

## ‘Is That All You Do, Write Stories?’ Metanarratives of Authorship in Fin de Siècle Popular Fiction

In Richard Marsh’s 1904 novel, *A Duel*, prosaic Scots physician Dr Twelves meets Harry Talfourd’s avowal that he writes fiction for a living with perplexity: “‘Stories? Oh! and is that a man’s work? My forebears have always held that a man should do a man’s work. Is writing stories that?’” Harry responds with an indignant, if rather embarrassed, “‘It isn’t easy, if that’s what you mean.’” The good doctor, however, is not to be won over: “‘Not easy? I should have thought you would have found it as easy as lying. ... Is that all you do, write stories?’” While Twelves claims not to be “‘judging’” the young author, his bafflement nonetheless speaks volumes as he ‘look[s] him up and down as if he were a specimen of a species which was new to him.’<sup>1</sup>

In some respects, Dr Twelves is justified in considering Harry as something new, since Talfourd is drawn from the increasing numbers of young men and women, often of quite modest backgrounds, who at the fin de siècle turned to writing as a way of making their living. While authorship had changed over the course of the long eighteenth century from being a matter for a ‘small circle of men of letters’ supported by ‘aristocratic patrons’ to a profession within a ‘book industry’<sup>2</sup>, and had seen its professional status consolidate over the course of the nineteenth century, the final decades of the century witnessed an enlargement in the opportunities for authors through expansion in the market for writing in general and fiction in particular. This was a massification of literature driven by changes in print technology, but also by growing levels of literacy that swelled both the circle of readers and the ranks of those vying to supply them. The response from the literary establishment, however, was frequently one of alarm at changes that were deemed to call its own values into question. The new reader, with her supposedly uneducated tastes, was often the locus of such anxieties, but so too was the

new author, who was considered to be imperilling Literature by making of it a trade. In writing for a living, so the argument went, the professional author turned writing into a commodity, pursuing sales above literary merit and therefore shaping literature to the tastes of the least discerning of readers. This wasn't a view without precedent – Romantic poets such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge had earlier argued that success in the marketplace meant lowering oneself to the level of the common reader, and that the sign of literary quality was not sales but enduring posthumous reputation<sup>3</sup> – but it was expressed so vociferously at this time that the closing decades of the century and the early years of the next are considered to have entrenched a rhetorical demarcation between serious and popular fiction, and between high and mass culture. Authors such as George Gissing and Henry James, who considered themselves upholders of an increasingly beleaguered minority culture, famously gave voice to their fears about the commodification of literature not only in essays and letters, but also in their fictional treatments of authorship.<sup>4</sup>

This article considers the question of professional authorship at the fin de siècle not from the perspectives of Gissing or James, but instead from those of two popular authors who seemingly embraced the new marketplace. Richard Marsh and Guy Boothby were both commercially successful writers whose significance for fin de siècle literary culture is increasingly recognised today.<sup>5</sup> Both captured the public imagination with stories of crime, adventure and the supernatural that helped shape the emerging genres of popular fiction. Both were astonishingly prolific, and for this attracted fierce censure from the establishment elite, which often spoke of the two in the same breath. In 1900, for example, in a spoof 'autobiography', the *Academy* magazine had Guy Boothby wondering 'the whole day long ... how I shall beat Richard Marsh ... in the manufacture of books'.<sup>6</sup> While such denunciations are easily to find, what is less accessible are the perspectives of these authors themselves. Unlike novelists of reputation such as James, Anthony Trollope, Rudyard Kipling, Arthur Conan Doyle and Thomas Hardy, neither

Marsh nor Boothby have left autobiographies by which their experiences of the literary life may be known.<sup>7</sup> In the fictions of both, however, can be found characters who aspire to, struggle for, and occasionally succeed in a life of letters. This essay will consider these fictions as self-conscious reflections on the pleasures and pains of professional authorship, through which Marsh and Boothby write back to their critics. My intention in exploring them is not to arrive at the ‘truth’ about literature’s massification and its significance – clearly, as professional authors who wrote with the market very much front of mind, both Marsh and Boothby have vested interests shaping their perspectives. But it is to suggest that literary historians obtain a richer view of the complexities of the debate when we look beyond the more familiar accounts of the self-consciously ‘highbrow’ authors – which contain, of course, their own particular investments – to consider those offered by non-canonical and avowedly popular writers. Peter McDonald has shown how ‘avant-garde and “popular” culture were being ‘reciprocally defined’ in this period, usually through relationships of ‘reciprocal antagonism’.<sup>8</sup> We shall explore how the popular authors Marsh and Boothby negotiated these antagonisms, offering accounts of the literary marketplace that differed significantly from those of Gissing and James, but that also at times intersected with them in perhaps unexpected ways.

## I. Mass Literacy and the Great Fiction Question

Scholars including Richard D. Altick, Patrick Brantlinger and Joseph McAleer have charted the history and effects of the emergence of mass literacy towards the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> Britain’s changing economy required an increasingly literate and numerate workforce, and successive Acts of Parliament in the 1870s and 1880s first established elementary education for working class children through the School Board system and then made it compulsory. While rates of literacy had increased across the century, by the 1890s they had therefore soared, with 97.2% of men and 96.8% of women

being classified as literate in 1900.<sup>10</sup> By the turn of the century the vast majority of young men and women of the working or lower-middle classes had time to read – even if this were just during the daily commute – as well as improved incomes at a time when technological advances had brought down the cost of book production. As such, and as Altick observes, by 1890 the ‘three great requisites of a mass reading public – literacy, leisure, and a little pocket money’ were in place.’<sup>11</sup> And these new readers predominantly desired to read fiction.

The popularity of fiction as a proportion of books read had steadily increased over the course of the century, with imaginative storytelling having largely overcome early Victorian prohibitions against fiction as akin to lying (although Dr Twelves’ ‘easy as lying’ recalls this tradition).<sup>12</sup> In the last decades of the century, however, recalcitrant anxieties about the effects of reading fiction seem to have been reawakened and focused onto the habits and preferences of those newly enfranchised into the reading public. While Wilkie Collins had in 1858 identified an ‘Unknown Public’ of working class readers who consumed the penny fiction sold in tobacconists, he had been fairly sanguine about this, believing in a ‘universal law of progress’ that would see these readers graduate onto better fiction as they ‘learn[ed] to discriminate’.<sup>13</sup> Collins’ relative optimism was fairly atypical in his own time, however, and it was certainly not to be shared by many commentators in the 1890s. For these, the new generation of readers had received an education sufficient for literacy, but woefully inadequate for the cultivation of aesthetic taste or moral judgement. The lower-class reader might prove susceptible to corruption by the wrong kind of fiction (penny dreadfuls, or even the middle-class sensation novel), which revelled in immoral behaviour that might be imitated. Anxiety also afflicted the writer of more ‘serious’ fiction, who in contrast to authors of a previous generation felt himself to be writing to an unknown reader, quite possibly not of his class or social experience, and who could not therefore be relied upon to read his text in the correct way.<sup>14</sup> In part, the problem was that the newly literate classes stubbornly continued to

chose fiction over the supposedly more edifying works of non-fiction that even vigorous defenders of mass literacy, such as the public libraries crusader Thomas Greenwood, reassured themselves that readers would move on to.<sup>15</sup>

Equally troubling was the effect these readers might have in turn upon fiction. The uncultivated tastes of the newly literate were deemed to produce a market demand for fiction that was neither aesthetically challenging nor intellectually demanding, but that was instead easy, entertaining, and escapist. Edmund Gosse, in 1891, considered that the influence of these readers constituted ‘grounds for “grave apprehension”’: the “enlargement of the circle of readers” meant “an increase of persons who, without ear, are admitted to the concert of literature”; and this wider audience in turn attracted publishers who “seduced” authors “capable of doing better things” into writing simply “for the sake of money”.<sup>16</sup> Increasingly cultural critics discerned, in an echo of Matthew Arnold’s warnings from the 1860s, a fissure developing between a mass civilisation endlessly processing entertainment commodities, and a minority culture dedicated to the preservation of art.<sup>17</sup> Yet many turn-of-the-century critics were less confident than Arnold had been that the elite minority could succeed in its mission of preserving and communicating this invaluable high culture. As Kate Flint reports, ‘A rhetorically absolute division between the intellectuals and the masses’ was becoming consolidated.<sup>18</sup> The genuine artist was, for many, increasingly a cultural alien, cut off forever from communion with the common man.

Of course not all commentators responded so pessimistically to this enlargement of the reading public. George Bernard Shaw joked about going ““under”” as a ““belated intellectual””; but in fact he adapted, determining to write for the new readers through his journalism.<sup>19</sup> Walter Besant welcomed the changed times, believing that the huge expansion of potential readers, not only in Britain but also in its colonies and in the United States, presented wonderful new opportunities for the aspiring professional writer. His *The Pen and the Book* (1899) advised the ‘thousands of young persons’ whom he

addressed, that poverty was no longer the objection to a life of letters that it had been for previous generations, and that they could expect to gain from writing both an income and a status 'quite equal to that of the average lawyer or doctor'.<sup>20</sup>

The reality, however, for the would-be writers who answered Besant's call, was often that of unrewarded struggle, financial instability and even catastrophe, especially if writing were not supported by a private income.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, in the perception of more conservative commentators the strenuous demands of writing for one's living were such that they engendered among the army of new writers a commercial instinct that threw into jeopardy the very idea of literature. The author who wrote for his daily bread was, it was thought, by necessity compelled to write for the largest possible market, and therefore for the lowest common denominator. He also therefore wrote quickly to maximise his returns, without time for forethought or reflection. That such conditions were incompatible with the production of works of intellectual or aesthetic merit, was a belief shared by many renowned authors of the day, from the self-consciously highbrow to the commercially popular. In the 1890s Gissing and James doubted whether great literature could be produced at all by persons lacking an independent income. A decade earlier, Anthony Trollope's reputation had been 'seriously damaged' by the posthumous publication of his autobiography (1883), 'with its stress on authorship as a standard middle-class profession and the careful calculation of his income novel by novel.'<sup>22</sup> Doyle's ambivalence about his Sherlock Holmes phenomenon famously led him to kill off his creation in order to write the historical novels he considered more worthy, but he yielded to pecuniary temptation and revived his detective.<sup>23</sup> H. Rider Haggard and Robert Louis Stevenson similarly feared that by writing genre fiction they contributed to the commoditisation of fiction – Stevenson, for example, writing to Edmund Gosse in 1886 that the public taste was for inferior work and declaring "There must be something wrong in me, or I would not be popular."<sup>24</sup> Stevenson's apparent antagonism towards his readership may not have been uncharacteristic of authors by the fin de siècle, but it was

an historically recent phenomenon: John Goode tells us that mid-century authors had maintained ‘a coherent and generally non-combative relationship with their public’ and popularity and literary merit had not generally been considered to be at odds with one another.<sup>25</sup>

Importantly, the fear was not only that a profusion of inferior fiction was *flooding* the market (the metaphor of deluge was fondly embraced for its connotations of ‘divine anger and retribution’<sup>26</sup>), but also that such fiction actually squeezed out work of superior quality. Universal literacy had led to not just a growth but also to a fragmentation of reading audiences, and to a demand for various kinds of genre fiction such as those practised by Marsh and Boothby. The resulting struggle, for George Gissing, was a Darwinian one; but it was also, even for some of the popular authors themselves, such as Doyle, a moral struggle for control over literature as a vehicle for communicating the right kinds of values.<sup>27</sup> Gissing’s *New Grub Street* (1891) provides the most famous fictional representation of the Darwinian struggle, depicting a literature industry that holds out false hope to its army of predominantly young workers, destroying some of these lives in the process. Those who survive are the literary speculators, who write not from any sense of the intrinsic value of their productions, but as ““skilful tradesm[e]n””, who ““thin[k] first and foremost of the markets””.<sup>28</sup> Truly gifted men discover there to be insufficient demand for work of genuine literary merit, and prove either unable or unwilling to produce the work of lesser value that the mass reading public demands. The character of Edwin Reardon seems to sum up Gissing’s position when he despairingly avers: ““What an insane thing it is to make literature one’s only means of support! [...] No, that is the unpardonable sin! To make a trade of an art! I am rightly served for attempting such a brutal folly.””<sup>29</sup>

In one respect, objections to literature’s massification can be seen as an elite’s fear of loss of privilege in the face of democratising processes. This is clear, for example, in an anonymous article from the self-consciously highbrow *Yellow Book*, in which it is

the transfer of cultural power from the ‘gentleman scholar’ to women and the lower classes that is being bemoaned.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, however, we see commentators reflecting upon what it is that may be lost with the loss of difficulty in writing. Helen Bosanquet wrote with some sensitivity in 1901 of a commuting urban readership tired through the exertions of work, and seeking ‘distraction’ and relief from ‘monotony’ in easy fiction that eschewed syntactical, psychological or moral complexity.<sup>31</sup> Similar observations would be systematised in the twentieth century as a Marxist critique of a ‘Culture Industry’ that standardised writing in the interests of producing harmless distraction for the workers and purging fiction of its capacity for social critique.<sup>32</sup> Let us now turn to how the popular fiction writers Marsh and Boothby negotiated the issues posed by changes in the literary market at the turn of the nineteenth century.

## II. Richard Marsh: strugglers, grumblers, and the land of strange enchantments

The author of nearly 80 volumes of fiction, Richard Marsh (Bernard Heldmann, 1857-1915) published numerous successful novels and short stories, wrote plays and was a regular contributor to the most popular periodicals of the day. He would have been known to the public as a reliable source of entertaining fiction; indeed a newsagent latterly recalled him as being among a handful of authors whom “every other person” was reading.<sup>33</sup> His comparatively neglected status today is being addressed through the reprinting of his texts and renewed scholarly attention that reckons with him as a central fashioner of late-Victorian and Edwardian fiction. He is most known for his 1897 novel, *The Beetle*, a supernatural thriller that for several decades outsold Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*.

As Minna Vuohelainen reports, ‘Marsh was by his own definition a professional author, maintaining a large family and a comfortable lifestyle on the proceeds of his written work’.<sup>34</sup> A prolific writer, Marsh was regularly castigated by the highbrow literary



press for which he seems to have functioned as something of a lightning rod for anxieties about popular novelists. During 1900, a year in which he published four novels and three short story collections, the *Academy* exclaimed that ‘Mr Marsh exhales novels’: it averred that ‘We do our best to keep up with Mr Marsh [...] and ask ourselves anxiously – “Can he manage twelve in the year?”’: and observed of one of his ‘delectable plot[s]’ that it ‘probably flashed on [him] while his ticket was being punched on the top of a “bus”.’<sup>35</sup> Marsh was occasionally prompted into replying to his accusers. He had in 1897 responded to criticisms from the *Academy* with a letter in which he asserted that their reviewers were labouring under a misapprehension: he was not producing work at the rate attributed to him; rather, novels *written* several years earlier were being brought out by publishers in the same year. He also took the opportunity to affirm the pains he took in crafting stories: ‘As a matter of fact, I produce slowly. Kneading a story, mentally, is a delight, setting it forth on paper is about as bad as a surgical operation.’<sup>36</sup>

Such direct interventions were rare for Marsh, however. Indeed, there is little non-fictional material to illuminate his views on authorship and literary culture. Perhaps because of a scandal in his youth there is no surviving diary, or memoir, and few personal letters, and he rarely gave interviews.<sup>37</sup> One interesting exception, however, is an essay in the Marsh archives at the University of Reading, entitled ‘Literary Grumblers’.<sup>38</sup> In this Marsh attacks those authors who complain that they are too good for the literary market: Grant Allen, the popular novelist who began his career writing on science, but found this did not sell; and particularly Robert Buchanan, the poet, dramatist and novelist, who had made a name for himself denouncing other writers of his generation (and the deleterious effects on literature of the ‘Deluge’ of ‘Democracy’<sup>39</sup>). Gissing also comes in for mention, with Marsh characterising his position thus: ‘Literature is synonymous with squalor. To breathe its atmosphere into one’s lungs is to impregnate one’s whole being with sordid qualities. Success in it is only to be achieved by the unscrupulous charlatan.’<sup>40</sup> In this rhetorically rich and humorous piece, Marsh turns the terms of the

contemporary debate about literature on its head: for him, the problem is not that there are those who make literature their trade ('A man is justified in taking to writing to earn his daily bread'), but that some of these have taken to think of it *only* from that perspective, loudly and unreasonably complaining that the public is not buying their merchandise at the price they demand. Asking whether there are no writers remaining who write just for love of writing itself, Marsh figures writing fiction as a kind of compulsion, something that one does not *choose* to do, but finds oneself *having* to do, because one has known since childhood a world 'quite away from this world', a 'land of story' and 'strange enchantments', the gate to which is closed in adulthood, but to which writing provides the key. The reference to childhood echoes a statement given by Marsh in a rare, posthumously published, interview in which he reports: 'I doubt if there was a time when I did not write - beginning, I do believe, with my first pair of knickerbockers. I used to lie awake at night telling myself stories; the following day I would write them down.'<sup>41</sup> It also suggests a perhaps unexpected connection with early nineteenth century Romanticism, which similarly valorised childhood as the site of an imaginative capacity that persists in the adult artist as the source of creative inspiration. In 'Literary Grumblers', Marsh asserts that for those writers who still know this world of story and strange enchantments, producing imaginative fiction offers compensation in and of itself for an admittedly 'fickle' bookbuying public that does not necessarily reward 'the best work [with] the best income.'<sup>42</sup> Those, however, who denounce literature as 'accursed', 'defil[ing]', and 'leprous', have mistaken the 'extraneous' thing (money and fame), for the real object of writing.

In this espousal of delight in storytelling as an end in itself, Marsh is far from appearing as the mercenary hack his detractors painted him. He draws a distinction between what he calls 'literature' and the more workmanlike productions of some writers of fiction and journalism - although he professes that these latter have their place - and it is clear that the distinguishing mark of the literary is, for him, some connection with this

world of the imagination which gives one no choice but to create invented worlds. His position here is close to that of Andrew Lang, in his 'Realism and Romance' essay (1886), where Lang defends the 'partisans of stories told for the story's sake' and argues that there is room enough for many kinds of fiction.<sup>43</sup> It is also clear that Marsh sees no necessary antagonism between literariness and writing for one's living. Interestingly, his critique of the self-pitying nature of the literary grumblers anticipates aspects of Patrick Brantlinger's analysis of Gissing's '*ressentiment*': Gissing's real problem, for Brantlinger, was not that his work was too good for the market but that he was still practising realism long after earlier writers had exhausted its possibilities.<sup>44</sup> For both Marsh and Brantlinger these authors' constant denunciations of sections of the reading public and other authors, with the concomitant elevation of their own work, in fact amounted to a form of niche self-advertising - and from writers who claimed most deeply to deplore the commercial instinct.

While such non-fictional treatments of the question are rare for Marsh, it is however the case that many of his fictional characters are actual or aspiring authors, whose professional struggles provide incidental detail or are integrally related to his plots. In his 1897 detection mystery, *Philip Bennion's Death*, the narrator-protagonist investigating his friend's murder is an ageing bachelor wishing to break into fiction.<sup>45</sup> In *Tom Ossington's Ghost* (1898), the heroine is a struggling author whose financial difficulties lead her to take on a haunted cottage in the backwaters of suburbia.<sup>46</sup> A struggling dramatist stakes - and loses - all on his play's production in *Ada Vernham, Actress* (1900); while another playwright - self-proclaimed genius Geoffrey Ford - turns to writing for the magazines in pursuit of financial reward in the short story, 'That Five Hundred Pound Prize' (1898).<sup>47</sup> Another short story, 'For Debt' (1902) is a piece of social critique aimed at the practise of sending debtors to prison: its first-person narrator is a 'poor devil of an author' for whom, in the story's refrain, 'circumstances have been too strong'.<sup>48</sup> A more successful example of professional authorship is provided by *The*

*Datchet Diamonds*' (1898) New Woman character, Miss Charlie Wentworth, who earns 'something over five-hundred a year' writing for the periodicals.<sup>49</sup>

1904's *A Duel*, however, is that of Marsh's longer fictions which features professional authorship most centrally. Essentially a sensation novel, it tells the story of adventuress Isabel Lamb, who bigamously marries and then murders ailing Scottish laird Cuthbert Grahame, after tricking him into signing a fraudulent will that leaves her his fortune, disinheriting his young ward, Margaret Wallace. In the novel's second of two 'Books', the now-wealthy Isabel has moved to England and (in a not inconsiderable coincidence) met, fallen in love with, and employed as her secretary, Margaret's fiancé, struggling author Harry Talfourd. The duel of the title commences when Margaret discovers the identity and crimes of her fiancé's benefactress, and vows to bring her to justice. The milieu of this half of the novel is that of the burgeoning culture industry, since Margaret and Harry belong to a scene of aspiring young writers, dramatists, actors and illustrators: but when the incongruous figure of Dr Twelves arrives, they are forced to confront a representative of an older generation, for whom their literary ambitions are quite unfathomable. Dr Twelves has been physician and friend to Cuthbert Grahame and Margaret since her girlhood, and he has left Scotland on her trail after seeing her signature beneath an illustration in a magazine. On learning that Margaret depends for her 'daily bread' on 'drawing pictures', Twelves draws upon his professional authority to pronounce her 'half-starved', and tells her 'It's a pretty market to which you've brought your pigs.'<sup>50</sup> It is for Harry Talfourd, however, that the doctor's greatest scepticism is reserved, when he learns that the young man 'write[s] stories' for his own living: "'Stories? Oh! and is that a man's work? ... Is that all you do, write stories?'"<sup>51</sup> If Twelves cannot accept writing stories as 'man's work', this is in part because this man of science cannot attribute to literary production the status of *work* at all. Twelves' revelation that he has "'written [stories] myself; I didn't find it hard. It's just a waste of time'" is partly an amusing aside (the doctor having appeared until now as a singularly

unimaginative man), but whatever we might suppose the good doctor's literary endeavours to have been like, it is nonetheless apparent that for him writing stories is a hobby, amusement, or leisure activity – something for when one has time to *waste*.<sup>52</sup> It is most definitely not work, and certainly not man's work, and in part precisely because it is not *hard*, but rather *easy* – indeed, “as easy as lying.”

Marsh's depiction of the young author's embarrassment in the face of his interrogation by an older man of established profession, suggests that even in the modern fin de siècle, what John Sutherland calls 'shame at being a novelist' – the corollary of fiction's stigma - had not entirely disappeared.<sup>53</sup> However, the role played in this embarrassment by gender norms also cannot be ignored. Indeed, where Sutherland suggests that the male author had greater reserves than the female author of 'resolution and independence in the face of [this] stigma', Marsh on the contrary implies that the ambiguous position of the professional novelist posed its own kinds of difficulties for men, in light of the distance of imaginative writing from men's traditional productive labour.<sup>54</sup> This is also, perhaps, a question of the gendering of different genres of fiction. Marsh wrote predominantly in the genres of sensation and gothic fiction - forms traditionally associated with women writers and readers, and whose subsequent feminising connotations had, according to Tamar Heller, earlier led Wilkie Collins to feel the contradiction of his professional status.<sup>55</sup> Marsh, like Collins, had not the benefit of identification with the 'masculine' adventure narratives of the Romance revival, which scholars argue was designed as a means of reclaiming the novel for male writers, and which enabled Guy Boothby, as we shall see, to fashion for himself a rugged, manly, authorial identity.<sup>56</sup> Marsh is nonetheless at pains to depict writing stories for one's living as a matter of hard and challenging labour, requiring tenacity and a willingness to expose oneself to failure (precarity was well understood by Marsh, who reputedly sold the copyright of *The Beetle* outright, to 'keep his family for a week or two').<sup>57</sup> His fictional

authors share with the heroes of Romance adventures this one characteristic at least: they must be willing to risk all on a gamble upon future success.

Harry Talfourd is himself a struggling writer whose very talent and idealism have brought him to the brink of penury. Harry is considered by those around him to be ‘clever on quite unusual lines’, his work ‘a cut above the market’, and ‘in consequence [to be] having a pretty rough time.’<sup>58</sup> This idea is forcefully presented by Harry’s literary nemesis, Dollie Johnson, herself a commercially successful contributor to the periodicals market. Margaret fears that it is her illustrations on Harry’s manuscripts that is causing their constant rejection, but Dollie responds with derision:

“Stuff! It’s Harry’s work that’s no good.”

“No good? How dare you! You’ve said yourself over and over again that it’s splendid.”

“That’s what’s against it -- it’s splendid.”<sup>59</sup>

The notion of good work being *unmarketable* implies a Gissing-like scepticism about the literary and publishing industries. Indeed, a similar note of cynicism is sounded in *Ada Vernham, Actress* (1900), when a character remarks that ‘so far as it concerns success in plays, as in novels, literary quality was not of great importance’.<sup>60</sup> Marsh, however, does not seem interested in treating this theme in tragic mode. Instead, his interest lies in identifying the dilemmas facing young professional writers and non-judgementally exploring their various responses. Dollie urges Harry to submerge his literary scruples and write for the market, which means – in an echo of Stevenson and others – producing inferior work. The central question of whether to write for artistic merit or for pecuniary reward is posed most acutely, however, when Isabel Lamb offers to finance Harry’s play.

‘The Gordian Knot’ is the endeavour upon which Harry has founded his highest hopes. It has, however, ‘gone the usual round of the untried dramatist’s play. Hope deferred again and again had made his heart sick.’<sup>61</sup> Yet Mrs Lamb’s offer to fund its production causes a dilemma, in part because while Harry does not yet know her real

identity and crimes, he does perceive the true nature of her (erotic) interest in him; but also because it is a condition of her offer that she herself play the part of the “heroine”<sup>62</sup>. In fact, Lady Glover, née Susan Stone, is not the intended heroine but the villain; like Isabel she is a ruthless adventurer of ambiguous identity who will stop at nothing in pursuit of her goals, and against whom the real heroine (dismissed by Isabel as “namby-pamby”) is pitted.<sup>63</sup> The fiction-within-a-fiction mimics the narrative scenario of the main plot. For Harry, Isabel’s is a perverse *misreading*; an example, perhaps, of how even the most morally correct of fictional messages might become corrupted in its transmission from author to audience. But Marsh seems mischievously to be asking whether Isabel’s is not in fact the more penetrating reading. Isabel comments that “There’s a popular fallacy that people don’t like wicked women -- it is a fallacy ... they love ‘em”’, and Marsh, in a moment of self-reflexivity about both fiction in general and the sensation genre in particular, seems to be asking whether it is not his ‘wicked’ woman, Isabel, rather than his good one, Margaret, who will hold the greatest appeal for readers of *A Duel*.<sup>64</sup> Harry, however, is left with a dilemma: to see his play finally produced, but at the cost of having Isabel’s performance “warp” it into “something altogether different” from his artistic vision.<sup>65</sup>

Dollie avers that Harry should accept the offer: “Harry, what is it you want? You want your play to be successful--that is, you want it to bring you cash and kudos; and that is all you want.”<sup>66</sup> For Frank Staines (Dollie’s on-off amour), this “utilitarian, material, sordid” remark is characteristically misguided: “the one thing Harry requires you have not mentioned--that is, satisfaction for his artistic soul.”<sup>67</sup> Frank, however, is the very antithesis of the cultural professional: he ‘wrote a little, and painted a little, and drew a little, and sang a little’ – a dilettantism afforded him by a private wealth that frees him from any need to ‘descend into the market-place and “huckster” his brain.’<sup>68</sup> Being without this economic privilege, Isabel’s offer to Harry is, despite everything, hugely tempting. But the question of what Harry really wants, and whether he is prepared to

compromise his artistic integrity, will not ultimately be answered: after this scene the action shifts to the discovery and bringing to justice of Isabel Lamb (through the friends' staging of an elaborate theatre to trap her). Marsh declines to resolve Harry's dilemma and thus to indicate a position that might be taken for his own.

The character of Dollie is a representative of the many young writers who took up pen in service of the period's new journalism. Besant had considered that journalism had 'rendered to the profession of letters' an invaluable 'assistance', by providing aspiring writers with an 'incline' into the literary world – a way of earning money through the pen while working towards a career as novelist.<sup>69</sup> For others, however, precisely the reverse was true: journalism had instead corrupted literature with the spirit of commercialism. Gissing, for example, satirised journalists in the form of *New Grub Street's* Jasper Milvain and Mr Whelpdale, the latter of whom achieves huge success with his *Chit-Chat*, a light and frothy magazine aimed at the 'quarter-educated' generation of the Board schools, and a parody of George Newnes' *Tit-Bits* magazine. Dollie writes for what Marsh clearly intends to be periodicals of this type, and she appears as an unrepentant materialist, for whom 'literature' has meaning only in terms of financial reward – what Peter McDonald would call a literary 'profiteer' in contrast to the literary 'purists' represented by Margaret, Frank and the albeit vacillating Harry:

"Margaret Wallace, literature means to me at least three pounds a week, it may be four, if possible, five. I can live on three, be comfortable on four, a swell on five. The problem being thus stated in all its beautiful simplicity, it only remains for me to discover the quickest and easiest solution. I have learned, from experience, that the *Home Muddler* is willing to give me half a guinea for a column of drivel, and the *Hearthstone Smasher* fifteen shillings for another. The *Family Flutterer* prints eight or ten thousand words of an endless serial at five shillings a thousand -- one of these days I mean to strike for seven-and-six. But in the meantime there you are -- the pursuit of literature has brought me bread and cheese."<sup>70</sup>

Marsh is evidently having some fun with the names of Dollie's magazines, although it is unclear whether the target of his humour is the popular periodicals market itself, or the handwringing critics who deem such publications a threat to hearth and home. With



Dollie's happy confession to producing "'column[s] of drivel'" he also pokes fun at the lengths that jobbing writers will go to in order to secure their subsistence. Similarly, in *The Datchet Diamonds*, the promiscuity of a successful periodicals contributor is suggested when she is described as writing 'anything [my italics], from "Fashions" to "Poetry", from "Fiction" to "Our Family Column": the authenticity of the latter, whose author the reader knows to be the unmarried New Woman character Miss Wentworth, may be left to be conjectured.<sup>71</sup>

Yet it would be a mistake to think that Dollie's approach is one that Marsh is encouraging his readers simply to condemn. Her unashamed materialism ("artistic tommy-rot!"<sup>72</sup>) is amusingly refreshing in the face of Harry's and Margaret's anxious idealism, and Frank Staines' advantaged unworldliness. She functions as a sort of foil to the pretensions of others. In support of her pragmatism, another character observes "No-one loves a bankrupt, not even your artistic soul" – a thought that is echoed in *Ada Vernham, Actress's*, 'A fiasco is a play which doesn't pay its expenses.'<sup>73</sup> We know that Dollie's enthusiasm for the remunerative potential of writing was one shared by Marsh himself, who recalled his excitement when, as a child, he had a story accepted in a boy's paper and was paid with a post-office order for thirty shillings. The young Bernard was fascinated by being able to 'convert [this] into coin', and by extension, we may surmise, to convert writing into postal order into coin.<sup>74</sup> As Vuohelainen observes, 'Marsh acknowledges [here, that] his writing career was driven not only by his love of storytelling but also by financial and professional incentives.'<sup>75</sup>

Marsh's sympathetic interest in the literary aspirations of women make him appear as something of an exception in a period where, as many scholars have observed, literary men were often in conscious competition with literary women.<sup>76</sup> His approach may have been partly motivated by awareness that his readership comprised many women, of whom some will have aspired to authorship themselves; but it also reflects a general tendency of his fiction to depict sympathetically the young person trying to make

their way in an often inhospitable world. His non-judgemental treatment of Dollie's staunch materialism perhaps ensues from recognition that employment options for women at the fin de siècle remained very restricted. Indeed, *A Duel* comments on the inequity of women's treatment by the publishing industry, with Dollie observing that "in literature [...] men always get paid at least twice as much as the women [...] it seems to be one of the rules of the game".<sup>77</sup> Marsh thematised the gendered nature of literary conflict in the short story 'That Five Hundred Pound Prize' (1898), in which a male author is bested in a prize competition by a new man, 'Philip Ayre', who is eventually revealed to be in fact his wife, Philippa. Marsh's sympathies here seem far from being simply on the side of his masculine protagonist: a literary purist who despises his rival as having "the making of a popular writer", Geoffrey Ford is described in the omniscient narrator's voice as being a man of talent and imagination, but who relies too much upon the moment of inspiration, refusing to put in the less enjoyable labour of crafting a story to make it interesting and accessible to others.<sup>78</sup> Marsh meanwhile depicts Philippa as discovering something of the pleasurable compulsion of writing, even though she is first motivated by pecuniary concerns (indeed, his depiction of the suffering endured by the literary wife – coping with financial hardship, quieting the children while her husband works, keeping faith in his ability despite persistent failure – is touching and perhaps revealing). It remains slightly troubling, however, that Marsh's female author characters seem to gather mostly on the speculator side of the spectrum, while his more idealistic writers are largely represented by men. Perhaps a current of competitive feeling subsisted in Marsh despite himself, resulting in a tendency to depict women as less serious competitors in terms of literary quality. Or perhaps, in attributing to his female author characters the more mercenary incentives for writing that we know he too possessed, he was divesting himself of qualities less easy to own in the context of the literary ideologies of the fin de siècle.

Through his fictional authors Marsh gives expression to the competing values and pressures that must be negotiated by the professional author, and points to the contradictions and compromises that inevitably assail any position. While his fictions depict a publishing industry that tends towards producing works of lesser value, there is a suggestion that the expanding market is also a diversifying one that caters for heterogeneous tastes and needs. Dollie assures Margaret that Harry will “get there” in the end, “if he keeps on long enough” suggesting that the market has room enough for the speculators and the idealists and everyone in between.<sup>79</sup> Marsh’s own commitment to a notion of literary quality that has less to do with intellectual difficulty or aesthetic innovation, but everything to do with a lucid style and imaginative storytelling conceived as a craft, perhaps marks him out as a quintessentially middlebrow author, even if, as Vuohelainen suggests, he obtained recognition of this only latterly in his career, when more positive reviews of his work perhaps reflected a growing cultural acceptance of professional authorship in the Edwardian period.<sup>80</sup> Whatever Marsh’s middlebrow aspirations, in his fictional depictions of the ‘low brow’ writer, there is gentle humour, but no tone of condemnation or abhorrence. In all his metanarratives of authorship, he pays testament to the professionalism of the modern author in the face of financial insecurity and cultural prejudice.

### III. Guy Boothby and literary celebrity

If Marsh predominantly depicts the aspiring and struggling writer, Guy Boothby’s metanarrative of authorship focuses on the other end of the scale: the bestselling, celebrity author. Boothby was himself emphatically an example. He published 53 novels and several short stories and plays in his short lifetime, writing to sustain a luxury lifestyle and reputedly earning the vast sum of £20,000 at the high point of his success.<sup>81</sup> Born in Australia in 1867, Boothby had moved with his family to Britain in 1874, then

returning to Australia after ten years.<sup>82</sup> In 1894, following an unsuccessful attempt to launch himself as a playwright in Australia, he came back to Britain and broke into fiction; at first with stories of Australian life, and then with adventure and crime fiction including the hugely popular stories of international criminal mastermind, Dr Nikola (1895-1901), and his reverse colonisation narrative, *Pharos the Egyptian* (1899). For the next decade Boothby worked tirelessly, reputedly writing up to 6,000 words a day, and rising in the small hours of the morning to dictate into a phonograph.<sup>83</sup> Ailise Bulfin considers that this phenomenal rate of literary production amounted to an ‘overwork’ that possibly contributed to the author’s early death from pneumonia in 1905, aged just 37.<sup>84</sup>

Given the short span of Boothby’s writing career, he was in relative terms more prolific than Marsh (producing more than 50 volumes in just ten years). Like Marsh, he was severely castigated for this prolificness. In 1899, for example, the *Academy* lampooned Boothby’s lifestyle and writing process in a satirical poem:

The old order passes, the new order comes,  
And Fiction today as a trade simply ‘hums,’  
So that Grub Street’s inhabitants, once on the rates,  
Are now to be found at their country estates.  
The public, who pay, name the tunes of their choice,  
And the novelist-merchant, by heeding their voice,  
By pouring his tales in the phonograph’s ear,  
At the rate of four six-shilling thrillers a year,  
[...]  
Nor do I presume to suggest which is greater:  
George Meredith – King; or Guy Boothby – Dictator.<sup>85</sup>

In his public responses to such criticism Boothby was unrepentant, frankly acknowledging that he wrote for money. As Bulfin observes, he seems to have been ‘cognisant of, and quite content with, the dubious status accorded’ him.<sup>86</sup> He famously remarked that ‘I give the reading public what they want ... in return my readers give me what I want.’<sup>87</sup> In an interview he reported, “‘I don’t take literature seriously ... Art’s got nothing to do with it ... Not in literature as I make it’”.<sup>88</sup> Smiling ‘serenely’ at the

interviewer's Arnoldian horror, Boothby dismisses Henry James as "a stylist" who "doesn't come into the question" and explains "Suppose I choose to spend two years on a book, like some of my esteemed contemporaries ... perhaps I'd be an artist too; but it would bore me to death". For him, writing cannot be an art because it is just "in [him]", and is therefore done "easily, without effort". Citing with apparent amusement the reviews that accuse him of lacking style, he concludes with satisfaction that "I'm not an artist, but I turn out books that seem to interest folk and take them out of themselves for a bit".

This picture of cheerful hackery is interestingly complicated, however, by a novel that critics have taken to be semi-autobiographical in its depiction of professional authorship. *Love Made Manifest* (1899), tells the story of Claude de Carnyon, raised by a dissolute English father on a colonial South Seas island, who travels via Australia to London to seek fame as a writer.<sup>89</sup> This rather sprawling narrative is a tale of love interrupted, adultery and atonement: in London Carnyon is reunited with his childhood sweetheart Loie, but each is now married (though unhappily); after a struggle against temptation the couple run away, at the height of Carnyon's fame, to a paradisiacal island in the place of their youth, where their happiness is however embittered by knowledge of their sin. The theme of authorship is a significant part of the first, 'London', half of the novel, with Carnyon's rise to literary fame mirroring in significant ways Boothby's own. Carnyon, like Boothby, has first tried his hand at the Australian literary scene before abandoning it in despair ('The Colonies, ever ready to claim talent when it has been thoroughly recognised elsewhere, were almost stoical in their firmness not to encourage him in his endeavours').<sup>90</sup> In London he has - again like his creator - undergone a rapid transformation from struggling to successful - indeed, bestselling - author. Interestingly, this fictional representation suggests something that is absent from Boothby's other statements on his profession: a degree of discomfort with literary celebrity and with the cult of personality on which it draws.

The ‘bestselling’ author was a phenomenon at the fin de siècle. Earlier literary figures such as the Romantic poets had achieved celebrity, and authors such as Charles Dickens had gained fame and fortune through the commercial success of their writing, but the turn of the century brought with it an unprecedented advertising machinery that increasingly sought to sell books by cultivating interest in the person of the author. The term ‘bestseller’ came to Britain from America, was applied to writers such as Marie Corelli, Hall Caine, Charles Garvice and Nat Gould, and attracted attack from members of the literary establishment including James Gissing, Joseph Conrad and James Joyce, for whom the bestseller was ‘a final confirmation of Britain’s cultural decadence, damning evidence that the majority could not be trusted and that hope for the future lay with the sensitive few.’<sup>91</sup> The cult of the celebrity author is satirised by Henry James in several short stories. In ‘John Delavoy’ (1898), a “beautiful” essay of literary appreciation on a deceased author is rejected by a literary magazine in favour of a pencil portrait and a frothy, gossipy article: the magazine’s editor knows that his readership “won’t stand” for something on the author’s work itself, but instead desires “anecdotes, glimpses, gossip, chat; a picture of his ‘home life’, domestic habits, diet, dress, arrangements” – morsels of the private life of an individual touched by the glamour of fame.<sup>92</sup> ‘The Death of a Lion’ (1894) traces the creative and physical decline of an author seduced by the attentions of a crowd that values him only for his slight celebrity.

The author-hero of *Love Made Manifest* is presented as experiencing a compulsion to create fiction from childhood: we first meet him as a boy, lying in the sands of his Samoan island home, utterly ‘absorbed’ in Sir Thomas Mallory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur* (1485).<sup>93</sup> When he finally transfers his attention to his surroundings and notices a ‘black and gold beetle’, ‘his imagination, fired by the book he had been reading, and always on the lookout for the poetic, pictured him as a knight in black and gold armour’.<sup>94</sup> The boy then narrativises the beetle’s fight with a tarantula as the heroic encounter of “brave Sir Lancelot” with the “Ogre of the Mountain”.<sup>95</sup> The young

Carnyon seems to possess in abundance a Langian ‘delight’ in ‘romances of adventure’, and his imagination allows him to endow his prosaic surroundings with the hue of the transcendent.<sup>96</sup> Boothby, like Marsh, figures the writerly imagination as something that is indeed *just in one*, as a continuation of a faculty known in childhood.

But the aspiring author Carnyon is also motivated by desire for fortune and fame: in his early days in London he watches enviously as ‘a small mail phaeton driven by a popular novelist’ goes past, reflecting to himself ““some day you are going to drive in this park in exactly the self-same style””.<sup>97</sup> But if Boothby frankly acknowledges the worldly rewards of authorship, he is also, again like Marsh, keen to stress that these are only obtained through toil and tenacity. Carnyon works ‘like a galley slave’ to achieve his first modest success, but the real significance of his book is that it opens up for him the lucrative periodicals market.<sup>98</sup> Recognising the porous boundaries of journalism and literature, Carnyon contributes magazine articles which generate ‘more and more attention every month,’ and so ‘build the public up to, and so pave the way for,’ his second book, which proves an extravagant success.<sup>99</sup>

When fame arrives, however, Carnyon seems indifferent to, and even somewhat troubled by it. His books adorn every newsagent window and railway stall; advertising hoards proclaim his name; his opinion is sought by every magazine; pictures of his face appear everywhere: he is, in short, ‘a celebrity’.<sup>100</sup> A colonial outsider, Carnyon is nonetheless invited to mix with the cream of high society, while ‘people of all ranks, sexes, and ages, wrote offering to sell him things or imploring his photo or autograph’.<sup>101</sup> Celebrity flattens out Britain’s traditional social hierarchies, Boothby observes. Yet Carnyon understands the superficiality and ephemerality of his fame: he knows that it is currently merely fashionable ‘to quote his sayings, and to find of genius all he did’, and that he could be ‘forgotten in a week’.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, he is frustrated that attention is focused upon himself, or the sensation caused by his book, and not upon his work itself. The book that gains Carnyon his phenomenal success, ‘God’s Microcosms’, causes a

controversy because it is alleged by a ‘certain illustrious statesmen’ in a ‘high-class monthly’ to have an ‘Atheistic tendency ... likely to prove harmful to the general run of readers’.<sup>103</sup> Carnyon discovers again and again that those who denounce it – literary critics or the ordinary reading public (including, unfortunately, Carnyon’s devout new wife) – have not actually read it, or have read it badly, attributing to him the views of his mere “puppets”, his characters.<sup>104</sup> However, the very controversy over the book in fact drives its sales, causing it to become a part of the furniture of ‘easy-going households’: used, that is, to signify something about the identity and tastes of its owners – if not perhaps actually read.<sup>105</sup> While Carnyon has striven to produce an important book on a weighty theological theme, it has been reduced through its reception to the status of mere commodity. But worse, so too has its author: everyone with something to sell wishes to make use of Carnyon’s brand, from photographers to tailors to bookmakers, and even a firm of hatters who have ‘invented a new style of headgear to which they were anxious to give the name of de Carnyon.’<sup>106</sup> Such is his disillusion with the ‘Dead Sea fruit’ of his fame, that Carnyon is able to abandon it and leave London without regret.<sup>107</sup>

What is one to make of this semi-Jamesian critique of literary celebrity, coming from the pen of an author who seemed so much to embrace the commodification of literature? It is by no means impossible that Boothby himself experienced a degree of disillusionment with fame and with the literary culture that supported his celebrity: indeed, we know that after the spectacular success of first the Dr Nikola novel (1895) he was subject to ferocious pressure to continue producing, in order to maintain his lifestyle, and reviewers noted the declining quality of his work.<sup>108</sup> If so, then this novel would present an intriguing insight into feelings of ambivalence and even hostility that were excluded from his robust self-presentation in interviews: something of a more uneasy relationship with his readership is implied, for example, than is suggested by his ‘I give [them] what they want ... [they] give me what I want’ formulation. This is complicated, however, by the likelihood that Boothby would have foreseen his author-hero being read



as autobiographical. As self-portraiture, the drawing of Carnyon is flattering. Not only is he handsome, resolute and chivalrous, but his book combines ‘original treatment of a daring subject, with a certain peculiarity of style’.<sup>109</sup> There is no reason, Boothby seems to be arguing, why the bestseller may not also be a work of intellectual heft and aesthetic merit. A claim such as Peter Morton’s, that the novel is ‘undoubtedly autobiographical’, therefore needs to be carefully unpacked with a view to understanding what kind of construction of self is here underway.<sup>110</sup>

Bulfin argues that throughout his career Boothby carefully performed an Anglo-Australian authorial persona, perceiving the appeal of hybrid-colonial authorial identities such as those of Haggard and Kipling to an English readership anxious for exotic locations and colonial excitement. In Australia in the 1880s and 1890s, she tells us, a construction of a rugged Australian settler identity had emerged, that was contrasted with a more refined but softer, even possibly degenerate, metropolitan British identity: Boothby perceived the possibility of exploiting this mythic *Australianness* for the British market, and set about using his colonial background to ‘create a selling point for his work in the crowded metropolitan literary marketplace.’<sup>111</sup> I suggest that this thesis is supported by *Love Made Manifest*, in which Boothby produces a very deliberate portrait of a specifically *colonial* author that he knows might be read as himself, but which downplays key aspects of his own professional practice. Strikingly, where Boothby was an active and astute marketeer of himself as commodity, any complicity in celebrity culture is precisely disavowed in the case of his creation. Claude de Carnyon is throughout the novel presented as a passive witness of his own commodification, observing somewhat bemusedly and unhappily the frenzy around him.

The distance between fictional and real author appears most clearly in two places. The first comes with the publication of Carnyon’s first book, which is well advertised, and which attracts a ‘moderate’ attention, which fact is mostly ‘accounted for’ by its ‘being the work of a new man who had been brought up, *so the publishers caused it to be*

*artfully stated*, entirely among savages, on a remote island in the Western Pacific' (my italics).<sup>112</sup> Boothby thus comes close to acknowledging that his own success is related to the sensationalising and exoticising of his colonial origins, yet importantly this is here entirely the doing of the publishers, with the author himself being innocent of involvement. Secondly, the novel makes several digs at the intrusiveness and irrelevance of interviewers who probe into the author's personal details, rather than, it is implied, the work that he has produced. The interview as a journalistic technique had come to Britain from America in the 1880s, and proved popular with readers.<sup>113</sup> It quickly became part of the marketing apparatus of publishers, and a means by which authors achieved and consolidated 'bestseller' status. It was mired in controversy from the start, however, associated as it was with a supposed "Americanisation" of British journalism.<sup>114</sup> Critics of the form (including James in many stories) considered the interview pernicious in its violation of the boundaries between public and private, or vacuous in its attention to trivia such as the mannerisms, attire or household possessions of a subject.<sup>115</sup> As such, Boothby was making use of a well-established trope when he attributed similar objections to his creation. Carnyon, we are told, had 'submitted himself to the tender mercies of three interviewers, who had commented on his furniture, his taste in dress, the colour of his eyes, and his preference for tea or coffee, as if such a thing mattered, and he had firmly resolved that nothing under the sun should ever induce him to let one inside his doors again.'<sup>116</sup> Yet far from being victimised by such impertinence himself, Boothby seems actively to have solicited and manipulated it, using the celebrity interview to cultivate journalistic interest in details of his private life, to establish himself as a first-person authority on Australia and its people, and to demonstrate his literary status.<sup>117</sup> In an 1896 interview in the *Windsor Magazine*, for example, he 'jocularly' declares the interview to be an "ordeal" and professes himself "rather at a loss how to proceed": it is only the performance of ingenuousness, however – he quickly and skilfully moves the

conversation on to the friendship and admiration shown him by his ‘brother’s of the pen’, displaying autographed portraits from Kipling, Stevenson, Haggard and Besant.<sup>118</sup>

Boothby’s fictional author Carnyon represents a further dimension of his public self-fashioning as the down-to-earth writer from the colonies. Through him Boothby is able to acknowledge the absurdity of literary celebrity culture and the mass-marketing machinery that supports this, while simultaneously disavowing complicity on the part of the author himself. In Boothby’s fictional treatment, the celebrity culture of the imperial metropole operates rather like the mesmerising gaze of a Pharos or Dr Nikola, threatening to alienate the author from his true self – from his own values and goals. But where others before him have succumbed, the strong-willed colonial proves immune to its dark fascination.

#### IV. Conclusion

Marsh and Boothby differed considerably in their writing practises and in their attitudes to authorship. Marsh, while deeming it ‘well enough that there should be a financial side to literature’, seems nonetheless to have maintained a personal commitment to an ideal of literature defined in relation to high-quality imaginative storytelling – to literature as skilled craftsmanship, if not high art.<sup>119</sup> Boothby, on the other hand, does not seem to have aspired to the ‘middlebrow’ status that this would imply, instead cheerfully disavowing the moniker ‘literature’ and frankly embracing the pursuit of pecuniary reward. Marsh, while undoubtedly prolific, would not have produced the 6,000 words a day of Boothby,<sup>120</sup> and his fiction often achieves a power of characterisation, dialogue and dramatic suspense that indeed suggests the careful ‘kneading’ of story referred to in his *Academy* letter. Many of Boothby’s fictions, however, with their ‘feeble’ characterization, ‘wild coincidences’ and clichés (Morton), suggest a process of construction at speed and without revision that Bulfin suggests at times approaches the

condition of 'stream-of-consciousness'.<sup>121</sup> Yet both authors agree in figuring imaginative storytelling as something that one does because it is inherent within one's nature: it may be well to make a (good) living through writing; but one writes anyway, since one must, since it is a compulsive pleasure, or pleasurable compulsion.

Their metanarratives of authorship also agree in testifying to the struggle against great odds faced by the aspiring author, and to the exhausting hard work, the dedication and the professionalism of the working writer. Perhaps Marsh and Boothby chose fiction as a means of response to their critics because of the greater audience it enabled, but perhaps too because by establishing some distance from the authorial self, fictional representation allowed for the expression of feelings difficult to own directly – Marsh pointing to the conflicted gender identity of the male author, and Boothby expressing distaste for the very marketing machinery with which he was complicit. Indeed, the fictions of each register a degree of cynicism about the industry of which they are a part, suggesting their perspectives do not simply oppose, but are sometimes convergent with those of more highbrow critics.

However, while the metafictional treatments of authorship provided by Gissing and James sound a single note of pessimism about literary culture in the closing years of the nineteenth century, presenting a polarised vision of irreconcilable schism between art and mass-culture, and between the literary author and the mass of readers for whom he does not write and can feel only disdain, the fictions by Boothby and particularly Marsh do something different. They describe the literary market as not simply degraded, but as diversified, and as such, as rightly providing for all kinds of needs – for the desire to be intellectually and aesthetically challenged, but also for the wish to find recreation and diversion through reading. Reading for leisure was frequently viewed negatively, as an inclination for passive, effortless, distraction – as indeed it sometimes is today, when new technologies such as e-readers promise to again reshape reading practises, thus producing similar fears about the sustainability of particular kinds of writing.<sup>122</sup> The popular

novelists of the fin de siècle perhaps suggest a more positive way of viewing ‘recreational’ reading: not as the refusal of difficulty, but as the desire, shared by readers and authors alike, to be transported into worlds of enchantment in which one’s own imagination may soar.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Marsh, *A Duel* (London: Methuen, 1904), 149-150.

<sup>2</sup> Florian Schweizer, “Authorship and the Professional Writer,” in *Charles Dickens in Context*, ed. Sally Ledger and Holly Furneaux (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2013), 118.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 118-119.

<sup>4</sup> See George Gissing, *New Grub Street* (1891), ed. John Goode (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2008). Henry James wrote a number of short fictions on authorship and literary culture in the last decade or so of the century: see ‘The Aspern Papers’ (1888); ‘The Death of the Lion’ (1894); ‘The Figure in the Carpet’ (1896); ‘John Delavoy’ (1898); all in *The Complete Works of Henry James* (Delphi Classics, 2011), Kindle edition.

<sup>5</sup> For recent scholarship on Marsh, see for example: Minna Vuohelainen, *Richard Marsh (Gothic Authors: Critical Revisions)* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2015); Stephan Karschay, *Degeneration, Normativity and the Gothic at the Fin de Siècle* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Leslie Allin, “Leaky Bodies: Masculinity, Narrative and Imperial Decay in Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle*,” *Victorian Network*, 6.1 (2015), 113-135; Minna Vuohelainen, “From ‘Vulgar’ and ‘Impossible’ to ‘Pre-Eminently Readable’: Richard Marsh’s Critical Fortunes, 1893-1915,” *English Studies*, 95.3 (2014), 278-301; Minna Vuohelainen, “‘Contributing to Most Things’: Richard Marsh, Literary Production, and the Fin de Siècle Periodicals Market,” *Victorian Periodicals Review* 46.3 (2013), 401-22; Johan Höglund, “Black Englishness and the Concurrent Voices of Richard Marsh in *The Surprising Husband*,” *English Literature in Transition*, 56.3 (2013), 275-91; W. C. Harris and Dawn Vernooy, “‘Orgies of Nameless Horrors’: Gender, Orientalism, and the Queering of Violence in Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle*,” *Papers in Language and Literature*, 48.4 (2012), 1-43; Anna Maria Jones, “Conservation of Energy, Individual Agency, and Gothic Terror in Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle*, or, What’s Scariest than an Ancient, Evil, Shape-shifting Bug?,” *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 39.1 (2011), 65-85. On Boothby, see Ailise Bulfin, “Guy Boothby’s ‘Bid for Fortune’: Constructing an Anglo-Australian Colonial Identity for the *Fin-de-Siècle* London Literary Marketplace,” in *Changing the Victorian Subject* (Adelaide: University of Adelaide Press, 2014); Clare Clarke, *Late Victorian Crime Fiction in the Shadows of Sherlock* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Clare Clarke, “Imperial Rogues: Reverse Colonization Fears in Guy Boothby’s *A Prince of Swindlers* and Late-Victorian Detective Fiction,” *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 41 (2013), 527-45; Peter Morton, *Lusting for London: Australian Expatriate Writers at the Hub of Empire, 1870-1950* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Ailise Bulfin, “The Fiction of Gothic Egypt and British Imperial Paranoia: The Curse of the Suez Canal,” *English Literature in Transition*, 54.4 (2011), 411-43; Rachael Weaver, “Colonial Violence and Forgotten Fiction,” *Australian Literary Studies*, 24.2 (2009), 33-53; Yu Ouwang, *Chinese in Australian Fiction: 1888-1988* (New York: Cambria Press, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Anonymous, “In the Manner of the Amir / Mr Guy Boothby,” *Academy* (6 October, 1900), 285.

<sup>7</sup> Henry James, *Autobiography* (1913-17) (Princeton: Princeton Legacy Library, 1983); Anthony Trollope, *An Autobiography* (1883), ed. Michael Sadleir and Frederick Page (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2009); Rudyard Kipling, *Something of Myself* (1937) (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 2008); Arthur Conan Doyle, *Memories and Adventures: An Autobiography* (1923) (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 2007); Thomas and Florence Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy* (1928-30) (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 2007). Hardy’s ‘autobiography’, narrated in the third person, was in fact first published as a biography written by his second wife, Florence; it is now believed that Hardy himself wrote the vast majority of the text. James’ autobiography finishes in his 35<sup>th</sup> year, in 1878, and so only addresses the earliest part of his writing career.

<sup>8</sup> Peter D. McDonald, *British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice, 1880-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1997), 173.

- <sup>9</sup> Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1998); Patrick Brantlinger, *The Reading Lesson: The Threat of Mass Literacy in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1998); Joseph McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing in Britain, 1914-1950* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992).
- <sup>10</sup> Kate Flint, "The Victorian Novel and its Readers," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. Deirdre David (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2001), 19.
- <sup>11</sup> Altick, *English Common Reader*, 306.
- <sup>12</sup> Simon Eliot, "The Business of Victorian Publishing," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. Deirdre David (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2001), 59; Flint, "The Victorian Novel," 17.
- <sup>13</sup> Wilkie Collins, "The Unknown Public", *Household Words* 18 (21 Aug 1858); quoted in McAleer, *Popular Reading*, 2. See also Brantlinger, *Reading Lesson*, 17-18.
- <sup>14</sup> Brantlinger, *Reading Lesson*, 17.
- <sup>15</sup> McAleer, *Popular Reading*, 22.
- <sup>16</sup> Edmund Gosse, "The Influence of Democracy on Literature," *Contemporary Review* (April 1891); quoted by McDonald.
- <sup>17</sup> Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), ed. Jane Garnett (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2009).
- <sup>18</sup> Flint, "Victorian Novel", 20. See also John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice Among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992).
- <sup>19</sup> Carey, *Intellectuals*, 6.
- <sup>20</sup> Walter Besant, *The Pen and the Book*, (London: Thomas Burleigh, 1899), <https://archive.org/details/penandbook00besauoft>
- <sup>21</sup> See Nigel Cross, *The Common Writer: Life in Nineteenth-Century Grub Street* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1985), 4-6.
- <sup>22</sup> Eliot, "Business of Victorian Publishing," 49.
- <sup>23</sup> For an extended discussion see McDonald, *British Literary Culture*, 157-171.
- <sup>24</sup> On Haggard, see Francis O'Gorman, "Speculative Fictions and the Fortunes of H. Rider Haggard," in *Victorian Literature and Finance*, ed. Francis O'Gorman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 157-72. Stevenson, *Letters* 2:281; quoted in Brantlinger, *Reading Lesson*, 173.
- <sup>25</sup> John Goode, "Introduction," *New Grub Street*, xvi.
- <sup>26</sup> Cross, *Common Writer*, 215.
- <sup>27</sup> McDonald, *British Literary Culture*, 160.
- <sup>28</sup> Gissing, *New Grub Street*, 9.
- <sup>29</sup> Gissing, *New Grub Street*, 51.
- <sup>30</sup> Anonymous, "The Yellow Dwarf", *Yellow Book*, October 1895; quoted in McDonald, *British Literary Culture*, 1.
- <sup>31</sup> Helen Bosanquet, "Cheap Literature," *Contemporary Review* 79 (1901), 671-681: 674-675.
- <sup>32</sup> Theodore W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 1997).
- <sup>33</sup> McAleer, *Popular Reading*, 33.
- <sup>34</sup> Vuohelainen, "Contributing," 405.
- <sup>35</sup> Anonymous, "Notes on Novels," *Academy* (13 October 1900), 310; Anonymous, "Notes on Novels," *Academy* (17 November 1900), 468; Anonymous, "The Yarning School," *Academy* (3 November 1900), 423-4.
- <sup>36</sup> Richard Marsh, "Mr Marsh Explains," *Academy* (October 1897), 358.
- <sup>37</sup> Bernard Heldmann's promising career as contributor to, and then co-editor of, W. H. G. Kingston's and G. H. Henty's *Union Jack* magazine was brought to an abrupt end in June 1883, and Heldmann disappeared from the literary scene. It has recently emerged that in April 1884 Heldmann was sentenced to 18 months' hard labour for having passed fraudulent cheques throughout much of 1883 until his arrest in February 1884. After his release from prison, 'Richard Marsh' began publishing fiction.
- <sup>38</sup> Two other exceptions are an essay on 'The Short Story', *Home Chimes* 12.67 (August 1891), 23-30, which advises prospective authors on how and what to write, in the process satirising literary magazines and the contemporary vogue for elusive, obscurantist writing; and 'A Chat with Young Authors: The Search for a Publisher' (MS 2051/10, University of Reading archive), which discusses the different routes to publication (selling copyright outright, half profits, royalties and commission) and warns against the sharp practises of publishing firms.
- <sup>39</sup> Robert Buchanan, quoted in Cross, *Common Writer*, 216.
- <sup>40</sup> Richard Marsh, "Literary Grumblers," (MS 2059/1, University of Reading archive).

- <sup>41</sup> Richard Marsh, "How I Broke into Print", *Strand Magazine* (November 1915), 573; quoted in Minna Vuohelainen, "Contributing," 401. Vuohelainen also notes how Marsh indicates storytelling to be a 'compulsive activity'
- <sup>42</sup> Marsh, "Literary Grumblers".
- <sup>43</sup> Andrew Lang, "Realism and Romance", in *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History c.1880-1900*, eds. Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst (Oxford: Oxford University, 2000), 102.
- <sup>44</sup> Brantlinger, *Reading Lesson*, 173, 188-89.
- <sup>45</sup> Richard Marsh, *Philip Bennion's Death* (1897) (Kansas City: Valancourt Books, 2007).
- <sup>46</sup> Richard Marsh, *Tom Ossington's Ghost* (1898) (London: James Bowden, 1898).
- <sup>47</sup> Richard Marsh, *Ada Vernham, Actress* (1900) (London: John Long, 1900), Kindle edition; Richard Marsh, "That Five Hundred Pound Prize," in *Harmsworth Monthly Pictorial Magazine* 1 (September 1898), 172-81.
- <sup>48</sup> Richard Marsh, "For Debt," (1902) in *Under One Flag* (London: John Long, 1906); 265, and 263, 264, 281.
- <sup>49</sup> Richard Marsh, *The Datchet Diamonds* (1898) (Kansas City: Valancourt Books, 2007), 29.
- <sup>50</sup> Marsh, *A Duel*, 146-7.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>53</sup> Sutherland, *Victorian Fiction*, 156.
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>55</sup> See Tamar Heller, *Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992). Heller describes Collins' position within the publishing industry as being a 'double one' in gender terms: feminised through his identification with sensation and Gothic, he was nonetheless masculinised through his professional status (7).
- <sup>56</sup> See, for example, Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (London: Virago, 1992), 79. Showalter writes of the Romance revival as a 'men's literary revolution intended to reclaim the kingdom of the English novel for male writers, male readers, and men's stories', in which the refined attention to manners and to character deemed characteristic of the realist novel as practised by George Eliot and her (female) contemporaries, would be supplanted by an emphasis on action, quest, and the manly virtues (79).
- <sup>57</sup> As related by Marsh's grandson, horror writer Robert Aickman in his autobiography *The Attempted Rescue* (Leyburn: Tartalus Press, 2001), 7.
- <sup>58</sup> Marsh, *A Duel*, 135-6.
- <sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 137-8.
- <sup>60</sup> Marsh, *Ada Vernham, Actress*, 106-7.
- <sup>61</sup> Marsh, *A Duel*, 132.
- <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.
- <sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.
- <sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.
- <sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.
- <sup>69</sup> Besant, *Pen and the Book*.
- <sup>70</sup> McDonald, *British Literary Culture*, 14 and elsewhere. Marsh, *A Duel*, 138.
- <sup>71</sup> Marsh, *Datchet Diamonds*, 29.
- <sup>72</sup> Marsh, *A Duel*, 170.
- <sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 171; Marsh, *Ada Vernham, Actress*, 203.
- <sup>74</sup> Marsh, "How I Broke into Print"; in Vuohelainen, "Contributing," 401.
- <sup>75</sup> Vuohelainen, "Contributing," 401.
- <sup>76</sup> Gaye Tuchman with Nina E. Fortin, *Edging Women Out: Victorian Novelists, Publishers, and Social Change* (London: Routledge, 1989); Heller, *Dead Secrets*; Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy*; Carey, *Intellectuals*.
- <sup>77</sup> Marsh, *A Duel*, 138.
- <sup>78</sup> Marsh, "That Five Hundred Pound Prize," 179.
- <sup>79</sup> Marsh, *A Duel*, 139.
- <sup>80</sup> Vuohelainen, "Vulgar and Impossible," 297-8.
- <sup>81</sup> Bulfin, "Guy Boothby's," 166. Bulfin draws upon John Sutherland and *The Australian Dictionary of Biography*.
- <sup>82</sup> "Boothby, Guy Newell (1867-1905)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of

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Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/boothby-guy-newell-5293/text8931>, published in hardcopy 1979, accessed online 28 October 2014.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>84</sup> Bulfin, "Guy Boothby's," 166.

<sup>85</sup> "The Literary Week", *Academy* (1899) in Bulfin, "Guy Boothby's," 167.

<sup>86</sup> Bulfin, "Guy Boothby's," 173.

<sup>87</sup> "Boothby, Guy Newell," Australian Dictionary of Biography.

<sup>88</sup> *The London Weekly Sun* interview is quoted extensively in "Mr Guy Boothby," in *The Advertiser* (Adelaide). All subsequent quotations in this paragraph are from this source.

<sup>89</sup> Guy Boothby, *Love Made Manifest* (London, New York and Melbourne: Ward, Lock & Co, 1899).

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>91</sup> Peter Keating, *The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1989), 445; quoted in McAleer, *Popular Reading*, 32-3.

<sup>92</sup> James, "John Delavoy."

<sup>93</sup> Boothby, *Love Made Manifest*, 22.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>96</sup> Lang, 'Realism and Romance,' 102.

<sup>97</sup> Boothby, *Love Made Manifest*, 35.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 259.

<sup>108</sup> See Bulfin, "Guy Boothby's," 116.

<sup>109</sup> Boothby, *Love Made Manifest*, 93.

<sup>110</sup> Morton, *Lusting for London*, 101.

<sup>111</sup> Bulfin, "Guy Boothby's," 153.

<sup>112</sup> Boothby, *Love Made Manifest*, 52.

<sup>113</sup> Matthew Rubery, *The Novelty of Newspapers: Victorian Fiction after the Invention of the News* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 113.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 116-7.

<sup>116</sup> Boothby, *Love Made Manifest*, 161

<sup>117</sup> See Bulfin, 'Guy Boothby's', 162; and Morton, *Lusting for London*, 106.

<sup>118</sup> John Hyde, "The Creator of 'Dr Nikola': An Afternoon with Guy Boothby," *Windsor Magazine*, 5 (Dec 1896), 129-33.

<sup>119</sup> Marsh, 'Literary Grumblers'.

<sup>120</sup> Indeed, Vuohelainen calculates Marsh to have produced 7,000 to 8,000 words per week on average, comparing this to Trollope's 10,000 words 'which, according to Trollope, was a manageable task that required self-discipline.' "Contributing," 416.

<sup>121</sup> Morton, *Lusting for London*, 105. Bulfin, "Guy Boothby's," 164.

<sup>122</sup> For example, novelist Joanna Scott has recently written in support of the difficult, serious or literary novel, which she fears is being endangered by the growing popularity of novels characterized by 'gripping plots' and 'clear, unfussy writing'. Scott cites researchers for whom this change is being driven by a move to on-line or electronic reading, which is thought to diminish attention span and hence tolerance for difficult, complex, writing. See Joanna Scott, "The Virtues of Difficult Fiction," *The Nation*, July 30, 2015. Accessed August 18, 2015, <http://www.thenation.com/article/the-democracy-of-difficult-fiction/>