome tract for these times? (29 Apr. 1859: 316).

To focus the current inquiry, I have concentrated on a small, but significant, cluster within the one thousand or so journals listed in the 1860 *Newspaper Press Directory*<sup>1</sup> which addressed themselves to literary issues, together with the fragmented evidence of correspondence and reminiscences. The critics who reviewed the *Cornhill* for the daily and weekly press in 1859 and 1860 freshly encountered the problems of subject and definition posed by such features as the title, the cover, the proportion of

fiction to non-fiction and the indirect, yet persistent, ways in which George Smith's intentions as publisher and Thackeray's influence as editor were allowed to emerge. Yet what can also be observed is the extent to which the *Cornhill* was constituted socially; its consumption was increasingly linked to social differentiation. As mid-Victorian England became a print-reading culture in which new readers, authors, and texts proliferated, the socially and culturally elite found the need for a boundary between high and popular cultures more acute than ever.<sup>2</sup> Magazine culture, in particular, circulated among other socially diverse cultural practices; like other such practices, magazine consumption was linked to social differentiation.<sup>3</sup> Consider, for example, this commentary offered by the *Economist* in October 1861:

Newspapers live by news and politics, and the greater quarterlies by information and politics, the monthly magazines live by tales and papers . . . They almost all of them aim at different ideals . . . *Macmillan's* has a high class of interests. The *Cornhill* is a kind of *Chambers' Journal*. . . . It relies for its sale mainly on the fictions it contains . . . (9 Mar. 1861: 260-1).

This passage's selection of critical judgements suggests a prejudice against popular culture. The reviewer considers the *Cornhill* but proceeds to cordon it off from a more exclusive literary audience. The passage plays Victorian textual forms off against one another, to the newer magazine's disadvantage. Nor is this an isolated response. Amongst private readers, too, fascination with the new shilling monthly was bound up with disdain for popular reading. Writing in February 1860, barely two months after the magazine's launch, Edward Fitzgerald gave this patronising summary:

Thackeray's first Number was famous, I thought: his own little Roundabout Paper so pleasant: but the Second Number, I say, lets the Cockney in already: about Hogarth: Lewes is vulgar: and I don't think one can care much for Thackeray's novel. He is always talking so much of himself, too. I have been very glad to find out I could take to a Novel again; in Trollope's *Barchester Towers*, etc [i.e. *Framley Parsonage*]: not perfect, like Miss Austen: but then so much wider Scope: and perfect enough to make me feel I know the People though caricatured or carelessly drawn.<sup>4</sup>

As well as revealing his customary fastidiousness, Fitzgerald uses familiar ideological strategies to marginalise the popular as a commonplace and non-literary category. His remarks compose a picture of a new kind of magazine which cares little for exclusivity or delicacy and which does not disdain to open its pages to the second-rate; of contributors who are coarse, crude and "vulgar," whose works are "little" rather than large, ephemeral rather than timeless.

Such social-cum-aesthetic judgements are ideologies of distinction.<sup>5</sup> Critical dismissal of the *Cornhill* reinforces the reader's predilection for elite cultural forms by devaluing more widely accessible forms of cultural capital. The reviews of 1859-60 confirm the *Cornhill's* immense popularity and the admiration it inspired in a wide range of reviewers, but they also reveal the frequent anxieties and prejudices which the *Cornhill* excited in elite readers - about popular literacy, about social barriers, about the development of a distinguishable popular culture - all of which emerged in the first months of the magazine's appearance and which have invariably been ignored.

## II

Publishing history has traditionally assigned the *Cornhill* a symbolic role alongside the many other quarterly, monthly and weekly magazines which were taking it upon themselves to fill the demands of an expanding reading public for entertainment and education.<sup>6</sup> The concept of a magazine that would fill the demand for an inexpensive monthly, one that would welcome new writers and imaginative literature as *Macmillan's* did not, one that would sell for a shilling as *Blackwood's* did not was clearly timely, well convened and well organised. George Smith called the *Cornhill's* launch "the literary event of the year."<sup>7</sup> When, on 23 December 1859, the first bright orange issue of the magazine (dated January 1860) hit the stands, it created a sensation and sold more copies than either its creators or its competitors expected. "I can remember," recalled Anne Thackeray, "messengers arriving during the day when that first number was published to tell the Editor of fresh thousands being wanted by the public; then more messengers came, and, we were told how the printers were kept working till all hours of the night."<sup>8</sup> Many people agreed with Anthony Trollope's comment that "nothing equal to it of its kind was ever hitherto put forth."<sup>9</sup> Estimates vary as high as 120,000, but sales of the first *Cornhill* stood at 110,000, although this settled down to around 87,500 at the end of 1860.<sup>10</sup> Four impressions totalling nearly 80,000 copies were bought up in the two weeks following the launch.<sup>11</sup> "[T]he success of the *Cornhill* magazine No. 1, has been quite without parallel in the records of magazine sales" announced the *Leeds Intelligencer* (31 Dec. 1859: 3). Although the figures had dropped to about 20,000 by 1870, this original circulation has left its trace in public and university libraries all over the world, a reminder of the *Cornhill's* centrality.

By the early twentieth century, cultural criticism could still cite the pervasiveness of the *Cornhill* and its connection with popular pleasure reading. As Henry James recalled in 1914, "They [those issues of the *Cornhill*] were enrichments of life, they were *large* arrivals. . . ." Remembering his youthful experience of looking through the first issue of the

magazine, James contrasted its magnitude as an event with the satiated consumption of the present time: "Is anything like that thrill possible to-day - for a submerged and blinded and deafened generation, a generation so smothered in quantity and number that discrimination, under the grasp, has neither air to breathe, nor room to turn round?"<sup>12</sup> Other early twentieth century critics (who, admittedly, were also often contributors themselves) tended to concur with James' nostalgic view. For E. T. Cook, the *Cornhill* was "the monthly visitor, eagerly awaited, gladly welcomed, and sometimes...never allowed to leave."<sup>13</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle recalled his "reverence for this splendid magazine with its traditions from Thackeray to Stevenson, and the thought that I had won my way into it pleased me even more than the cheque for £30 which came duly to hand."<sup>14</sup> "As a work of art," noted Leonard Huxley in 1922, "it won universal admiration in 1860, and if to-day we are critical of its subsidiary parts . . . we are still conscious of the great beauty of its chief features."<sup>15</sup> Our own understanding of the early reception of the *Cornhill* continues to be strongly shaped by the claims of these reminiscences, especially as supplemented by the narrative accounts embodied in George Smith's "Our Birth and Parentage" and Anne Thackeray's "The First Number of the *Cornhill Magazine*."<sup>16</sup> Their expressions of appreciation are shaped by their writers' retrospective stances.<sup>17</sup>

The *Cornhill Magazine's* attractions to multiple audiences did give it sufficient momentum to outstrip other mid-Victorian competitors and to become a long-term classic within the field of magazine publishing. Its shrewd mixture of ingredients and wide diversity of subject matter - travel, science, fiction, history, biography - was one of the features on which the editor and publisher prided themselves and to which reviewers responded. The reviews of 1859-60 reveal not simply the magazine's initial popularity but its multiple appeal: the extent to which the *Cornhill* seemed to cross the tenuous boundary between gendered spheres, between political factions, between metropolitan and provincial. For example, on 24 December, *John Bull* (Tory) congratulated the magazine on the "brilliance of its debut" (24 Dec. 1859: 828), the *Atlas* (Whig) similarly offered a word of welcome for a new friend, whose orange cover and tempting outside conceal a store of good things within" (31 Dec. 1859: 543). The *English Churchman* agreed, suggesting that, "if the first number is a fair specimen of the getting up of the work, its quantity, quality and illustrations, a shilling is a low price for it, and its cheapness will secure it a wide circulation" (5 Jan. 1860: 11). In these matters literary, the *Nonconformist* was in complete agreement, acknowledging that the *Cornhill* was "everything a magazine could be, in rich variety and high excellence of materials" (15 Feb. 1860: 214). The *Englishwoman's Review* suggested that readers "must indeed be hard to please who do not find that which is acceptable

and instructive and amusing (31 Dec. 1859: 237); the rival *Lady's Newspaper* concurred and suggested that the magazine "will soon distance all competition and reign supreme in the world of periodical literature" (31 Dec. 1859: 534). Amongst the weekly literary magazines, *Notes and Queries* also suggested that it was "obvious from the character of the articles, [and] the reputation of the writers . . . that they [the editors] intend the *Cornhill Magazine* to be one of the permanent institutions of the country" (31 Dec. 1859: 542), while the *Athenaeum*, the most prestigious literary journal, spoke of the magazine's "great" and "well-earned success" (31 Dec. 1859: 890). In London, the *West End News* pictured "a close and happy friendship" between itself and the new magazine (7 Jan. 1860: 3), while in the provinces, the *York Gazette*, a conservative weekly paper directed at the land owning and farming communities of the North and East Ridings of Yorkshire, pronounced that "the *Cornhill* has fulfilled in every respect our most sanguine expectations and reflects the highest credit on all parties involved" (14 Jan. 1860: 8). Moving beyond Britain, the *Globe and Traveller* recommended the new magazine to its readers in the far-flung outposts of the expanding Empire as "a splendid shilling's worth of rich and varied reading" (1 Feb. 1860: 219). Summing up for the trade, the *Bookseller* announced that "the *Cornhill Magazine* has opened our eyes to the great fact of there being a very large, and hitherto overlooked mass of readers . . ." (26 Apr. 1860: 213). For these first reviewers, the *Cornhill* belonged in a cultural mainstream, one seemingly untroubled by separating currents of elite and popular culture. In doing so, the magazine gained entrance without apparent struggle to a range of social and political structures within Victorian society.

The adaptability of the *Cornhill* to the kind of diverse cultural literacies implied by the reviews can, in part, be traced back to the magazine's dual literary parentage in the commercial world of the Victorian publisher (represented by George Smith) and to Thackeray's status as a writer whose novels, as Gaye Tuchman points out, "qualified simultaneously as high culture and popular culture."<sup>18</sup> Smith himself was well suited for periodical publishing in this new age where multiple companies vied for sales and readers.<sup>19</sup> By 1859, Smith had established himself in the field as a recognised arbiter whose imprint - the Brownings, Elizabeth Gaskell, Charlotte Brontë, John Ruskin - was not merely a sign of legal ownership but a classificatory cachet. As the stock of these authors rose, so did that of Smith, Elder. The pointedly genial attitude of many critics towards the *Cornhill* is based on their sense of Smith, Elder and Co. as the embodiment and champions of literary value. For example, the *Englishwoman's Review* announced as a "fact" that "Smith and Elder [sic] would be sure to have the periodical excellent of its kind" (31 Dec. 1859: 327) and had very definite ideas about what the firm represented. It promoted artistic autonomy; it

championed a generation of select writers, and it created taste by publishing for posterity.

This, however, reflects at best only one element of Smith's complex position in the contemporary field. He was also a pioneer in discovering the possibilities for planned popularity. Almost every reviewer talks, as the *Morning Herald* does, of the "expectations of the public" (23 Dec. 1859: 3) or of the atmosphere of "intense curiosity" engendered by the prospect of the *Cornhill's* appearance (*Englishwoman's Review*, 31 Dec. 1859: 327). "It is a long time," suggested *The Daily News* on 22nd December, "since any event unconnected with politics or battles has been so eagerly looked for as the appearance of the first number of the *Cornhill*" (22 Dec, 1859: 5). Smith, who claimed to have spent £5000 on advertising, created a media event. Announcements in the weekly press throughout the autumn of 1859, the production of prospectuses in the form of throwaway handbills, newsagents and booksellers' window bills, adverts on billboards, all worked to affirm the new magazine's importance.

The initial reviews reveal, too, the extent to which Smith was at the forefront in recognising the nature of the book as a commodity. As Bill Bell and others have argued, the very physical format of a book in the nineteenth century carried with it its own significance as "a status-resonant object."<sup>21</sup> The bibliography of the *Cornhill* tells part of this story. In the autumn and winter of 1859, advertisements stressed not only its affordable price (one shilling) but its look and feel: "handsomely printed on good paper. . . ."<sup>22</sup> The *Cornhill* was, in the first instance, a physical thing; it was to consist of 128 pages per issue, so many words per page, two full page illustrations, several smaller illustrative cuts and a map.<sup>23</sup> It was to be a status symbol, an indication to others of the buyer's taste and discernment, to be displayed at home in the drawing room or read in the railway carriage. Once published, it looked attractive and even seductive. "The very cover," enthused the business orientated *Morning Herald* (which had made the magazine's launch a headline story), "is enough to tempt one to buy what is concealed by so fair an outside. The drawing of the four illustrations is proof that they are products of a masterhand" (23 Dec. 1859: 3). Yet the new *Cornhill* was also respectable. Aesthetically, as well as morally, it was as the writer for the *Weekly Dispatch* noted, "a periodical that may lie on the table of any man without impeaching his sense, which may contribute to his information, and which he may safely leave in the hands of every member of his family" (8 Jan. 1860: 6). This image of the *Cornhill* as focal point of the private family home is itself revealing. It presupposes and promises a particular social and moral order, what George Steiner describes as "a bourgeois order founded on certain hierarchies of literacy, of purchasing power, of leisure, of caste."<sup>24</sup>

There is another sense in which the *Cornhill* can be seen to disappear

into the economic horizon of the commodity text. This is in the way in which the magazine's editor was himself reconstructed as an image, created for, and perpetuated by the marketplace. Although Peter Shillingsburg's *Pegasus in Harness* suggests the residual idea of the independent writer's relative resistance to the nineteenth-century market,<sup>25</sup> Thackeray's own career as editor of the *Cornhill* is distinguishable by his making the trade of authorship part of a marketable professional identity. And, as his comments on the design of the magazine's cover indicate, he believed that his involvement was one of the commodities on offer. The cover, had to be designed, he told Smith, "to bear my *cachet* you see and be a man of the world Magazine, a little cut of Temple Bar or Charles I on the outside?"<sup>26</sup> A good name is, to use Pierre Bourdieu's phrase, a kind of "symbolic capital," with immediate exchange value in the literary market. That is, the more fame one has, the more one might be expected to accumulate, much as economic capital helps one amass more economic capital. Thackeray felt that he had become better known than almost any competitor in the fiction market and felt great satisfaction as he contemplated the value of his talents. "8,500 in the next 2 years from Smith and Elder - prodigious!... One talks of stopping, but how stop with such fees?"<sup>27</sup> Moreover, in the business of authorship, Thackeray's name was as familiar to consumers of popular culture "the public," the middle-class subscribers to Mudie's, as it was to the cultural elite, the "men of letters."<sup>28</sup> The *Englishwoman's Review* makes the point that "The known and long tried talent of the Editor . . . conspired to attract public attention to the *Cornhill* magazine long before the articles were set up in type or perhaps written" (31 Dec 1859: 328). *Bell's Weekly Messenger* notes simply that "his [Thackeray's] name would sell anything" (10 Mar. 1869: 6). Such was the influence of the Thackeray cult. Thackeray's own definition of the *Cornhill's* readership and his evocation of the "social table" in the magazine's advertisement letter - professor, curate, artisan, schoolmaster, child, himself as host - neatly summarises this consciousness (shared with Smith) of his role as producer of commodities for the cultural marketplace, and as one of the commodities on offer.<sup>29</sup> Smith, Elder had bought Thackeray's intellectual labour power, social status, his "great name" (as the *Illustrated News of the World* put it (3 Mar. 1860: 131)) and his appeal to readers for two years, divided into monthly intervals. The pattern of control, initially imposed by money, determined that the end result should be a fictional text of a negotiable length, together with a miscellaneous paper, produced regularly and to be handed over complete at an agreed time.<sup>30</sup>

In an industry dominated by increasingly sophisticated promotional strategies, for Smith to recruit Thackeray as editor and then to exploit his name turned out to be a shrewd move. Moreover the centrality of the name "Thackeray" in all the advertisements (bold type and large font) for what

was, after all, a miscellany, a fragmented publication, does not indicate the kind of “fundamental tension” in the relation of Thackeray to the magazine’s production that bedevilled Dickens (or “Boz”) and *Bentley’s Miscellany* in the 1830s.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, one happy reason for the reviews to elevate the *Cornhill* as popular culture had its origins in their perception of what Thackeray stood for; that the very name of its editor had as Smith was aware, become a symbol for a kind of cultured grace. The *Leeds Intelligencer* sees Thackeray precisely in these symbolic terms; not as a “hands-on” editor but as an ethereal figurehead and reports that “his friends do not seem to think him likely to put up with the harassment and botheration of looking after ‘copy’ and revising proofs, after Messrs’s Smith and Elder’s [sic] venture is once and fairly underweigh [sic]” (24 Dec. 1859: 3). This was not to be the case. Thackeray remained as editor, and his influence continued long after his resignation in May 1862. Other reviewers, who invariably refer to the magazine as “Mr Thackeray’s new serial” (*Morning Herald*; 23 Dec. 1859: 3)), recognise that Thackeray’s name had a compelling, inspirational quality to it, particularly for the socially ambitious. The *West End News* describes Thackeray simply as “a magnet for public favour,” at least among the readers of Hyde Park, Kensington and Belgravia (7 Jan. 1860: 3). Among such commentators, enthusiasm for the *Cornhill* is informed by an attitude of unquestioning respect – not only for Thackeray the writer but equally for Thackeray the social figure. “The name of Thackeray as editor of a magazine,” predicts the *Atlas*, “is guarantee that the contents shall be of first quality and that the standard of periodical literature shall be raised” (31 Dec. 1859: 543). This kind of cause-and-effect logic is continued by the *Press* for whom it is obvious that, as editor, “Mr Thackeray has made use of his own influence in literature to engage the services of gentlemen” (31 Dec. 1859: 1318). Reviewers were quick to acknowledge that one of the perceived benefits of reading the *Cornhill* was that readers were offered personal contact via Thackeray to a rarefied social sphere to which some of them otherwise had no access – or at least not yet.

These collective responses reveal one image of the *Cornhill* taking shape in the literary world of 1860. We find the reviewers describing the new magazine as “charming” (*Englishwoman’s Review*; 31 Dec. 1859: 327), “sparkling and piquant” (*Atlas*; 30 Jun. 1860: 516), “fragrant” (*Examiner*; 5 May 1860: 429), “brilliant” (*Sun*; 6 Feb. 1860: 4). This worked (and has continued to work) to suggest a kind of popular critical stability for the *Cornhill*, whose distinctive orange cover, together with regular items like Thackeray’s “Roundabout Papers” and the magazine’s prestigious fiction, were attractive markers for buyers.

What is also significant is that many reviewers brought to their discussions of the packed, yet elegant, contents of the *Cornhill* the sense that Smith, Elder had engineered nothing less than a revolution in magazine

publishing: “signal proof” as the *Morning Herald* put it, “that ‘cheap’ literature is not of necessity nasty literature and the fact that the time, the energies, the ability and the thoughts of some of our own best writers become daily more and more, the heritage of all but the lowest class of the community, is an important element in the progress of civilisation” (23 Dec. 1859: 3). Reviewers placed considerable emphasis on its accessibility. “[M]ost people,” suggested the *Englishwoman’s Review*, “will find something which they feel interested in” (31 Dec. 1859: 327). The *English Churchman* agreed, suggesting that “There is plenty to interest all classes of readers” (8 Mar. 1860: 236). Phrases like “all classes” are, like the related terms “mass” and “popular,” problematic, but they can be understood to designate, at the very least, multiple social layers.<sup>32</sup> Reviewers assigned the *Cornhill* a symbolic role. The magazine, editor, and publisher were seen as producers of new style of publication: a commodity text for a new kind of audience, a collective of people not simply genteel in the traditional sense but those genteel in the new sense, engineers, merchants, manufacturers.

The extraordinary reception of the magazine was due to the ability of Smith and Thackeray to meet the needs of these readers (subsumed, as one contributor put it, beneath “the wearing toil and carking anxiety of the present”<sup>33</sup>) to be entertained and also to understand, in a simple and pragmatic way, the sense of upheaval inherent in the world that was developing around them. More crucially, it also promised to be a space for the consumption of that once exclusive commodity: knowledge. “The suggestions of apathy, and the prejudices of ignorance, have all at times inspired the wish to close the temple [of knowledge] against new comers” announced G. H. Lewes in the first of his “Studies in Animal Life” in January 1860. “Let us be vigilant against such suggestions, and keep the door of the temple ever open.”<sup>34</sup> The *Cornhill’s* pages aimed to bring together classes that would normally have been separated both in life and in reading: leisured cultured gentlemen, indifferently educated women and unschooled but ambitious artisans. In doing so, Smith and Thackeray crossed the boundary between elite and popular cultures, demonstrating its demarcation. This putative violation prompted praise, but it was also a reason for members of the mid-Victorian press to degrade the *Cornhill* as popular culture. The magazine’s very name would become a synonym for the literary name as commodity. This, added to critical anxieties about the magazine’s accessibility – financial and intellectual, quickly worked to establish the *Cornhill* as an easy target for anti-popular cultural judgements.

### III

The recreation of the *Cornhill* as a text of debatable literary value began promptly. During the first six months of 1860 a variety of observers and reviewers, including those of the *Saturday Review*, *Bell’s Weekly Messen-*

ger, the *Illustrated Times*, and the *Illustrated London News*, used their influence and/or their column inches to reshape the status of the magazine in the cultural field. As early as January, the *Weekly Dispatch* was complaining that "among many articles we cannot point out one that lays any claim to distinguished excellence. We should be puzzled to quote one sentence of striking wit, wisdom or humour from the number" (8 Jan. 1860: 6). The firm of Blackwood vilified the *Cornhill* not just after it was published, but even while it was being planned. In December 1859, as its appearance loomed, John Blackwood wrote to his brother from London. "The *Cornhill* mag. contents do not look very alarming. On the contrary there is a sort of trifling look about the whole concern." William Blackwood agreed, explaining that few people of taste would be deceived by it. "It's a beastly vulgar looking thing whatever it's [sic] contents may be."<sup>35</sup> Over in the rival Macmillan offices, David Masson, discounted the threat to his own sales figures with the idea that Thackeray "makes and takes his ground so clearly distinct from ours. He only wants to amuse and says so."<sup>36</sup> Contrasting his own ideal of popular, intellectual earnestness with the "flippant frivolous style of the *Cornhill*," Masson, like the Blackwoods, was outwardly confident that the two magazines appealed to different audiences; that they might "go on together without interfering with each other."<sup>37</sup> Later, Masson used a similar distinction in an attempt to lure one of the *Cornhill*'s more distinguished contributors, Richard Monckton Milnes, away from its rival with the promise of that which Smith and Thackeray's magazine could not offer, namely, "a considerable proportion of readers likely to appreciate the subtle thought and feeling and careful musical expression of your poem."<sup>38</sup>

Although some observers, like Anne Thackeray, would later write with pride of the magazine's wide appeal, explaining how the *Cornhill* was devoured and discussed by workmen<sup>39</sup>, many of those passing judgement in 1860 devalued the *Cornhill* precisely on these grounds; it was too popular. Edward Fitzgerald reacted disdainfully to the anomalous experience of entering a reading world where "Cockney" readers seemed to present themselves, buying and reading the magazine for pleasure. The *Press*, which initially praised the *Cornhill*, also wrote slightly of its "mercantile precincts" (2 Feb. 1860: 112), as did George Simpson of the firm of Blackwoods. "The title of Thackeray's Magazine," he wrote, "conveys to me the idea of Banks Stockbrokers, and Assurance Companies not of Literature."<sup>40</sup> These kinds of disdainful reactions to the *Cornhill* and its readers imply worries about what Michael McKeon, writing of an earlier period, has termed "status inconsistency," the discordance between culturally embedded expectations (of privilege) and lived experience (of open access).<sup>41</sup> Moreover, the choice of "Cockneys," "Stockbrokers," and mercantilism as points of reference was not random. These particular anti-

*Cornhill* anxieties centred on the desire of an elite audience to devalue the leisure reading habits of newly literate and thus disturbingly mobile classes. Cockney tradesmen, merchants, bankers, speculators were the new plutocracy who amassed wealth, if not finesse, with alarming rapidity to become the living, breathing symbols of full-blown capitalism in the city. The *Saturday Review* is often a helpful source for evidence of anti-popular cultural judgements, and its attitude to the new *Cornhill* was typically forthright. Indeed, it was the *Saturday* which, in July 1860, produced one of the most hostile reviews of all when it made the magazine the subject of its discussion of "Truth and Novelty" in publishing. Making sport of Thackeray's pride in the *Cornhill*'s sales figures (expressed in the boastful June 1860 "Roundabout Paper, "Our Victories"), the *Saturday* represented the *Cornhill* as though it were fit for very little:

It is wonderful how many people - and even those who might be expected to judge otherwise - test literary success without any reference to the real merits of the writing. Mr Thackeray has lately afforded a remarkable instance in a panegyric he has written on the *Cornhill*....So long as the periodical sells he does not seem to care whether there is anything in it really good. He does not ask himself whether the poetry is poetical, whether the essays have any thought in them, and whether the stories have imagination and force, and originality. He merely says that the magazine sells well, and he is as pleased as if he were giving the world an accession to the standard literature of England. With what awe and reference must he look up to the *London Journal* which sells nearly half a million a week. (14 Jul. 1860: 43)

Some of this lofty hostility can be taken as intellectual contempt for Thackeray's position as an author for hire. It is also a denunciation (echoed by others) of commercial, as well as personal, "puffery," the pushing of the image rather than the product.<sup>42</sup> This is compounded later in the article when the *Saturday* returns to Thackeray's evident pleasure in his massive sales, adopting a tone of mock-pitying condescension along the way: "That the notion of excellence is something quite independent of commercial success seems to have dropped out of the mind of such a writer as Mr Thackeray" (14 Jul. 1860: 43). This jibe seems to have arisen more from personal hostility than from any disinterested delight in literary criticism, but it was a potentially damaging taunt. Thackeray's taste and discrimination were his most valued abilities, and the ones he and Smith most conspicuously flaunted.

The kinds of hostile comments offered by the *Saturday* and others are defensive, sarcastic, even petulant at times, but they lay out some of the central grounds for attacks on the new *Cornhill*. Of these attacks, one of the most frequent stemmed from the premise that its readers were naive and ill-educated, that they lacked learning. For example, as can be seen in

the extract above, the *Saturday*, a magazine explicitly geared to university educated men with classical education, and often quite rude about people who lacked these advantages, brackets the *Cornhill* with the *London Journal*, a mass circulation magazine whose audience was "known" to be most definitely to the "indifferently educated" and even the "barely literate."<sup>43</sup> Others ranked the *Cornhill* more generously but placed it even so, below "that second spoilt child of the public . . . *All the Year Round*" (*Bell's Weekly Messenger*; 7 Apr. 1860: 6). For a magazine such as the *Cornhill*, which liked to think of itself as a cut above Dickens' weekly, this was clearly a slight. The *Illustrated Times* placed the *Cornhill* in another damaging context by representing its audience as indiscriminating and gullible featherbrains who could not stomach the "honest, hearty, bluff outspokenness" of *Blackwood's* or *Fraser's*, devouring Smith, Elder's "trifling," "gossiping" paper with its "temporising politeness" over cups of weak tea (10 Mar. 1860: 153). The gendered distinctions of this review are themselves revealing. Gossip is, of course, gendered in the feminine by traditional association and the array of gender specific terms reinforces this correlation: "minute," "trifling," "twaddling," "amusing," "easy," "gossiping" – they read like a catalogue of stereotypes of women's conversation which are at a considerable distance from the serious masculine implications ascribed to *Blackwood's*. This elevation of one set of critical terms against the others forms part of an aesthetics of reception based on elitism; the reviewer deploys a discourse of distinction to define *Blackwood's* cultural privilege by changing the reputation of its new rival from intelligent to trivial to mindless.

As a frame adopted by the reviewers for understanding the *Cornhill*, the comments made by the *Illustrated Times*' reviewer suggest something of the critical disadvantages the *Cornhill* accrued by associating itself with women readers. The mid-Victorians strongly identified women with novel reading and with circulating library membership in particular.<sup>44</sup> As Guinevere Griest notes, Mudie's "years of eminence" in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, which coincided with the "years of great development in the English novel," rendered Mudie "the single most important distributor of fiction . . . exerting such a profound influence that its creator [was] a symbolic 'Dictator of the London Literary World.'" Mudie's typical subscribers were identified with young women and the "British Matron," and the Library's standards were designed accordingly.<sup>45</sup> Reviewers often distinguished between Mudie's subscribers (the "idle" and the "half educated") and university educated "industrious" Victorian men.<sup>46</sup> G.H. Lewes wrote of two groups of readers: "that unfastidious class of readers subscribing to circulating libraries" and "that other class . . . more cultivated which seldom troubles the library."<sup>47</sup> Information about readership has to be inferred but when, in March 1860, we see *Bell's Weekly*

*Messenger* claiming that the *Cornhill* succeeded not just because it was "puffed up to thousands upon thousands" in the press, but because it was "encouraged" by "the great Oxford-street circulating library monopoly" (10 Mar. 1860: 6), it seems clear that the intention is to reposition the magazine within what is regarded in elite circles as a damaging context. The *Cornhill* cannot transcend its circulating library status.

Nicola Thompson has described how, in the mid-Victorian period, the magazine and the genre of the literary review "served, under the aegis of the print media as a whole, as educational institutions whose larger role in Victorian society was the cultivation and transmission of Victorian culture." As Thompson points out, reviewers often presented themselves as "cultural police responsible for protecting public standards and taste."<sup>48</sup> This idea that the Victorian reviewer consciously sought to protect and educate his or her readers and to prescribe and regulate critical value is apparent in many of the reviews cited in this section, but nowhere is it expressed with greater hostility than in the final anti-*Cornhill* stance I want to consider: that of *Bell's Weekly Messenger*.

Founded in 1790, *Bell's* was a conservative family newspaper directed at an audience of "clergy, gentry and yeomanry," confidently promising (in a tone similar to that adopted by Thackeray in the *Cornhill's* advertisement letter), "the exclusion of everything calculated to exercise an injurious influence on the young or to wound the sensibility of the cultivated mind." However, in contrast to the *Cornhill*, it had a crusading bent: "it strongly advocates the reformation of all abuse in whatever department of government or society they may be found."<sup>49</sup> Detecting this "abuse" in the cultural centrality being won by the new shilling monthly, *Bell's* launched an attack:

The *Cornhill Magazine* is reported to be the most successful literary venture that has been made of late years. If this be true it says but very little for the discrimination, or good sense of the public; for we have no hesitation in asserting, that it is the most contemptible specimen of modern literature that we have for a long time been compelled to read and discuss (7 Apr. 1860: 6).

Writing in the first half of 1860 when readers well above the level of the so-called Mudie reader were still happily reading the *Cornhill*, the *Bell's* reviewer represented the *Cornhill* as a singularly worthless text whose only value was the light it shed on the dubious level of intelligence of the "flunky-like" British public (9 Jun. 1860: 6). "The proprietorship and editorship and contributors are relying a little too much on the gullibility of John Bull" (9 Jun. 1860: 6). The charge here is conventional enough. The distinction between readerly discrimination and naiveté and the appropriation of the *Cornhill* as an instance of it was a recurrent strategy. What,

however, makes the *Bell's* reviews interesting is that their main targets are those elements of the *Cornhill* which were proving most popular with other readers and reviewers: *Lovel the Widower* and *Framley Parsonage*. This was particularly true of the latter. The *Athenaeum* later estimated that over "a hundred thousand readers . . . followed with breathless eagerness the loves of Lucy Robarts and Lord Lufton, and gossiped and cried over Mark and Mrs Mark, as though they had been living personal friends."<sup>50</sup> Throughout 1860, *Bell's Weekly Messenger* remained strangely unmoved both by the magazine and by these "monthly visitation[s]" which stirred so much "pleasant excitement" in other people. It declared the *Cornhill* as a whole to be a mass of "assumption and affectation." Thackeray, its chief attraction, was "wordy and purposeless"; *Framley Parsonage* was "painfully coarse" (7 Jan. 1860: 6). The *Bell's* reviewer did not simply make the usual complaint, namely, that there was too much fiction<sup>51</sup>; his comments repeatedly carried an unmistakable class charge; the *Cornhill* was judged socially and found wanting. Expressions such as "commonplace vulgarity" and "rubbish" pepper the reviews; indications not only of personal but social hostility. Although elsewhere Trollope and Thackeray were seen to reap literary advantage from their social position<sup>52</sup>, for the *Bell's* reviewer, their social and intellectual profiles are hardly ones that can be described as elite. Contrasting the *Cornhill* with the "truly delightful" *Gentleman's Magazine*, the reviewer constructs Thackeray and Trollope as imitation gentlemen, writers of the "veriest twaddle." "Mr Trollope's *Framley Parsonage* savours of all the vulgarity of one of his mother's novels, and is full of absurd reference to high life of which he can have no cognisance" (10 Mar. 1860: 6). On 4 April, the reviewer reported that the fourth *Cornhill* number was similarly full of Thackeray's "platitudes and yellow plush phraseology which is the very essence of commonplace vulgarity." "From Mr Thackeray it is but one short step to Mr Trollope, whose . . . story is as flimsy as it is full of blunders" (7 April 1860: 6). Purveying fiction for the newly rich is bad enough, but purveying inaccurate and mischievous fiction is clearly not on at all.

Whereas other reviewers condemned the magazine's fiction for being too "real" and therefore unimaginative and depressingly sordid<sup>53</sup>, the *Bell's* reviewer uses Trollope and Thackeray to compose a picture of two Victorian hacks who write inaccurately and impertinently of upper-class events, who plagiarise from other sources and from themselves (Trollope's use of re-appearing characters provokes particular ire), and finally, who do not disdain to cheat the gullible, reading public for their own mercenary uses. These triple charges of imposture and intellectual and social ignorance were compounded when, in April, the *Bell's* reviewer decided to compare the *Cornhill's* serials with Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown at Oxford*, currently appearing in *Macmillan's Magazine*. Nostalgic fascination

with the Oxford as (re)created by Hughes (with its "lifelike and therefore exciting sketch of the boat race") prompts the reviewer to signal his own affinities with the serial's writer and the intellectual elite which Hughes represents. "Unless our own recollections of Oxford very much mislead us, Mr Hughes is sketching a very famous year in our own day..." (7 Apr. 1860: 6). This admiration for Hughes contrasts strikingly with the disdain the *Bell's* reviewer feels for the pseudo-gentlemen, Thackeray and Trollope who (lacking degrees themselves) will always remain ignorant of this elite world. Their work suffers accordingly. Commenting on Trollope's central story – that involving the ambitious young clergyman, Mark Robarts – *Bell's* reviewer retained a suitably lofty tone. "[N]othing," he argued, "so coarse as is represented in this tale could possibly go on as a matter of course. The obtaining of a clergyman's name to an acceptance by a swindling MP. is . . . improbable, since University experience would have made such a man, as the hero is presented to be, wary, however, desirous he might be of obtaining interest for future preferment" (9 Jun. 1860: 6). Although the dismissal of the new *Cornhill* and its contents is justified by the *Bell's* reviewer on the basis of "truth" and "reality," readers are faced throughout with the evidence of a deeply social discomfort in the reviewer's regular invocations of contemporary cultural prejudices.

In reading the kinds of socially motivated distinction made by *Bell's Weekly Messenger* and the other anti-*Cornhill* reviewers as examples of elite ideological production, one may see traces of Marx's warning in *Capital* of the "fetishism of commodities." Marx argues that when the products of human labour become commodities they take on the "grotesque" and "wonderful" form of "social things." The commodity becomes a text encapsulating new social relations that replace those wiped out from the marketplace. Those responsible for the production of the commodity then discover that:

the relations connecting the labour of one individual with that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations between individuals at work, but as what they really are; material relations between persons and social relations between things.<sup>54</sup>

Once this has happened, seemingly inanimate objects begin to lead lives of their own, with their own interrelations of exchange, hierarchy and symbolism.

As the history of the *Cornhill's* own launch demonstrates, by 1860, Britain was a fully developed capitalist society; books and magazines were manifestly commodities in a free market, and the widely differing responses to the *Cornhill* by the reviewers can be seen as enacting some of the confusion that Marx describes. In turn, and as Richard Altick and Ann Parry have pointed out, traditional social hierarchy alone could not dictate



who would buy and read the monthly press in 1860.<sup>55</sup> In theory, the *Cornhill* was open to an extremely large section of the population; it excluded only those lacking proximity to libraries, railways and booksellers and a threshold level of disposable income and leisure time. Among those who could afford to buy the *Cornhill*, those who actually did were believed to share three characteristics that, although class linked, were not necessarily identical to class position: an interest in novelty and in self-improvement, and a willingness to buy and read for pleasure. These appeals of novelty, instruction and pleasure formed George Smith's keys to the *Cornhill's* large and ill-defined audience.

Ultimately, the problem that seems to have arisen for certain reviewers in 1859 and 1860 was that the *Cornhill's* satisfying of these demands for novelty, pleasure and self improvement crossed other cultural boundaries that seemed ideological necessities at a time of social change and instability. The implications made in *Bell's Weekly Messenger* was that everything about the *Cornhill* – Thackeray's inflated salary, the "puffing," the advertising – made it corrupt. Readers were warned that a taste for the magazine put them in "vulgar" rather than distinguished social company (as Thackeray had promised). The reaction of *Bell's Weekly Messenger* to Thackeray's and Trollope's work was to dismiss authors who pandered to the desires of a new audience too broad and various to be labelled exclusive.

To turn from magazines such the *Englishwoman's Review* which are openly admiring of the *Cornhill*, to the *Illustrated Times* and the *Illustrated London News* (sceptical), to the *Blackwoods*, *Saturday Review* and *Bell's Weekly Messenger* (scathing) is to become aware of a challenge to the familiar and congenial image of this magazine. The *Cornhill* was undeniably successful and had wide appeal (as many of the reviews indicate) and further investigation is needed if there is to be any radical reassessment of the *Cornhill's* place within the literary field of 1860. Having said this, there is enough evidence to begin to suggest that we can no longer see the *Cornhill* merely as the quintessential popular magazine, consumed eagerly by an admiring readership. As the more discordant contemporary voices indicate, it also became a space for contesting popular access to leisure reading – a contest energetically acted out in the periodical press where fear, admiration and disdain towards the democratisation of literature was exposed to all readers.

#### ENDNOTES

1. *Newspaper Press Directory*, (London: C. Mitchell and Co., 1860).
2. The term "elite" as used here in connection with culture refers to the aesthetic theories, canons of taste, traditions, general knowledge and formal

education that signalled and accrued to social and economic privilege. According to Ann Parry ("The Intellectuals and the Middle-Class Periodical Press: Theory, Method and Case Study," *Journal of Newspaper History*, 4 (3), Autumn 1988), "Oxford and Cambridge were the major sources that produced this elite, who were, on the whole at home with the social and cultural life of their time, so that their intention and effect was to maintain the social equilibrium" (19). This paper also follows Patricia Anderson, *The Printed Image and the Transformation of Popular Culture, 1790-1786*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991) in suggesting that the much disputed term "popular culture" refers to forms readily available to a broad audience, diverse and changing in their qualifications, but socially constructed as distinct from elite audiences. Popular culture is characterised not by its intrinsic difference from "exclusivist culture," but by its exclusion (8).

3. Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800-1900* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1957), especially Chapters 13 and 14.
4. Edward Fitzgerald to W. F. Pollock, 23 February 1860, in William Aldis Wright (ed.), *The Letters of Edward Fitzgerald*, 2 Vols., (London: Macmillan, 1894), II 13-14. Quoted in: Spencer L. Eddy, *The Founding of the Cornhill Magazine*, (Muncie: Ball State University, 1970), 47-48.
5. According to Pierre Bourdieu these ideologies are created when the selective criticism of one group's cultural forms serves to define, normalise and even create the taste of another group. See: Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984).
6. See, for example: J Don Vann "The *Cornhill*," in Alvin Sullivan (ed), *British Literary Magazines, The Victorian and Edwardian Age 1837-1913*, (London: Greenwood, 1984). "The *Cornhill* represents a major development in British periodical history . . ." (83).
7. George Smith, "Our Birth and Parentage," *Cornhill*, n.s. 10, January 1901, 9.
8. Anne Thackeray [Mrs Richmond Ritchie], "The First Number of the *Cornhill*," *Cornhill*, n.s. 1, July 1896, 1.
9. Anthony Trollope to W. M. Thackeray, 28 December 1859, in N. John Hall (ed), *The Letters of Anthony Trollope*, (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1986), I 93.
10. John Sutherland, "Cornhill's Sales and Payments: The First Decade," *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 19 (3), Fall 1986, 106.
11. Eddy, *The Founding of the Cornhill Magazine*, 41.
12. Henry James, *Notes of a Son and Brother*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914), 21; 19.
13. E. T. Cook, "Jubilee of the *Cornhill*," n.s. 28, January 1910, 8-9.
14. Arthur Conan Doyle, *Memories and Adventures*, (London: Hodder Stoughton, 1924), 73.
15. Leonard Huxley, "Chronicles of *Cornhill*," *Cornhill*, n.s. 52, March 1922, 368-9.

16. John Sutherland, *Mrs Humphrey Ward: Eminent Victorian, Pre-Eminent Edwardian*, (Oxford: OUP, 1990) has suggested that, in later life, Smith's memory was unreliable and that his version of events was at times flawed (387); Sutherland is one the few to date to draw attention to the various confusions that have arisen as a direct result both of this text and of the unpublished *Recollections of a Long and Busy Life*. See: Bill Bell, "The Secret History of Smith and Elder," in Robin Myers and Michael Harris (eds.), *A Genius for Letters: Bookselling and Booksellers from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century*, (Winchester: St. Pauls Bibliographies, 1992), 178.
17. Richard Salmon also makes this charge against Henry James. See: Richard Salmon, *Henry James and the Culture of Publicity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 51.
18. Gaye Tuchman [with Nina Fortin], *Edging Women Out: Victorian Novelists, Publishers and Social Change*, (London: Routledge, 1989), 126.
19. On Smith's "business acumen" see Barbara Quinn Schmidt, "The Patron as Businessman: George Murray Smith," *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 16 (1), Spring 1983, 3-4.
20. John Sutherland, *Victorian Novelists and Publishers* (London: Athlone, 1976), 106.
21. Bill Bell, "Fiction in the Marketplace: Towards a Study of the Victorian Serial," in Robin Myers and Michael Harris, *Serials and Their Readers: 1620-1914*, (Winchester: St. Paul's Bibliographies, 1993), 137. On the commodification of the book and George Smith's earlier packaging of Thackeray's *Henry Esmond*, see N. N. Feltes, *Modes of Production of Victorian Novels*, (London: Chicago UP), 18-35.
22. Eddy, *The Founding of the Cornhill*, 40-1.
23. Once they had picked the magazine up, reviewers spoke of the *Cornhill* as if it were an exact thing with a "weighty" feel which never varied. (*English-woman's Review*, 31 Dec. 1859: 327). As Feltes (*Modes of Production*) has pointed out, "weight" and "value" are two words which designate extremely succinctly the fetishization of the commodity-text (26). This leads to the sense of approval on the part of the *Cornhill* reviewers that readers are getting value for money; the idea that the more space a book occupies the more money ought to be paid for it. For many of the reviewers, questions of quantity and/or quality are linked umbilically to price in just this way. *Notes and Queries*, echoes many in praising "the illustrations, the paper, and press work" and in holding the magazine up as "a marvel of cheapness" (31 Dec. 1859: 542). But it did not look cheap. *The Lady's Newspaper*, in tones addressed to the properly frugal housewife, recommended the magazine as "a wonderful shilling's worth, whether we regard the quantity or the quality" (31 Dec. 1859: 534). The *Atlas* suggested that "As the price is so low - 128 pages, with map and woodcuts, for twelve pence, it is almost superfluous to specify the contents" (31 Dec. 1859: 343).

24. George Steiner, *On Difficulty*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978). Quoted in Bell, "Fiction in the Marketplace," 137.
25. Peter Shillingsburg, *Pegasus in Harness*, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia), 1-14.
26. W. M. Thackeray to George Smith, 7 September 1859, in Gordon N. Ray (ed), *The Letters and Private Papers of William Makepeace Thackeray*, 4 Vols, (New York: Octagon, 1980), IV 150.
27. W. M. Thackeray to Mrs Carmichael-Smyth, 19 February 1859, in Ray, *Letters*, IV 130-31.
28. Smith, "Our Birth and Parentage," 5.
29. W. M. Thackeray, "Letter from the Editor to a Friend and Contributor: *The Cornhill Magazine*," in Ray, *Letters*, IV 161.
30. On this form of commodification, see Feltes, *Modes of Production*, 13.
31. Bell, "Fiction in the Marketplace," 130.
32. Anderson, *The Printed Image*, 11.
33. J. W. Kaye, "On Holidays," *Cornhill*, 2, August 1860, 248.
34. G. H. Lewes, "Studies in Animal Life," *Cornhill*, 1, January 1860, 74.
35. John Blackwood to William Blackwood, 20 December 1859; William Blackwood to John Blackwood, 24 December 1859, in Carol Martin, *George Eliot's Serial Fiction*, (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1994), 111-12.
36. David Masson to Thomas Hughes. 9 November 1859. BL Add MSS 55837.52.
37. David Masson to W. G. Clark, 30 December 1859. BL Add MSS 55837.197.
38. David Masson to Richard Monckton Milnes, 2 June 1860. BL Add MSS 55837.341.
39. Mrs Richmond Ritchie, "The First Number of the *Cornhill*," 2.
40. George Simpson to Joseph Munt Langford, 19 November 1859, in Gordon S. Haight (ed), *The George Eliot Letters*, 9 Vols., (Oxford: OUP, 1954), III 210.
41. Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1987), 11.
42. The *Illustrated London News* talks of the "pseudo-enthusiasm created by the circumstances under which it was produced" (7 Jan. 1860: 4). The reviewer raised the question again in March: "one inevitably finds oneself considering and debating how much is real and how much factitious. May it be allowed us to say that here and there we are conscious of a little aid gathered from the glitter of jewellery and even from a *soupcou* of rouge?" (10 Mar. 1860: 228).
43. Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 346; 360.
44. See Nicola Thompson, *Reviewing Sex: Gender and the Reception of Victorian Novels*, (London: Macmillan, 1996), 29.
45. Guinevere L. Griest, *Mudie's Circulating Library*, (London: David and Charles, 1970), 27; 137-40.

46. Unsigned Review, "Three Novels," *Westminster Review*, 130, October 1856, 315. Quoted in Thompson, *Reviewing Sex*, 29.
47. G. H. Lewes, "Charles Reade's New Novel," *Leader*, 23 August 1856, 810. Quoted in Thompson, *Reviewing Sex*, 29.
48. Thompson, *Reviewing Sex*, 3.
49. "Advertisement," *Newspaper Press Directory*, 20.
50. Unsigned Review, "Orley Farm," *Athenaeum*, 1741, 9 March 1861, 319.
51. The *Saturday Review* predicted that only those with a "strong taste for fiction" could possibly enjoy the magazine (7 Jan. 1860: 17). *John Bull* was of the opinion that the *Cornhill* was "too exclusively a fasciculus of serials" (5 May 1860: 283).
52. See Thompson, *Reviewing Sex*, 72.
53. At least some of the reluctance to accept the *Cornhill* arose from Trollope's and Thackeray's apparent robustness, which was translated as insensitivity. While the muscular *English Churchman* praised *Framley Parsonage's* "vigour and interest" (7 Jun. 1860: 547), the *Weekly Dispatch* characterised the *Cornhill's* fiction as being the "painting of sordid everyday life, carefully excluding the nobility of character and action that excites to love and admiration." Such work "no doubt constitutes an art, such as it may be worth; but this is not the art of the prose epic" (8 Jan. 1860: 6).
54. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol 1, in Robert C. Turner (ed), *The Marx/Engels Reader*, (New York: Norton, 1968), 321; 320.
55. Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 274; Parry, "The Intellectuals and the Middle-Class Periodical Press," 27.

## Invoking the Bard – The *Cornhill Magazine* and "Revival" in the Victorian Theatre, 1863

AINSLIE ROBINSON

In 1863, three years after the inception of the *Cornhill Magazine*, its editorial adviser George Henry Lewes wrote:

That our drama is extinct as literature, and our stage is in a deplorable condition of decline, no one will venture to dispute; but there are two opinions as to the avenues through which a revival is possible, or even probable, and various opinions as to the avenues through which such a revival may be approached.<sup>1</sup>

Although he pessimistically goes on to elucidate the reasons for hopelessness in the case namely, "the gradual cessation of all attempts at serious dramatic literature, and their replacement by translations," "the slow extinction of provincial theatre," and the "accident of genius on [the Victorian] stage being unhappily rarer than ever,"<sup>2</sup> what emerges in the early issues of the *Cornhill Magazine* is evidence of a commitment to the rectification of this regrettable state – in short, a concentrated attempt at theatrical revival.

The July–December 1863 issues of the *Cornhill Magazine* have been singled out in this discussion because they provide an assessment of directions taken by English drama (with particular regard to Shakespeare) in the 1860s, a period in which Allardyce Nicoll discerns "movements which ultimately were to prove the foundation of the twentieth-century stage".<sup>3</sup> Evident in that six months' contributions are an overt promotion of Shakespeare's plays as superior art forms, the exaltation of successful players of Shakespeare as "great" actors, the reclamation of Shakespeare by the drama despite his having been first claimed and celebrated in the nineteenth century by extra-theatrical bodies, and the reiteration of Lewes' 1849 remark that "the first purpose of the dramatist . . . [is] to interest and amuse an audience."<sup>4</sup> In the background, though neither Lewes nor the