Abstract

Contextualizing Value: Market Stories in Mid-Victorian Periodicals

Emily Catherine Simmons

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Department of English, University of Toronto

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This dissertation examines the modes, means, and merit of the literary production of short stories in the London periodical market between 1850 and 1870. Shorter forms were often derided by contemporary critics, dismissed on the assumption that quantity equals quality, yet popular, successful, and respectable novelists, namely Charles Dickens, Anthony Trollope, Elizabeth Gaskell and Margaret Oliphant, were writing, printing, and distributing them. This study navigates a nexus of discourses about culture, literature, and writing to explore, delineate, and ascertain the implications of the contextual position of certain short stories. In particular, it identifies and characterizes a previously unexamined genre, here called the Market Story, in order to argue for the contingency and de-centring of processes and pronouncements of valuation. Market stories are defined by their relationship to a publishing industry that was actively creating a space for, demanding, and disseminating texts based on their potential to generate sales figures, draw attention to a particular organ, author, or publisher, or gather and hold a captive audience. These texts indicate their authors’ self-aware commentary on the construction and relativity of literary and generic value: in effect, they constitute a discourse on value.
Following the Introduction’s outline of the historical field in which market stories were produced, Chapter One reads Anthony Trollope’s six “Editor’s Tales” as intensely comic, self-reflexive, and interrogative of extant conceptions of cultural and literary value; Trollope glories in the exposure and dismantling of seemingly-reliable externality. Chapter Two considers “Somebody’s Luggage,” Dickens’s argument for the contrivance of literary genre, which features a narrator who does not correspond to the author of the body tales and constructs an exaggerated system of exchanges whereby the short story generates unprecedented income. In Chapter Three I move to Elizabeth Gaskell’s “Cranford Papers” and argue that their diligent tracing of the careful consumption of small wholes and cultivation of irregular habits constitutes an insistence on the plurality of appropriate models of consumption and value. By shifting the discussion from content to form, Gaskell’s text throws the shape of the market story into relief. Finally, Chapter Four considers Margaret Oliphant’s “Dinglefield Stories” as a figurative argument that generic and literary value is always, necessarily, inextricably, contextualized. As literary works and cultural products, these stories embody the tensions between the utilitarian and the ‘purely’ artistic that underwrote much nineteenth-century discussion of art and culture, and these authors were unmistakably aware of the external conditions enabling, eliciting, and affecting the production of literary work as well as its subsequent valuation.
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Table of Contents

Introduction: “The Value of it all”: Periodicals, Markets, Genres ........................................ 1

Chapter One: “It’s Hard Enough to Find the Plan”:
Systemic Aspiration in Anthony Trollope’s “An Editor’s Tales” ................................. 33

Chapter Two: “A Goodish Profit on the Original Investment”:
Luggage, Writing, and Anxiety in Charles Dickens’s Christmas Numbers .................... 80

Chapter Three: “This is not Waste”:
Careful Consumption in Elizabeth Gaskell’s “The Cranford Papers” .......................... 119

Chapter Four: “Across the Verdant Lawns”:
Arrangement as Contingency in Margaret Oliphant’s “Dinglefield Stories” .............. 157

Un-Collapsing, in Conclusion ........................................................................................... 198

Works Consulted .............................................................................................................. 205
George Gissing’s 1891 novel *New Grub Street* depicts a world of writers attempting to earn livings and reputations in Late Victorian London, and Jasper Milvain, one of its protagonists, struggles for survival as a literary journalist with a shrewdly mercenary outlook that borders on the reprehensible. His emblematic scene, a boastful detailing of a particularly productive and efficient day wherein he has written a review by 10:30 a.m., an informal essay and half an artistic one in the afternoon, read four newspapers and two magazines, sketched something like half a dozen ideas for new papers, and journeyed between mealtimes “thinking hard all the way” (Gissing 207), exaggerates and distorts a mechanized approach to artistic production. Milvain’s sister puts a fine point on the implied disparity between factory and creative work when she asks him the “value of it all.” He first replies with an economic measurement (between “ten to twelve guineas”) before acknowledging that the day’s work has a “literary value” approximately equal to “the contents of a mouldy nut” (Gissing 207). Work produced by rote, in Gissing’s world, will have no lasting artistic merit.

*New Grub Street* holds pride of place in the canon as the “most eminent nineteenth-century novel dealing directly with the position of writing in the social context of its time” (Goode vii). Paul Delany has recently written that *New Grub Street* “still stands as the most acute analysis of the literary marketplace in English fiction” (184-85). It is generally considered to engage more substantially with representations of writers and their concerns than earlier novels like Charles Dickens’s *David Copperfield* or W.M. Thackeray’s

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1 Fitzgerald 737.
*Pendennis*; as Stephen Arata contends, the novel depicts to an “unprecedented degree” the “sheer physical labor” involved in writing, where earlier novels—including the two just mentioned—remain largely silent about the work of composition itself (36). For all of this groundbreaking representation, though, *New Grub Street* is unequivocally an “indictment” of a commercial system that, in Gissing’s view, disables more than it enables the proliferation and cultivation of good work (Arata 38). In 1891, *New Grub Street* paints a picture of a literary marketplace where economic forces thwart, distort, and debilitate a hardworking individual’s efforts towards artistic achievement. The disillusioned tone of Gissing’s representation may reflect the particular historical moment of the literary marketplace, which was approaching a height of proliferation at the century’s end. *Tit-Bits* was the real referent of *Chit-Chat* (a magazine pioneered in the novel by the enterprising character Whelpdale), condensing news down into bite-size pieces for speedy readers; Arthur Conan Doyle had popularized the winning formula of a protagonist who recurs through discrete episodic tales with Sherlock Holmes; and review journals (titles such as *The Eclectic Review* (1805), *The London Quarterly Review* (1853), *The Home and Foreign Review* (1862), *The National Review* (1883) or *The New Review* (1889) were common) compounded into the uroboric Review of Reviews. Combined with the fin-de-siecle’s overtones of decadent decline, it is possible to see the fatigue Gissing may have felt observing an overwrought sphere.

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2 Arata calls the novel an “indictment of late-Victorian literary culture” that expresses Gissing’s sense of the “utter futility of literary endeavour” (38), and Adrian Poole asserts that “The central indictment of the contemporary literary world made by Gissing, is that it has achieved a total industrialisation of writing, and reduction of the world to the status of a thing” (142).

3 This is more so when those individuals begin without independent financial means. It should be noted, as well, that for Gissing the sword is sharpened on both sides. As Simon James has observed, “the intransigence of the characters is as much to blame as the nature of the world they inhabit … [even] with a slightly higher income … their temperament can also prevent development” (98).

4 *Tit-Bits* was founded in 1881; Conan Doyle’s first Holmes story, “A Study in Scarlet,” was printed in 1887; and the Review of Reviews began circulating in January 1890. While journals with titles like *The Eclectic Review* (1805-1868) lasted through much of the century, these are different in kind from the Review of Reviews.
However, the world that informed *New Grub Street* did not spring up overnight, and it is worth looking back to an earlier part of the century to ask what preceded this novel, and if other fictional representations of market issues, writing and authorship predate Gissing’s account. This is a study about the modes, means, and merit of the literary production of nineteenth-century short stories. I am concerned with, and articulating a new dimension of, those emergent discourses of the publishing industry, the professionalization of authorship, and the periodical market for fiction in London at the mid century, between 1850 and 1870. The literary landscape that Gissing’s novel represents in stark detail and at great length was in fact the apex of decades of social change, including the rise of the three-volume novel and the periodical press early in the century; the repeal of the stamp tax in 1855 and the paper tax in 1861; the lowering costs for paper production and corollary advances in printing technology and stereotyping plates; the education act of 1870; what began as a new avenue for book distribution before turning into the “triple headed monster” of Mudie’s circulating library (Gissing 226); and finally the Net Book Agreement of 1899. Prior to this, the period

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The former paid contributors to write reviews of books on a diverse range of subjects, while the latter (with a similarly ‘eclectic’ impulse) attained a second level of synthesis by collecting extant reviews published elsewhere and re-printing them under a single umbrella.

5 For example, Thomas Miller’s *Godfrey Malvern, or, the Life of an Author* (1843), Rose Hendricks’s *The Young Authorress* (1847), and Edward Bulwer Lytton’s *The Caxtons* (1849) are three novels either about or featuring authors and publishing practices that precede *Pendennis*.

6 The connections between Gissing’s novel and short stories as a genre are few, but they are telling: even in a depiction of contemporary London written in 1891, short stories are “an inferior kind of work” and Jasper’s two sisters Dora and Maud are authors who “knocked [a] trifle together ... very quickly, and in a [very] workmanlike way” (60, 151). Their value is circumscribed insofar as they are appropriate for two female characters writing together under direction, and their worth is easily dismissed by Milvain.

witnessed a burgeoning print culture, where the novel was slowly but steadily developing as a respectable literary genre, where new daily, weekly, and monthly periodical publications were continuously appearing, and where, more generally, ‘market forces’ were ascendant. In these two decades the London publishing world welcomed a myriad of new periodical titles, including *Household Words* (1850), *The London Quarterly Review* (1853), *The National Review* (1855), *All the Year Round* (1859), *Bentley’s Quarterly* (1859), *Macmillan’s Magazine* (1859), *The Cornhill* (1860), *Temple Bar* (1860), *St. James Magazine* (1861), *The Home and Foreign Review* (1862), *Victoria Magazine* (1863), *The Argosy* (1865), *The Fortnightly Review* (1865), *The Contemporary Review* (1866), *Belgravia* (1866), *Tinsley’s Magazine* (1867), and *Saint Pauls* (1867). Among the editors of these journals were well-known novelists like Dickens, Thackeray, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, and Anthony Trollope; these editorial roles served as useful marketing tools, having the added benefit of (or being at least partly designed for) keeping their names “before the public” on a regular basis, especially when they were between novels (Fitzgerald 737). Simultaneously, these authors were exploring the various types of financial reward available to novelists: as Simon Eliot has discussed, Dickens took the working-class form of novels in parts “upmarket,” Trollope “shopped around” for the publisher who would give him the best price for a manuscript (“Business” 44, 49), and Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot signed their novels to the popular and prestigious *Cornhill* magazine, away from their earlier periodical homes, because it paid better.  

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8 In calling the novel in parts working class I accept John Sutherland’s argument in *Victorian Fiction: Writers, Publishers, Readers*. Sutherland seeks to “desmystify” the seemingly “wonderfully sudden” Dickensian innovation of the novel in parts (with *Pickwick*) by discussing several “precedents and possible inspirations” including Pierce Egan’s *Life in London* (1820-21), Harriet Martineau’s *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832), and Henry Colburn’s *Pelham* and *The Disowned* (offered in 1836) (87-88).
increasingly—yet not universally—employed; Dickens utilized it more successfully than many of his imitators and after his death it all but disappeared (Eliot, “Business” 44-45).

And while reviewing as a genre had mushroomed in the early nineteenth century, it was in the middle decades that terms like ‘puffing’ and debates about signed versus anonymous articles became commonplace alongside an accepted public vocabulary for criticism.9 What is more, this debate, these new critical discourses, were all happening in the periodical sphere, described as having paramount importance by George Saintsbury: “Perhaps there is no single feature of the English literary history of the nineteenth century, not even the enormous popularisation and multiplication of the novel, which is so distinctive and characteristic as the development in it of periodical literature” (qtd. in Brake 7-8). Simply put, the mid-Victorian period was a heyday for the expansion of print culture.

This fruitful landscape for literary production yielded myriad formal innovations and generic experiments. Dallas Liddle has recently observed, in his study of journalistic genres in mid-Victorian periodicals, that the period may be “the most dazzlingly multigeneric that any period of literary history has produced” (8).10 From Dickens’s long-running narrative serial “A Child’s History of England,” through comic sketches, historical romances, ghost tales and literary essays ranging from the political (“England’s Place in Europe”) to the literary (“Fashion in Poetry”) to the entirely fanciful (“Breakfast in bed: or, Philosophy between the sheets”), to Elizabeth Gaskell’s intermittent “Cranford Papers” (which, though eventually received as a novel, was certainly not begun as one), mid-Victorian literary periodicals housed a tremendous range of generic forms, and offered authors multiple

9 See Nicola Diane Thompson, Reviewing Sex, for more on the “new importance” of reviews (3).
10 Similarly, Alistair Fowler declares, “We may not yet have the perspective to be sure whether the nineteenth century is the most prolific of all literary periods in experimentation with genre. But it certainly offers an embarrassment of riches” (206).
avenues for their work.¹¹ Some of these innovations were clearly unsuccessful: in 1840 Dickens undertook to publish *Master Humphrey’s Clock*, a weekly periodical consisting of collected but discrete stories and sketches told among a group of recurring characters, but flagging sales soon prompted him to shift the publication to a vehicle for his next serialized novel, *The Old Curiosity Shop*.¹² Declining sales were a clear indication of public response to Dickens’s open-ended plan to “vary the form of the papers by throwing them into sketches, essays, tales, adventures, letters from imaginary correspondents and so forth, so as to diversify the contents as much as possible” (*Letters* 1.563-64). Nevertheless, generic variety was embraced and new formal experiments were continuously attempted in the pages of weekly and monthly periodicals.

I want to emphasize the connections among Dickens’s work in the periodical sphere, the dates that shape this study, and generic development. Dickens is in many ways a representative figure and it would be difficult to understate his impact on the periodical market in London between 1850 and 1870 (the year of his death). In 1850 he began assiduously and energetically overseeing the production of *Household Words* (1850-59) and then, after the public scandal of his divorce prompted a fallout with his publisher Bradbury & Evans in 1859, *All the Year Round* (1859-1895). Canonical Victorian novels such as his own *Hard Times* (1854), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859-60), and *Great Expectations* (1860-61) first appeared in his journals, as did Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South* (1854) and Wilkie

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¹¹“A Child’s History of England” ran in *Household Words* between January 1851 and December 1853; “England’s place in Europe” appeared in *Saint Pauls* in December 1867; “Fashion in Poetry” was printed in *Saint Pauls* in March 1868; “Breakfast in bed: or, Philosophy between the sheets” appeared in *Temple Bar* in October 1862; and “The Cranford Papers” ran intermittently in *Household Words* between December 1851 and May 1853.

¹²*Master Humphrey’s Clock* is a fascinating artefact of Victorian periodical experimentation. For more discussion of its brief life span, see Rosemary Mundhenk, “Creative Ambivalence in Dickens’s *Master Humphrey’s Clock*,” Audrey Jaffe, “‘Never be Safe but in Hiding’: Omniscience and Curiosity in The Old Curiosity Shop,” and Robert Patten, “‘The Story-Weaver at his Loom’: Dickens and the Beginning of *The Old Curiosity Shop*.”
Collins’ *The Moonstone* (1868), to name only the two most famous. His letters evince a daily correspondence with his sub-editor W.H. Wills, whose charge of the journals Dickens micromanaged with both sweeping directives—“KEEP ‘HOUSEHOLD WORDS’ IMAGINATIVE!”—and instructions regarding minutiae—“See to the dashes in the article on Epitaphs. They are at present innumerable” (*Letters* 7.200, 6.773). In *Dickens the Journalist* John M.L. Drew has identified the author as “the most potent individual force … in weekly journalism” (180), working across a range of genres so diverse as to involve the comic sketch, the miscellaneous satire, the historical narrative, “the character-narrator’s account of himself,” travelling letters and vacation sketches, “original investigative reporting,” political spoofs, familiar essays, “collaborative process articles,” and (what will be the subject of my second chapter) the multi-authored Christmas Number (Drew 169). And this recognition of his impact both is and was felt. Trollope’s obituary article characterizes Dickens’s multifaceted involvement as “always enthusiastic” in the interests of literature, “ready to push on beginners, quick to encourage those who were winning their way to success, sympathetic with his contemporaries, and greatly generous to aid those who were failing” (“Dickens” 374). At a dinner in his honour held in 1868, George W. Curtis suggested that “Since the beginning of the publication of *Household Words*, the periodical literature of England has been born again” (qtd. in Drew 181). Dickens’s work and influence actively fostered generic innovation in the fecund periodical marketplace in London between 1850 and 1870.

The short story is extremely closely connected to processes of production and proliferation in this historical moment. As a form following in the footsteps of the novel in prose fiction’s quest for critical respectability, short stories were less likely to be printed on
their own merit or for (supposedly) purely aesthetic reasons. Often derided, if they were noticed at all, by contemporary British critics, and dismissed on the assumption that quantity is quality—one reviewer hesitated to include George Egerton’s collection of stories Keynotes among a review of modern fiction because it was “not so ambitious as a three-volume novel”—shorter forms were far from the apex of nineteenth-century genre hierarchies (Stead 68). Yet popular, successful, and respectable novelists, namely Charles Dickens, Anthony Trollope, Elizabeth Gaskell and Margaret Oliphant, were writing, printing, and distributing them. This study asks what novelists of the period were doing with shorter fictional forms in the periodical sphere, and navigates a nexus of discourses about culture, literature, and writing to explore, delineate, and ascertain the implications of the contextual position of certain short stories. In particular, it contributes to the field of Victorian cultural and literary criticism by identifying and characterizing a previously unexamined genre, here called the Market Story, and reading its texts as a previously unrecognized arm of contemporary discourses of axiology which argue for the contingency and de-centring of processes and pronouncements of valuation. These texts indicate their authors’ self-aware commentary on the construction and relativity of literary and generic value: in effect, they constitute a discourse on value.

The four authors here discussed were all remarkably active in the literary marketplace: Dickens and Trollope edited their own journals, and Gaskell and Oliphant wrote consistently in a variety of forms for a number of different publishers and editors

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13 Current criticism on the short story, as will be discussed below, almost entirely neglects the contextually-driven aspects of the texts I identify as Market Stories. Similar work has been done on the novel; Andrew Miller’s Novels Behind Glass, Jennifer Ruth’s Novel Professions and Daniel Hack’s The Material Interests of the Victorian Novel are good examples insofar as they seek to explore Victorian texts through material and contextual channels in order to find “potential sources of meaning, value, and power” (Hack 2). However, these investigations are solely invested in recasting the landscape of that ubiquitous subject of criticism, the Victorian novel, which is why my work seeks to supplement and expand this landscape with other genres.
throughout their careers. Between 1869 and 1870 Anthony Trollope printed a group of six “Editor’s Tales” in the magazine then still under his own editorship, *Saint Pauls*. His six discrete stories chronicle a fictional editor’s trials and tribulations with would-be contributors. Similarly, Charles Dickens’s Christmas Number for the 1862 season, “Somebody’s Luggage,” presents a group of stories literally found, in manuscript form, and presented as an assemblage with no false efforts towards coherence. With a less explicit focus on physical acts of writing, Elizabeth Gaskell’s “Cranford Papers”14 (1851-53) shift the evaluative impulse almost entirely towards the contextual surroundings in which they, as texts, and the objects they feature, are embedded. Finally, Margaret Oliphant constructs a loosely-connected series of stories published in the *Cornhill* between 1868 and 1869. Her four “Dinglefield Stories” foreground the perspective—or ‘standing place’—of their well-intentioned but figuratively short-sighted narrator, Mrs. Mulgrave, who is frequently to be found standing in a place which makes her privy to the private lives of her friends, the events of which are the subject of her narration. These four sets of texts explore embeddedness, materiality, and value simultaneously in their subject matter and through their form.

Published in periodicals edited by established novelists, they suggest and reflect an interest in extra-novelistic forms, while at the same time carrying a stamp of contemporary approval, albeit an approval that is simultaneously fraught with questions about popularity and merit, transience and permanence, and quantity and quality.15 This is (for some critics) the same

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14 The employment of this title, a variation on the more common and novelistic *Cranford*, will be discussed in the third chapter.
15 I begin with the field of the periodical that was printed on a weekly or monthly timetable to highlight fiction produced to meet a waiting vehicle, rather than according to an internal or supposedly spontaneous impulse. My thinking here follows recent work done by scholars such as Peter Shillingsburg, who in *Pegasus in Harness* attests to the “mythology [which] demanded of authors that they conceal the sweat” insofar as “Fits of creative passion” are acceptable modes of working, but “daily discipline” and “writing to deadlines” are not (2). “In recent years it has become fashionable to reject the romantic image of the autonomous writer-genius and to acknowledge, instead, the determining confluence of social, economic, and ideological factors that used the
Trollope approving as editor who is also working as novelist, and being reviewed as “the most fertile, the most popular, the most successful author—that is to say, of the circulating library sort ... [and] there are persons who would rather not receive such praise,” as E.S. Dallas drily commented in an 1859 review of Trollope’s novels (qtd. in Smalley 104). Mid-Victorian short stories exist in a precarious sort of context, on the precipice between a blossoming cultural capital associated with wildly successful and beloved novelists, and a veritable no-man’s land of ephemera, disposable fiction, and critical contempt.

In *The Field of Cultural Production* Pierre Bourdieu crystallizes a set of ideas about types of artists that had been in circulation throughout the nineteenth century and before.16 Like *New Grub Street*, which presents stereotyped versions of two familiar but opposed artist figures, mid-Victorian market stories embody an extant tension between artistic and economic value. Two artist figures are emblematic of the terms of my argument and reappear throughout this discussion: one, Milvain, represents mechanization and commercialism; the other, Harold Biffin, stands for artistic merit and cultural capital. In Biffin Gissing creates the stereotypically sympathetic starving artist who labours “patiently, affectionately, scrupulously” over his novel in a “cold garrett [sic]” and on an “empty stomach” (418); Milvain’s hard-headed pursuit of pecuniary success has been indicated above. These two figures, that of the Romantic, frenzied, genius idealist, and the rational, plodding, mechanistic worker—and the tension between them—are stereotypes that dominate

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16 While Bourdieu’s terms have become a part of a shared critical vocabulary, his study of late nineteenth-century French culture does not map onto my temporally and geographically distinct scene, and it is not my particular concern to explore a dominant group’s maintenance of exclusivity and power; thus, I employ his terms without necessarily adhering to his argument in *The Field of Cultural Production*. 
nineteenth-century portraits of the literary artist. One, through industry and diligent self-denial, overcomes economic hardship. The other embraces it, basking in the volatility of the artistic temperament and touting the “callous indifference to genius of respectable society” (Arata 25). Biffin embodies the artist who experiences “failure in this world as election hereafter” when he renounces material compensation: his economic capital may be nonexistent, but he can take refuge in an idea of symbolic capital that will eventually vindicate him (Bourdieu 50). Barbara Herrnstein Smith, with whose argument in *The Contingency of Value* this study will engage, theorizes the opposition (the “double discourse of value”) across all periods, not just the Victorian: “On the one hand there is the discourse of economic theory: money, commerce, technology, industry, production and consumption, workers and consumers; on the other hand, there is the discourse of aesthetic axiology: culture, art, genius, creation and appreciation, artists and connoisseurs” (129, 127). While an author like Dickens is often taken as a hallmark of the ability to supersede this opposition, being at once popular and respected, successful and principled, a discourse of risk is never far from the surface. “This very popularity suggested an intellectual shallowness which worried the canonically-minded,” Phillip Waller notes of the sharp increase in sales of Dickens’s books after his death (195). By the time Gissing publishes *New Grub Street*, in 1891, the first of these two stereotypes has arguably lost its respectability. Thus Milvain is

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18 Biffin’s language strikes the same note as Bourdieu’s; he “had no thought of whether such toil would be recompensed in coin of the realm” and was convinced that even if published, his novel “would scarcely bring him any money.” Aesthetic and ethical principles dominate Biffin’s rationale, who is adamantly that all he cares for is that the work must be “significant” (418).
shrewd, mercenary, and soulless, while Biffin appears gentle, meek, and sympathetic, and the
two are emblematic of the intersections of pragmatic and aesthetic branches of axiological
discourse.¹⁹

As a literary work and a cultural product, the market story embodies and exemplifies the
tensions between the utilitarian and the ‘purely’ artistic that underwrote much nineteenth-
century discussion of art and culture (as will be discussed below). This “professional
paradox,” that the writer inhabits a contradictory position, simultaneously dependent upon
and claiming indifference to the market, was a part of the Victorian “cultural imagination” at
the end of the 1850s if not before (Ruth 83). Herrnstein Smith also identifies this tension in
relation to value as “the product of the dynamics of a system” that is itself made up of both
personal and market economies:

> It is traditional ... both in economic and aesthetic theory as well as in informal
discourse, to distinguish sharply between the value of an entity in [one] sense
(that is, its exchange value) and some other type of value that may be referred
to as its utility or use value, or, especially with respect to so-called
nonutilitarian objects such as artworks or works of literature, as its intrinsic
value. (30)

However, attempts to sustain a separation between these two types of value are and will
continue to be impossible, and have the effect “of mystifying the nature—or, more

¹⁹ Biffin and Milvain are two extremes among a large cast of characters who espouse economic principles and
Romantic ideals in mixed proportions; the two poles are complicated throughout by multiple intersecting and
contextualizing factors. For example, Edwin Reardon wishes to write creative fiction of literary merit, but does
not repudiate the “luxurious” comforts that come from financial success, like a well-furnished study with
handsomely-bound books (Gissing 101). Alfred Yule has worked for success in the marketplace and, having
not attained the heights of a great Editorship, considers himself a “failure”; yet he has made a living and
supported a family, which is more than Biffin can hope to do (Gissing 134). Stephen Arata sees Yule as a
figure who “breaks down the antithesis between art and commerce,” though this is only a “faint” suggestion,
and made the more so by his reliance on his diligent daughter Marian, who fears that her labour will be replaced
by a literary “automaton” capable of turning out books and articles as well as she does (Arata 34, Gissing 143).
accurately, the dynamics—of [the] value” of works of art (33). Personal experiences (of both authors and audiences) and the market economy are “interactive and interdependent” (31); whether financially independent or starving in a cold garret, writers never transcend material circumstances, and readers never receive and evaluate their products in a vacuum. This is the implication of, for example, Trollope’s assertion that an editor must always notice a “tattered glove” worn by a would-be contributor (sartorial poverty might indicate desperation to publish, and therefore poorer-quality work) (“TB” 110). Moreover, when we read mid-Victorian periodical short stories through the market economies in which they were produced, this cross-section of aesthetic and economic dependencies is both highlighted and mobilized.

A bit of history will be helpful here, and it does not take long to trace the genealogy of the short story in nineteenth-century Britain. Long-running respected periodicals like Blackwood’s had been regularly printing short fiction for decades,20 and new ventures like Household Words, which opened its first number with Gaskell’s short story “Lizzie Leigh,” displayed a similar investment in the genre.21 As Harold Orel notes in The Victorian Short Story: Development and Triumph of a Literary Genre, the growing popularity of the short story was directly related to “the development of general interest periodicals and a substantial need to fill columns of white space with agreeable reading-matter” (1-2). However, this increased presence was not accompanied by significant critical attention to the genre. Very little theoretical discourse comes out of nineteenth-century England about the short story as a

20The Blackwood’s Tales of Terror were so well-known that they could be parodied by Edgar Allen Poe in “How to Write a Blackwood Article,” which appeared as a re-working of “The Signora Psyche Zenobia” (first published in the Baltimore American Museum, November 1838) in the Broadway Journal, July 12, 1845.
21For more on the antecedents of the form, including the eighteenth-century sketch and tale, see Tim Killick, British Fiction in the Early Nineteenth Century: The Rise of the Tale, and Amanpal Garcha, Sketch to Novel: The Development of Victorian Fiction.
form. Apart from Edgar Allen Poe’s now-seminal theorization of the “short prose narrative” as ideal for creating the “unity of effect or impression” that is the highest achievement of literary writing (Poe 571-72), which cannot be ignored in a study of short fiction but seems to have had little impact in London, not much was written about short fiction before the 1880s. And while Poe’s observations, contained in a review of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Twice-Told Tales*, appeared as early as 1842, their influence to spur the development of the genre did not extend to Britain.²² As Dean Baldwin notes, “By the 1840s the genre was already established in America, and within two decades it had taken root in Germany, Russia, and France … [yet it] did not achieve prominence in Britain until the 1880s” (23). Underscoring the point from another angle is Robert F. Marler’s essay with the promising title “From Tale to Short Story: The Emergence of a New Genre in the 1850s,” which focuses exclusively on American authors, American periodicals, and the “history of American short fiction” (Marler 153). In 1884 Brander Matthews published the first of a group of essays that would be collected as *The Philosophy of the Short Story* in 1901. Here he contributed the inaugural piece of British criticism to make a claim like Poe’s, that the “difference between a Novel and a Short-story is a difference of kind” (52). Thus Matthews elucidates what he, like Poe, sees as the unique characteristics of the short story form, arguing that “at its best it impresses the reader with the belief that it would be spoiled if it were made larger” (53). Tellingly, Matthews is writing during the *fin-de-siecle*, when authors like Robert Louis Stevenson, George Egerton, Ella D’Arcy, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Thomas Hardy are employing the form with increasing frequency. In the 1890s *The Yellow Book* could identify itself in its prospectus as a periodical that would “publish no serials; but [only] complete stories,”

²²Pertinent to a consideration of genre, Alistair Fowler notes that “Poe may have overstressed the single sitting as a threshold. But we can agree that extension of the reading experience beyond it has many formal implications” (63).
indicating that the short story form carried a certain avant-garde appeal (qtd. in Mix 78).
Before this period when proto-Modernist short stories flourished on the London publishing
scene,23 short stories were being written, printed, and read, but not critically discussed.

What is more, a distinction is implicit in this late-century discourse between two
types of short fiction. *The Yellow Book*’s prospectus refers to the “modernity” of its
material (qtd. in Mix 78), and Matthews distinguishes between the “Novelet” and the “Short-
story,” where only the latter conveys Poe’s singular unity, and the former is, for all intents, a
“brief Novel” (Matthews 52). Matthews may well have asserted that a Novelet is ‘merely’ a
brief novel, for a hierarchy is embedded in his parsing of different types of short fiction, and
the hierarchy carries through much twentieth-century criticism of the form. With the
development of Modernism and subsequently New Criticism comes a preference for
stylistically restrained, spare short stories that convey “atmosphere” rather than plot and
“emotional experience” rather than character development (May 12, 8). Thus critics who
look back at the short stories produced throughout the nineteenth century find little in
keeping with these Modernist aesthetic standards, and easily dismiss the rest. These short
stories are stuffed with assumptions about aesthetic criteria: they are wordy, meandering, and
filled with ‘plot’: essentially they embody aspects of the tale, being solely concerned with
“sentimental romance, simplistic allegory, and explicit moral didacticism” (Killick 6).

In 1968 Wendell V. Harris wrote the most extensive study of Victorian short stories
before Harold Orel’s in 1986. In “English Short Fiction in the 19th Century” Harris finds
much to ridicule and does so without hesitation. There are “hordes of uninteresting and
tedious stories from the nineteenth century,” that are so because they do not fit Harris’s own

23See Winnie Chan, *The Economy of the Short Story in British Periodicals of the 1890s*, and Joseph M. Flora,
idea of what the short story is as “a separate genre with structural requisites of its own” (50). While claiming to eschew the “retrospective shadow” cast over the century by new theorizations made at its end (Matthews’s, for example), Harris actually replicates this critical orientation (1). He extols as the only short story worthy of praise one which is a clear exception to mid-century norms: D.G. Rossetti’s “Hand and Soul” (1855) is admirable for its “freshness and directness” and its similarities to fiction of the Aesthetic movement (37). Noting how unusual this tale would have appeared to a reader in the 1850s, Harris summarily dismisses “the greater portion of the short fiction written in the first three-fourths of the century” as, unequivocally, “careless, formless, and crude” (1). Similarly, Dean Baldwin’s title “The Tardy Evolution of the British Short Story” (emphasis mine) carries evaluative connotations, and Valerie Shaw writes of the “delayed … arrival of the short story into English Literature” (5). This categorization of the ‘true’ short story as impressionistic, modern, and different in kind from novelistic prose fiction therefore cripples any approach to that which comes before.

These institutionalized consignments make it that much more imperative that we attempt to remove the filters and lenses that are oriented to favour twentieth-century critical approaches when reading the short fiction produced in the decades preceding the fin-de-siècle. Simultaneously, in a dearth of contemporary literary criticism about the form, I am acutely aware that they will necessarily be replaced by other filters, other lenses. Rather than trying to read in an absence of evaluative determinants or judgments, then, plunging into the centre of a nexus of discourses about culture, literature, and value that were circulating in the period—those of the publishing industry, the author’s professional identity, and the
periodical market for fiction in London at mid-century—will enable us to see something new.

It is my contention that a selection of the previously-overlooked short stories constitute a new genre, which I am calling the ‘market story,’ and that this genre is primarily articulated through contextual features, namely periodical placement, date-stamping, linked titles, and moments of self-reflexivity. A market story, in the context of this argument, is a single unit that is necessarily part of a larger aggregate, which emphasizes its contingency and mirrors the relationship of the larger unit to the publication. Market stories are either written or printed because there is some exogenous impetus outside of the writer him or herself, either an editorial Dickens waiting for another ‘Cranford’ instalment from Gaskell, or the repeating calendar structure that keeps Dickens himself writing for the December market each year. In other cases, a less precise trigger is still influential, whether it is—for Oliphant—the financial pressure that prompted writing contracts for cash advances, or—for Trollope—the straightforward knowledge that his periodical had one hundred and twenty-eight blank pages to be filled each month at his discretion. Therefore, the “market story” as a term suggests the exterior and multiple forces acting on authors, editors, and publishers; market stories are defined by their relationship to a publishing industry that was actively creating a space for, demanding, and disseminating texts based on their potential to generate sales figures, draw attention to a particular organ, author, or publisher, or gather and hold a captive audience. Representations of materiality, labour, and exchange-value found in, for example, “Somebody’s Luggage,” comment on the literary environment in which these groups of short stories were conceived and produced, then sent forth into a marketplace

24 Dickens writes to Gaskell in December of 1852 about proofs of “The Old Nurse’s Story” and adds a postscript reading simply “Cranford??”; at this date Gaskell has not submitted a new installment for eight months (Letters 6. 812).
where they competed with novels, books of poetry, non-fiction works, and a myriad of other periodicals. Their production is complex and contingent in multiple directions.

I say the market story is a genre; of course, genre is a loaded term, and its invocation calls for some consideration of its parameters. At its least productive, genre theory is taxonomic, about arbitrarily slotting things (texts) into boxes (categories); this is what many Victorian critics tried to do when they rigidly adhered to formal hierarchies and dismissed short stories simply for their failure to adhere to a certain shape or length requirement. The short story was measured in two ways and doubly excluded from the channels according to which nineteenth-century fiction was awarded merit. If considered quantitatively, the length of the short story was found to be inferior in relation to the novel; if qualitatively, prose writing was thought to be less artful than poetry. However, a brief survey of these channels exposes the inextricable intertwining of genre and axiology. At mid-century, poetry and the novel were the two genres most often utilized in debates over literary value. According to Mary Poovey, Wordsworth and Coleridge made significant advances for the delimitation of poetry when they “yoked [to it] a distinctively Literary form of value” that was itself new and ostensibly non-market (30). And yet, even Wordsworth was likely influenced by “disappointing sales and poor reviews” when he claimed to elevate “the judgment of posterity over that of his peers” (Poovey 297). Judgment is the key term that precedes value in all cases: a work is not valuable until it is deemed so by some agent, whether author, editor, reviewer, critic, or audience. And the different registers according to which value could be located were a source of anxiety to more nineteenth-century authors than Wordsworth. Early in the century novels were beset by cultural and religious prejudices that deemed prose fiction “a snare of the devil” and too dangerous for a “frail” human will (Altick
109-110). Even Trollope, in 1882, can say that “there exists still an idea, a feeling which is very prevalent, that novels at their best are but innocent. Young men and women … read them,—as men eat pastry after dinner,—not without some inward conviction that the taste is vain if not vicious” (*Autobiography* 157). The championing of aesthetic (non-utilitarian, non-market) merit is the result of what John Guillory articulates as a separation between political economy and aesthetics wherein the latter forgets “the fact that the ‘fine arts’ emerged as such in contradistinction to commodities of immediate utility … [and] reassert[s], against the universality of economic commensurability, a theory of the incommensurability of aesthetic and economic values, on the basis of the inutility of the aesthetic object” (Guillory 316-317). This late eighteenth-century reassertion is, of course, “in response to the fact that works of art continue to be exchanged in the marketplace as commodities which are commensurable with other commodities” (316). Thus, again, any attempt to hierarchize artistic differences is problematic; and in the middle of the nineteenth century the aesthetic became aligned not just against politics (Evangelicals), economics (poor sales) and contemporary reviewers, but popularity, as well, which became a portent of doom for a work’s aesthetic valuation. The sensation craze of the 1860s exemplifies mass appeal and its critics latched on to its “unprecedented … popularity” and ability to attract “countless readers”; such observations are almost seamlessly linked to the pronouncement that sensation novels must be designated “the least valuable among works of fiction” when measured according to a “*purely* literary standard” (Fraser Rae, 583, 591, emphasis mine). Contemporary critics and reviewers desired to separate aesthetic criteria from all others, according to the same logic that Herrnstein Smith refers to as the “double discourse of value” (129). And yet, this isolation was hardly possible.
These discussions of form were inflected with the language of worth and value; I present nineteenth-century discourses of genre theory not in order to employ its terms or engage in its debates, but rather to give a sense of the contemporary critical context of the periodical short story. As Poovey remarks, “with Mudie’s declaring, in practice if not explicitly, that a ‘good’ book was published in three volumes and composed with women and young girls in mind, there seemed to be during the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century no reliable system for evaluating imaginative works and no consensus about the criteria that should be applied” (305). “It is useless for serious persons to gird against the ‘tyranny’ of the novel,” Arnold Bennett could remark in 1906, “if the novel is on top it has earned its place. It didn’t fall up there by force of gravity. It climbed there” (qtd. in Waller 116). The short story was being situated on a ladder, the rungs of which (denoting reviews, sales, popularity, reprints, etc) seemed permanent and concrete to Victorians, but begin to look quite provisional from a contemporary perspective.

More modern iterations of genre theory, on the other hand, stress impermanence and cultural relativity. Rather than deterministic approaches that generate prescriptive formulations, these genre theories are attuned to historical change and the modulation of horizons of expectation over time, as well as the subtle shifts between iterations that, taken to a logical extreme, suggest that each individual text is a genre unto itself. Generic development is a process of transformation that is not necessarily teleological or evolutionary. We may keep in mind Todorov’s dictum that “a new genre is always a transformation of one or several old genres,” but this should be qualified to allow for the

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accretion of multiple, disparate, and sometimes non-literary influences (“Origin” 161).
Alistair Fowler discusses a process of monogenesis whereby generic innovation may be
sudden and not clearly traced to a modulation of a pre-existing form; this can be a process of
assembly, involving “existing generic materials ... small in scale and diverse in origin”
(Fowler 156). In the mid-Victorian periodical sphere the emergence of the market story is a
confluence of impulses and influences, and Dickens alone, or Trollope, Gaskell or Oliphant,
need not have been purposeful in this activity. “The author perhaps thinks only of writing in
a fresh way,” Fowler asserts, and “the phase of assembly may of course be largely
unconscious” (159). Critics label generic innovation retrospectively, identifying shifts and
attributing influences, and this is partly what I do throughout this study, but not, it should be
noted, for that end alone. The market story is a new genre, one that hasn’t been recognized
as such because it is not well suited to the aesthetic criteria traditionally used to judge the
short story.

Genres and market stories as I am outlining them offer convenient labels. Fredric
Jameson writes of genre as an historically-located operation that ends with its own
deconstruction, suggesting “a final axiom, according to which all generic categories, even the
most time-hallowed and traditional, are ultimately to be understood ... as mere ad hoc,
experimental constructs, devised for a specific textual occasion and abandoned like so much
scaffolding when the analysis has done its work” (145). Jameson’s is a compelling position,
suggesting that genre’s use-value is primarily its ability to convey something else. Similarly,
Adena Rosmarin argues that genre can be a way of talking that “most fully unfolds the
characteristics that make the text seem valuable to us as a literary text” (39). When we attend
to generic features sensitively, without expecting rigidity to yield meaning, we can produce
other useful readings through the generic lens. This study aims to use genre to say something about the ideological implications of a particular moment, the London periodical marketplace between 1850 and 1870. Thus, genre is most productively used as a vehicle, and the market story is a particular form that is valuable precisely insofar as it allows us to see the importance of the contextual field that produced the form.

The market story is shaped and channelled by its context as a generic vehicle; what is produced thereby is a range of formal features that comment on this production. Across the four sets of texts discussed here, two structural features are strikingly similar and warrant consideration: self-reflexivity and point of view. The first is manifested through a myriad of self-conscious references, gestures, and assertions. Dickens and Trollope write explicitly about authors and editors engaged in acts of writing and publishing. Less obviously, Gaskell and Oliphant explore arrangement and position, structure and proper use, in their self-aware tales that metaphorically embody similar discourses of writing as a context-dependent kind of work. Throughout, the self-reflexivity of the market story is reflected in its form: works produced under these conditions necessarily manifest their awareness of and attention to modes of production and consumption, as well as the ephemeral status and disposable nature of much periodical fiction. The work “does not develop at random, in undiscriminating freedom; it grows because it is precisely determined at every moment and at every level”; it

26 The self-conscious mode constitutes my authors’ most direct formal attempt to address the generic aspect of their stories. Self-consciousness in the market story is not a thoroughgoing joke on the act of fictional creation itself, as critics such as Brian Stonehill have asserted is usual: “In a self-conscious novel … the narrator is visibly engaged in the invention of his narrative” (19). Trollope, Dickens, Gaskell and Oliphant do not invent narrators who are inventing the substantive stories they’re telling; indeed, to do so would undermine rather than bolster the work that they do to call attention to the labour and effort involved in real writing. Conversely, it is the supposed actuality of the events being narrated—Gaskell’s correspondence to the publication of Household Words indicated above and Trollope insisting that the events of “Josephine de Montmorenci” happened to a friend of his in order to ask that readers not try to identify actual personages with the characters—that marks the effectiveness of the market story’s self-consciousness; in the fictional world they are true, and this enables the market story to bear relation to a real world of print culture. Thus I would distinguish between a self-conscious novel, as Stonehill and others have defined it, and a self-conscious narrator who punctuates the work with moments of self-reflexivity in order to remind readers of the text in their hands.
is “the work of a labourer, and not of a conjurer or showman” (Macheray 39, 41). Thus Gaskell opens the fifth instalment of “The Cranford Papers,” which was printed after a break of nearly eight months, by providing her narrator with the following fictional explanation for a real-world absence (explained by the publication of her second novel, *Ruth*): “Soon after the events of which I gave account in my last paper, I was summoned home by my father’s illness ... so that altogether I seemed banished from Cranford, and was deprived of the opportunity of hearing any chance intelligence of the dear little town for the greater part of that year” (390). Commenting on the situatedness of the text and insisting upon the market story’s undeniable relationship to a real world—you are my readers; this story is printed by me and not someone else (the editor); here and not there (in my journal); now and not then (intermittently; at Christmas)—self-consciousness is a formal attribute of market stories that reinforces the genre’s attentiveness to the material context of its production.

The second key formal feature of the market story, related to the first, is the embedded narrator. Market stories consistently feature a character narrator who is first-person but peripheral, and at key moments vacuous, which differs in several key ways from the omniscient or protagonist first-person narrators more common in much canonical Victorian fiction. This is character as a mechanistic function, created to serve a purpose on

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27 J. Hillis Miller refers to the omniscient narrator as “that standard convention” of Victorian fiction, “so crucial to nineteenth-century English fiction, so inclusive in its implications, that it may be called the determining principle of its form” (*Form*, 63). Edward Bulwer Lytton’s assertion that “artistic fiction must be told as though the narrator herself believes the tale” (qtd. in Childers 409) exemplifies Susan Lanser’s summary of the dominant tenor of the Victorian debate: “the narrator was supposed to correct all the fictional characters’ misguided behaviors and beliefs, and make certain that the reader received a sound moral message from the text, but this narrator was to accomplish all this ‘behind the scenes’” (22). In 1860 a *Fraser’s* critic praised one of Jane Austen’s novels on the grounds that its “machinery of representation [was] almost wholly concealed from observation” (qtd. in Stang 94). Thus omniscient narrators were very desirable as long as they did not disrupt the illusion of verisimilitude, while Trollope (in the *North British Review* in 1864) was criticized for the “inartistic obtrusion” of asserting his presence in his own novels (qtd. in Stang 95). First-person narrators were purportedly “less effective” for teaching and authoritatively conveying morals, often equated with the biographical author (Charlotte Bronte for *Jane Eyre*) and thus seeming a lowering of the creator “to the level of a character-marionette” (Lanser 22-23). Moreover, when a first-person narrator is used, “the narrator in most
the market (or to meet the availabilities of the market, which amounts to the same thing), and to solve a formal and ideological problem. Formally the vacuous narrator allows Trollope and others to write several short stories that work together but are not trying to be a ‘mini-novel’; ideologically the peripheral narrator allows authors to express a flattened plane of valuation, to begin to dismantle implied hierarchies, in this case those of voice (the first-person protagonist is good, the omniscient narrator better). The embedded and peripheral narrator can make fewer claims to authority, exists on a level plane with other agents, is at the ground level, is in among as opposed to apart from, and is not seeing from a higher vantage point. This point of view emphasizes plurality and de-emphasizes distinction. As a key feature of the market story the peripheral, first-person narrator illustrates—and embodies—the concerns that emerge out of this environment, and takes a stance on them. If the prevalence of the market threatens to undermine traditional (aesthetic) structures of authority for literary work, then the first-person embedded point of view asserts that there is no superior (physically removed, omniscient) way to ascertain value than, so to speak, from eye-level, and as an embodiment of material conditions. Thus the narrative stance enables market stories to make a claim for the relativity and contingency of value.

In these market stories we see Trollope, Dickens, Gaskell and Oliphant exploring alternatives to the dominant form of the novel as a capacious vehicle for expansive philosophical commentary. The opposite stance is, paradoxically, to champion the small and its virtues. Dickens makes such an inverted claim about the text originally from Master Humphrey’s Clock that is cut from The Old Curiosity Shop, which he calls “one of the lost books of the earth—which, we all know, are far more precious than any that can be read for

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cases coincides with the protagonist” (Miller, Subjects, 97): as David Copperfield narrates his own story, Pip is the hero and first-person narrator of Great Expectations, and Jane Eyre is the same for her eponymous novel.
love or money” (“Preface” 5). In some ways this approach to valuation is presented throughout Gaskell’s “The Cranford Papers,” which glories in the accounting of the diminutive and slight in precise terms, such as the narrator’s need to preserve “little hanks” of string, “picked up and twisted together.” The value of the string to Mary Smith is sharply juxtaposed by those who would cut the string tied around a package “instead of patiently and faithfully undoing it fold by fold” (588-89). However, it is not my intention to champion smallness instead of largeness, or to privilege size as a reliable index of value. Likewise, this study does not consider as belonging to the market story’s framework those singular, one-, two-, or three-instalment pieces of short fiction that peppered the pages of many nineteenth-century periodicals. Short, self-contained stories like Gaskell’s “Lizzie Leigh,” Trollope’s “George Walker at Suez,” Percy Fitzgerald’s “The Canon’s Clock,” Oliphant’s “The Open Door,” and Wilkie Collins’s “A Terribly Strange Bed,” were regular if not frequent among the pages of middle-class weekly and monthly literary journals, and often treated melodramatic or supernatural subjects: as William Chambers put it, the “ordinary trash about Italian castles, and daggers, and ghosts in the blue chamber, and similar nonsense” (qtd. in Altick 333). However, in their very structure these stories fail to emphasize contingency. They are singular, with an instance of plot and rising action that is self-contained; by the end of “The Canon’s Clock,” questions about the mysterious apparition in a midnight bedroom and the death of a beloved neighbour have been answered and neatly tidied away. The

28 This is also what Jennifer Ruth identifies in one of Bronte’s letters about The Professor, when the novelist responds to a publisher’s rejection by asserting that “very particular and unique” must be the “penetration” of those able to appreciate the rejected work, maintaining that “the smaller the commodity the more inestimable its value” (qtd. in Ruth 35). As Ruth interprets: “that which appears to lack value because it is intangible … is in fact more valuable” (35).

29 Originally printed in Household Words, 30 March–13 April 1850; Public Opinion, 28 December 1861; Household Words, 21 August 1858; Blackwood’s, January 1882; and Household Words, 24 April 1852.

30 The supernatural and mysterious is another substantial sub-genre of nineteenth-century short fiction that has been anthologized in volumes like Late Victorian Gothic Tales and Ghost Tales from “Blackwood.” Again, this
form, being whole, suggests completion as opposed to the market story’s relentless reach for framework and scaffolding. The same is true for other forms of ‘compiled’ fiction, such as the short story series, sequels, and trilogies of novels. Simply put, the overriding character and importance of plot necessarily centralizes the production of meaning in these texts. Even in a multi-plot triple-decker novel, theme and argument will cohere to a plumb line of events; which cannot be said for the discrete sets of tales that constitute the market story, held together as they are only by a narrating figure who remains largely exogenous and vacuous.

A final note about selection criteria: these clusters of stories were not chosen because they are representative of a larger range. It is not, as far as I know, that there are more potential market stories waiting to be read in this way. The four sets of texts are brought together for their particular formal and thematic characteristics, in addition to the historical criteria that drew them to my notice. Trollope’s “Editor’s Tales” are the only stories he wrote in a group about his profession, and Dickens’s “Somebody’s Luggage” is the only ‘meta’ Christmas Number. Similarly, Gaskell’s Cranford stories are often noted for their formal, stylistic, and thematic deviation from her novels of industrial life, and Oliphant’s Dinglefield stories differ in tone from her ghost stories, for which she is better known, as well as her novels. Nor were there other authors, as connected to the market in myriad ways, probing the same issues through shorter forms in the middle decades of the Nineteenth Century. Together these clusters of stories mark a moment when periodical authors felt a sense of optimism and possibility in a rapidly-changing print culture, and they have been selected for their resonance when read together; the term ‘market story’ is, primarily, a convenient label.

type of writing falls outside the purview of the market story insofar as the supernatural and otherworldly de-emphasizes reality, concrete physicality, and contingency. Indeed, the Signor Brunoni episode of “The Cranford Papers” comically underscores this distinction: in the end the mystery is revealed to have been a simple misunderstanding, and Miss Pole is equipped with full knowledge about the material moves that produce an apparent sleight of hand.
Chapter One discusses the group of six discrete tales Trollope first printed in *Saint Pauls* as “An Editor’s Tales.” These stories stridently address all of the issues at play in my argument: labour, systems, value-relativity and the construction of cultural capital. Trollope’s fictional editor is running around, complaining about not knowing what he should publish and reject, thinking about everything from genre, form, and merit, to typography, handwriting, and his own ability to appear “enveloped in MSS. from morning to night” (“JM” 368). “An Editor’s Tales” are intensely comic, self-reflexive, and interrogative of extant conceptions of cultural and literary value. Rather than attempting to articulate detailed external apparatuses that may possibly generate and sustain valuation, Trollope glories in the exposure and dismantling of seemingly-reliable externality. Each of the six stories presents a different ‘type’ of the aspiring contributor, and the editor is a relatively vacant figure who must accommodate himself to their individual eccentricities, from Mary Gresley, meek and hardworking, to Mackenzie, whose talent is as irrepressible as his working habits are unreliable. Ironically but not accidentally, it is “The Panjandrum,” the editor’s own tale of his past efforts to work collaboratively as a contributor, that most fully explodes the possibility of a stable, coherent interiority from which one can, reliably, write. In his efforts to find a subject the editor “drank green tea, [ate] meat very slightly cooked ... debarred [him]self from food for several hours, so that the flesh might be kept well under ... [and] sat up one night, nearly till daybreak, with a wet towel around [his] head” (564). Trollope’s characters construct elaborate systems in vain attempts to ensure their success in the literary marketplace, and as the authoritative ‘editor’ with the power to accept or reject work, Trollope’s otherwise-unnamed narrator finds himself increasingly unmoored from any reliable criteria of value. As the locus of literary production, he is ultimately flawed and
suggestible. Formally, the tales are told in such a way that he has little perspective, as the first-person embedded narrator, besieged in his office, walking about the streets, and standing on stools to try and see eye-to-eye with the aspirants who make demands on his time.

With a similarly comic reflex, Dickens’s “Somebody’s Luggage” takes a different approach to the emphasis on contingency and relativity that is the primary argument of the market story. Chapter Two discusses this set of tales, the Christmas number for 1862, as a parodic inversion of the usual convention whereby Dickens invented a framework tale that generated a fictional setting for tale-telling (a shipwrecked group of passengers on a lifeboat, the tenants of a lodging house exchanging experiences, etc.). The beginning and end of this Christmas Number, “His Leaving it Till Called For” and “His Wonderful End,” present Dickens’s conceit that the various stories are supposedly all written by the same author, ‘Somebody,’ among whose luggage they were found.31 When the narrator Christopher finds these stories among a set of abandoned luggage, he underhandedly turns around and sells them to a popular periodical without giving credit to the original author, thus spoofing Dickens’s own policy of anonymous journalism in *All the Year Round*, and highlighting the ways in which Christopher as narrator undermines ideals of authorship and reveals deep-seated anxieties. “Somebody’s Luggage” argues for the contrivance of literary genre by situating the frame tales around an ‘absent centre,’ giving us a narrator who does not correspond to the author of the body tales, and figuring that author as an anonymous ‘Somebody,’ and then constructing an exaggerated system of exchanges whereby the form of the short story generates unprecedented income for Christopher.

After Chapters One and Two lay out the features of the market story and its thematic concerns, Chapters Three and Four move away from texts that are explicitly and literally

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31 In fact all Christmas Numbers were multi-authored, as will be discussed in the chapter.
about writing and being a writer in a professional marketplace to sets of texts that are explicitly about domesticity, and only implicitly about writing and production, yet which are still equally important as representations of market forces. Gaskell’s “The Cranford Papers” explore and catalogue a series of eccentric and highly particularized models of valuation that depend almost entirely on external factors. “The Cranford Papers” privilege and diligently trace the careful consumption of small wholes, the cultivation of irregular habits, and the variable roles of objects in accordance with changing circumstances. Moreover, they insist on the plurality of appropriate models of consumption, use, and value. As a narrator Mary Smith is vacuous, largely uncharacterized, and peripheral. The first four stories are discrete, and self-consciousness ties the events published in *Household Words* to external specificities. Thus “The Cranford Papers” replicate the structure of the market story as exemplified by Trollope and Dickens. Moreover, in its use of objects the primacy of contingency is demonstrated. Mary Smith and Miss Matey spend an evening reading old letters in “Memory at Cranford,” and the most resonant of these is a previously-unopened plea from Miss Matey’s mother to her absent son Peter. Both the original writer and the intended recipient are now gone from Cranford, and the narrator dwells on this circumstance: “The writer of the letter—the last—the only person who had ever seen what was written in it, was dead long ago—and I, a stranger, not born at the time when this occurrence took place, was the one to open it” (595). As its first reader Mary feels strangely affected but also highly displaced: the intended meaning of the letter has been lost and its current effect depends entirely on the happenstance of its new context. Gaskell’s text is strongly marked by these

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32 In keeping with this effort toward textual fidelity, I retain the *Household Words* spelling “Miss Matey” and other slight but substantive practices of the first printed version. Of course this means that, were it to form a part of my discussion, I would read the “Pickwick” episode of “Our Society” as Thomas Hood. However, this issue has been more than adequately addressed by scholars such as Hilary Schor, and does not enter into my argument about economic usage (see Schor 88-97).
“Cranfordisms”—moments of textual and material peculiarity that make no claim to being mainstream or replicable. In this way “The Cranford Papers” approaches issues of production, form, and value from an alternative perspective that emphasizes space and context. By shifting the discussion of reading and writing from content to form, Gaskell’s text throws the shape of the market story into relief.

Finally, Chapter Four considers Oliphant, who continues to move from the overt to the more nuanced and attenuated. Admittedly, these stories do not closely resemble the content of Trollope’s: one is a set of tales about a stressed-out, self-important editor; the other is a series of stories of village life and women’s gossip. Chronologically though, Trollope and Oliphant are in close proximity, and what we see is that even though they look quite unrelated, the market story as lens is attuned to, and brings to light, their similarities insofar as both embody an emphasis on form and the relativity of value. Oliphant’s “Dinglefield Stories” are four discrete tales linked together by a consistent narrator, who writes in the first person, from the sidelines, with a limited perspective. Mrs. Mulgrave describes Dinglefield green, the grassy space around which the village houses are situated:

“The Green was the central point, a great triangular breadth of soft grass, more like a small common than a village green, with the prettiest houses round—houses enclosed in their own ground—houses at the very least embosomed in pretty gradients, peeping out from among the trees” (210). This configuration encapsulates Mrs. Mulgrave’s own position: the green itself is an empty space, lacking definition or character, or it is defined by the houses that surround it, each of which is self-contained and discrete. The events of the tales emphasize mutability and relative valuation: of fortunes, persons, and families. While not investing material objects with contextual value in the same way that Gaskell does, Oliphant still,
necessarily and persistently, foregrounds issues of arrangement, shape, and worth.

Moreover, by this time the embedded, self-conscious, peripheral narrator begins to look very similar. And the shape of the story structure, four discrete tales yoked together by this narrator, begins to stand for the very structure of the green: something de-centred, where meaning is produced by what exists outside, rather than what lies within. When we read with attentiveness to the lens of the market story, these shapes, and this structure, distil themselves from Oliphant’s set of stories. What is finally important is that the structure lacks centrality. In terms of both form and value, the market story is a vehicle for the tenor that generic and literary value is always, necessarily, inextricably, contextualized.

The lack of chronological difference between Trollope’s “Editor’s Tales” (1869-70) and Oliphant’s “Dinglefield Stories” (1868-69) exemplifies the ability of the generic label ‘market story’ to gather and hold together texts from what would otherwise appear to be a wide and disparate range. What develops, then, is the assertion that literary representations of authorship and issues pertaining to the commercial and cultural valuation of prose fiction were present and notable in periodical fiction well in advance of Gissing’s 1891 novel. It is no small coincidence that Gissing himself perpetuated the myths of Romantic authorship in his account of the novel’s composition: his letters record a year of false starts trying to write New Grub Street before the whole is produced at a frenzied pace, under “utter prostration of spirit,” in less than two months (qtd. in Arata 10). Rather, then, consider Fitzgerald’s voice in the epigraph that opens this discussion: he emphasized the constructs surrounding the production and distribution of a new work: the presence of the master (Dickens), the reputation of the journal, and the efficacy of its channels of distribution and publicity. The immediacy of surrounding factors and external considerations shapes and colours the text,
underlining an awareness of its mode of production—the forces, including weekly deadlines and space restraints attendant on publication in *All the Year Round*, that result in a text about which a mid-Victorian contributor can feel proud. The four authors studied here were unmistakably aware of the external conditions enabling, eliciting, and affecting the production of literary work as well as its subsequent valuation.

Together these market stories explore literary form, structure and the *shapes of things*. From Dickens’s crumpled manuscripts stuffed inside a hat box, to the hole in the hedge through which Mrs. Mulgrave observes her neighbours, through Gaskell’s two-pronged fork that will not pick up peas and Trollope’s devoted description of a large table surface as the only thing suitable for literary work, in the short stories they wrote for periodical publications these authors are attuned to the material contexts of production and consumption. As the self-reflexivity is in the form of the market story, in this particular market and context of the mid-nineteenth century periodical field, attention to production cannot be escaped, denied, or transcended, and my authors are not trying to do so. The strategies employed foreground their concerns: attention to quantity, shape, arrangement and size; descriptions of objects, small, fragmented items, scenes of writing, and objects breaking, have the effect of diverting attention away from plot, and diffusing textual interest out, literally, toward surrounding matter, thus expressing and constituting the value of such contingent and contextual features. Repeatedly and persistently, these objects occupy primary positions in the stories as determinants of theme and argument. And this discrete, aggregate, piecemeal form—the form of the market story—is the one in which the ideas attendant upon literary production could be most productively manifested in this historical moment.
“It’s Hard Enough to Find the Plan”:

Systemic Aspiration in Anthony Trollope’s “An Editor’s Tales”

“Society has not yet forgiven that excellent novelist for having worked so many hours a day, like a carpenter or tailor, instead of periodically going mad with inspiration and hewing Barchester Towers at one frenzied stroke out of chaos, that being the only genuinely artistic method.”

—George Bernard Shaw on Anthony Trollope

The short story “Josephine de Montmorenci,” written by Anthony Trollope and printed in Saint Pauls magazine in December of 1869, presents its editor Mr. Brown in a vexing moment of editorial decision. Assuring his audience that “four-fifths” of the heaps of manuscript daily presented to professional readers may be “safely” and assuredly rejected, while the other minority comprises works which are undoubtedly “the fruit of some newfound genius,” he encounters a text which surprisingly falls between these two groups. Miss de Montmorenci’s novel is one of those “doubtful cases” (371). Rather than contemplate the work itself to make his decision, Mr. Brown contemplates his possible courses of action. He sees two choices, both of which are painful and difficult: if he rejects the manuscript it will be his “duty … to convey that unwelcome opinion to the writer” and he anticipates that her reaction will not be appreciative (“MG” 246). On the other hand, to accept the novel would almost be worse, as it would involve the devotion of “many of his own hours” to “such difficult” and awkward tasks as the “repairing of mutilated sentences” (“JM” 372). As Mark Turner has rightly noted, “In these ‘editor’s tales’ very little editing of manuscripts ever occurs” (196); however, this scene offers one of the few descriptions of the kind of minutiae which editing seems to entail. Mr. Brown dreads the necessity of alteration, “so ungracious, so precarious, so incapable of success” which acceptance would necessitate (372). “How much must he cut out!” Mr. Brown wonders, and imagines that the very sentence which he

33 Waller 199-200.
confidently judges “long-winded, far-fetched, high-stilted, [and] unintelligible” will be the one on which the author has pinned all of her aims: “In it she has intended to convey to the world the fruits of her best meditation for the last twelvemonths. Thinking much over many things in her solitude, she has at last invented a truth, and there it lies” (372). All of the options open to the editor are unpleasant, ungracious, and dreaded. This moment in “Josephine de Montmorenci” neatly encapsulates the primary strife of editing as it is presented in Trollope’s stories, and is emblematic of the disparity between the matter at hand (the text) and the editor’s dominant concerns (the painful emotions associated with accepting or rejecting the text): meaning and value are inessential, dislocated, and subject to deconstruction. This will be a recurring pattern throughout “An Editor’s Tales.”

The tales themselves are six stories grouped under a common heading. In many ways each is a discrete tale that can stand alone, even though, as Turner points out, “On the contents page to Volume V of Saint Pauls, the story titles are numbered and indented under the general title, as if the stories were chapters of a larger whole” (190). And yet they are not chapters: these stories are self-contained, and each one has a distinct plot and set of characters. This is part of what makes them market stories, as even with a somewhat constant narrator, none of the protagonists, aspiring contributors, or other significant characters recur in more than one story, interact with, or otherwise encounter one another (excepting ‘the boy’ who is the Editor’s assistant). The first and last tales of the sequence offer almost nothing by way of introduction or conclusion. “The Turkish Bath” begins with “It was the month of August” and indicates that the only background readers need is that

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34 The first story’s title is the only one whose specific wording differs: it is “An Editor’s Tale: The Turkish Bath.” From here on all stories are given as “An Editor’s Tales. No. I. Mary Gresley” and so on. Thus “The Turkish Bath” could appear to stand alone as an editor’s tale, but each subsequent story is indicated to be a part of a larger series.
“This little story records the experience of one individual man; but our readers we hope, will, without a grudge, allow us the use of the editorial we” (110). Thus we do not have the established scene of a small town with a recurring cast of characters (as will exist in “The Cranford Papers”), nor even an attempt at unification through an overarching framework tale (as in Dickens’s Christmas Numbers). Each “Editor’s Tale” is its own formally discrete story, while the group is thematically amalgamated in ways that suggest a strategic use of the short story form.

Trollope’s “An Editor’s Tales” embody several characteristics of the market story. Printed during his tenure as editor of Saint Pauls, they were arguably composed and continued in response to the extant space in the journal. They are aggregate, and simultaneously disjointed and connected. A series without being a sequence, “An Editor’s Tales” offer an only loosely-unified commentary on literary production. The editor is the one constant figure, and his perspective is characterized by the sidelined, fraught, ironic tone that worries over the trials and tribulations of editorial work. Finally, his insistent use of an “editorial we” as a narrative pronoun constitutes a self-reflexive commentary on conventions specific to periodical genres (“TB” 110). Repeatedly, “An Editor’s Tales” highlight the ways in which writing and printing are problematic and pragmatic, undoing high-flown ideals about artistic work and dismantling conceptions of stable, valuable forms.

A brief summary will indicate the diversity of “An Editor’s Tales.” The first of these, “The Turkish Bath,” establishes several of the patterns that will shape this exploration. In it the editor is surprised by a wily author, Molloy, in a state of near-undress in the Turkish bathhouse of the title. The editor undertakes to consider the aspiring contributor’s work, but finds it nonsense. Following the intrigue to Molloy’s private home the editor finds that he is
a harmless madman whose wife works, runs the home, and indulges her husband in his penchant for composition. This story is followed by one more sincere: “Mary Gresley” concerns a girl with whom the editor is half in love. He undertakes to aid her as she plans and writes a novel dealing with subjects and aspects of human nature of which she is woefully ignorant. Her hard work and diligence come to nothing, though, when her sickly fiancé—a curate—engages her promise to leave off the writing of fiction, which he considers blasphemous. “Josephine de Montmorenci” is the next female aspirant, and hers is a mystery that the editor Mr. Brown cannot resist. Her letters are direct and candid, and her novel, as mentioned above, is potentially acceptable. But Mr. Brown is most concerned about its authoress, and imagines that a great beauty must lie behind her brash letters and polysyllabic French name. When he ventures to her home and finds her not only not beautiful, but crippled, and using a pseudonym for her real appellation, Maryanne Puffle, all incitement to editorial involvement is at an end.35

The fourth “Editor’s Tale” is somewhat aberrant, being set back in time roughly thirty years, narrated by a much less experienced editor, and entirely comic. “The Panjandrum” is the magazine that never was, and its editor-to-be is impossibly idealistic. Its plot hinges on the generic status of this editor (our narrator)’s contribution, as his short story it is rejected on the grounds that the magazine’s founders had agreed on ‘no prose fiction’ and ‘no novels.’ The immature editor does not take rejection well when it happens to him.

The last two tales return us to the present scene of editorial power and authority. In “The Spotted Dog” the narrator tries to aid a poor, educated author who is possibly an alcoholic and whose wife most definitely is. Setting Julius Mackenzie in a position to index

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35For more on the sexual politics of Trollope’s editor and their sinister implications, see Mark Turner, Trollope and the Magazines: Gendered Issues in Mid-Victorian Britain.
the learned manuscript of the editor’s friend the Doctor, though, proves tragic and fatal. The editor finds himself inadvertently at fault, the Doctor’s precious singular manuscript is destroyed, and Mackenzie’s hopes are dashed. Finally, the editor offers a depiction of “Mrs. Brumby,” the most hated contributor he can imagine, who is a militant, aggressive, conniving Harpy. In his trials and tribulations with this aspiring contributor the editor is brought to his knees, and the concluding scenes of the last “Editor’s Tale” are dominated by pathos, anticlimax, and humiliation.

All six of these stories display a pattern of aspiration and failure bounded by the work of the benevolent editor. The editor himself repeatedly goes beyond the call of duty, extends himself towards aspiring contributors out of kindness and not necessity, and refrains from publishing their early efforts only because his duty to his imagined public exceeds his generous impulse. Several would-be contributors, the editor himself among them (in his youth), adopt regimes of hard work with an eye to maximizing productivity and the chance of success in the “lottery” of the literary sphere (“MG” 245). Despite this, many parties are brought to face unforeseen circumstance and insurmountable, overwhelming obstacles. No one is published in his or her forum of choice, if published at all, and failure is the dominant chord and the repeating refrain. In every story and regardless of particulars, the aspiring contributors and their editors fail, despite ability, or diligence, or both. Thus my reading differs from critics, such as Betty Jane Breyer, who see the stories as in keeping with Trollope’s disciplinary beliefs: “there lies a firm substratum of faith in that clear formula, a thing to say and the self-discipline to say it. Young Mary Gresley lacked the one; the old Doctor lacked the other, or perhaps both. How many other aspirants have been measured against this Trollopian standard and been found wanting?” (Breyer xiv). And yet Mary
Gresley and the Doctor are not the only characters who fail in “An Editor’s Tales,” and in a myriad of situations this simple formula of cause and effect proves unreliable. The texts explain this recurrent phenomenon through representations of opaque and inaccessible ‘systems’ meant to facilitate the journey to literary success. On several occasions we see aspiring contributors and even the editor attempt to believe in the potential of these systems. But, over and over, the systems are shown to be multiple, shifting, and unreliable; value is not fixed and its relative status is emphasized and manifested persistently throughout the tales. Trollope’s “An Editor’s Tales” are a prime example of the market story insofar as they are particular and distinct from other mid-Victorian periodical short fictions: both their subject matter (the detailed representation of editorial life offers a glimpse ‘behind the veil’) and their format (six connected, but discrete, self-conscious texts narrated by a peripheral first-person character) are unconventional. Coupling these generic features with the stories’ persistent attention to the methods and merits of processes of valuation creates a question about their function in relation to contemporary discourses of cultural worth. To explain this function, I would like to begin by situating Trollope’s tales in relation to the conditions of their original publication.

**Saint Pauls and Mid-Victorian Genres**

“An Editor’s Tales” were published in *Saint Pauls* magazine between October of 1869 and May of 1870. At this time Trollope had been the chief editor of the magazine for two years. *Saint Pauls*’s inauguration occurred with Trollope at the helm, and the terms of his contract with the publisher James Virtue were explicit: he was to be paid £1000 annually for a “minimum” of two years, minus editorial expenses, which amounted to a £250 sub-editor’s salary. Trollope would be paid additionally for his own contributions to the
At the outset Trollope and Virtue aspired to two things: a circulation of 25,000 or higher, and to “hold [their] own” against competitors like *Belgravia* and *Temple Bar* (Virtue qtd. in Srebrnik 450). Within eighteen months of *Saint Pauls’s* first issue it appeared that this circulation was not to be reached, and that, subsequently, the magazine would not “pay” (Srebrnik 450). By May of 1869 Virtue had sold *Saint Pauls*, among other assets, to Alexander Strahan, who had little interest in retaining Trollope’s editorial services at such an expense. The two year contract expired in September of 1869, yet the extant arrangement endured until 25 January of 1870, when Strahan informed Trollope in a letter that the magazine must begin to “edit itself” (qtd. in Srebrnik 459). The timing of these events in relation to the appearance of “An Editor’s Tales” is telling. Prior to the series all short fiction published in *Saint Pauls* dealt with subjects like marriage, love, the supernatural, or travel (the Italian castles and ghosts in the blue chamber), and none of these stories was set in the world of contemporary publishing; for their subject treatment alone the Editor’s tales are singular. Moreover, the first of these six tales, “The Turkish Bath,” was printed in the October 1869 issue, directly following the end of Trollope’s two-year term. Whether or not he anticipated dismissal from Strahan immediately at the close of his contract, Trollope would have been aware of this significant date. When Trollope was notified that he and *Saint Pauls* should “part company,” he had just printed the first instalment of “The Panjandrum,” a two-part tale that was followed by another in two parts, “The Spotted Dog.” Indeed Trollope did not finish printing “Editor’s Tales” until six months after the October date, as the sixth and last, “Mrs. Brumby,” appeared in May of 1870. Trollope retained his editorial role at the magazine until at least that time. “As events worked themselves out,” Patricia Srebrnik explains, Trollope
continued to do most of the editing until “sometime in June or July 1870” (460). Without further historical evidence this leaves the series of six stories uniformly titled “An Editor’s Tales” in a crucial position. To maximize Trollope’s strategic intentions one would suggest that he commenced the series immediately after becoming dispensable to the magazine, and continued it beyond his dismissal in order to prolong his presence as ‘Editor’ (with his readers even if not in reality). Ostensibly this may have been done out of editorial benevolence, but with Trollope it is never a stretch to suggest that self-interest is at work, in which case he may have extended the stories for a number of months until he was sufficiently prepared to have done with Saint Pauls. The vague “sometime” in June or July could have been whenever Trollope decided that he was not inclined to produce any more written work for the magazine, and therefore ready to eliminate the 20s. per page for contributions from his income. He is absent from the June issue’s list of contributors, and appears in July only for a short obituary on Charles Dickens, and his Ralph the Heir continues to appear as a supplement to the magazine, its purchase having been arranged by Virtue prior to May 1869.

Referencing Virtue’s earlier apprehension of “the propriety of working a dead horse” should Saint Pauls not achieve a profitable circulation, John Sutherland points out that Trollope was “skimming all Virtue’s cream for himself” not least by keeping the latter “strictly” to the two year clause “in spite of [the magazine] proving a very dead horse indeed” (125, 123). While Sutherland sees Trollope’s profits in this situation as a “rare, if not unique” instance of a Victorian novelist exploiting a publisher, accumulating agreements from Virtue that totalled £8,400 in one year, a more generous view of the situation might include Trollope’s wistful comment that “If the use of large capital, combined with wide
liberality and absolute confidence ... on the part of the proprietor, would have produced success, our magazine certainly would have succeeded” (Sutherland 125-26; Trollope, *Autobiography* 285). The intention of this exploration is not to determine the truth of Trollope’s own attitudes, or to ascertain with precision if he was shamelessly duping Virtue or if his intentions were noble. Such answers can only be speculative, and will not change the more notable reality that, undoubtedly, all of these factors were influential in Trollope’s decision making processes. His “Editor’s Tales” emerged out of this context, wherein economic considerations vied with Trollope’s potentially genuine aspirations to edit a successful periodical, and both factors would have been present as he recognized the period of his ‘Editorship’ coming to an end and contemplated his course of action. Placed in this cultural context, Trollope’s “Editor’s Tales” offer a commentary on literary production and the evaluative apparatus that demythologizes, grounds, and deflates Romantic stereotypes about art and its worth. For the established novelist working in more than one new genre, this commentary suggests a broadening sense of the different terrains to be found in the literary landscape, and a challenge to existing conceptions based on their arbitrariness.

“An Editor’s Tales” and *Saint Pauls* magazine were both being produced in a literary climate where the cultural and commercial value of the short story is necessarily situated among other literary forms, and Trollope was writing during a period when novels were clearly the most popular, if not the most respected, literary genre. He claims to be of the opinion that “poetry takes the highest place” among the forms, while novels, occupying a secondary position, are still capable of much good influence and boast many merits (*Autobiography* 217). *An Autobiography* does not say anything particular about short stories, except that shorter novels are not popular (237). One of my assumptions throughout this
project is that the choice to work in a specific genre constitutes an author’s acknowledgement and consideration of that genre’s characteristics. Thus, as the shorter forms existed on an alternative plane in the mid-Victorian period, Trollope’s decision to write “An Editor’s Tales” as a group of short stories alerts us to a potential reading of value in relation to type within the works. Repeatedly the Tales advocate a ‘realistic’ approach to writing and publishing, where idealism is derided and the “blood and nastiness” of the penny-press is tolerated if not completely understood. This realistic approach emerges from awareness—latent in the stories—of the lack of certainty accompanying most forms of literary judgment. In the opaque steam-rooms of the Turkish Bath; through attempts to define the art of writing for the press; in discussions of the market for “penny dreadfuls,” of Mrs. Brumby, and of sartorial choices; in their representations of objects of value and money; and in its comedic emphasis in “The Panjandrum,” “An Editor’s Tales” work to separate and subsequently emphasize the detachment between signifier and signified, form and content, and judgment and value in literary writing. Simultaneously, depictions that construct an editorial ideal, combined with the predominance of failure throughout, shifts this awareness of literary judgment to the realm of the editor working within these confines, assessing literature with full knowledge of how imperfect his tools actually are. The editor is a contextual agent, outside of the immediate realm of literary creation, and as such his valuations emphasize the influence of external factors in the process of value-creation, what Herrnstein Smith calls “the value of an entity to an individual subject [which] is also the product of the dynamics of an economic system: specifically, the personal economy constituted by the subject’s needs, interests, and resources—biological, psychological, material, experiential, and so forth” (30-31). The tales suggest that this awareness is both limiting and freeing: limiting insofar as the
editor finds himself subject to the same desire for approval which he recognizes as fruitless and misdirected in his authors, and freeing because he can release himself from the burden of arbitration (of the expectation that he determine an enduring value based on “fixed attributes, unidirectional forces, and simple causal and temporal relationships”), and leave judgment to the market (Herrnstein Smith 31). The editor considers the possibility of divesting himself of responsibility for the texts he publishes by deferring his responsibility to his audience, and in so doing suggests that the market model may be equally as meritorious as any other.

“Our Little Systems”

“An Editor’s Tales” repeatedly register the failure of attempted systematization. The editor is benevolent and hard-working, and together with his aspiring contributors devises schemes for diligence and productivity: but success in literary endeavours is always elusive and far-off, and failure is pervasive, whether deserved or not. External conditions (personal relationships, economic necessities, belief systems) frequently assert their demands over the opportunities of the literary marketplace, and the stories repeatedly employ representations of shifting and opaque systems to explain these outcomes. These systems may be literal, or they may be only metaphorically aligned with the system they represent, as in “The Turkish Bath.” Systems are crucial to my reading of value throughout these market stories because they emphasize—by embodying—the importance of contingency and relational meaning. The market story itself, as defined here, constitutes a small, self-contained system, and each time Trollope, Dickens, Gaskell and Oliphant foreground systemic relations in their stories they stress the existence of value in and through structural relationships.

The first of “An Editor’s Tales” spends three pages introducing, detailing, and explicating the mysterious world inside London’s Turkish bathhouse. The narrator justifies
his description on the basis that “everybody has not taken a Turkish bath in Jermyn Street,” and without having done so they cannot be familiar with its workings. The first part of what follows neatly sets up the parameters of this world: “We were … accommodated with two checked towels; and, having in vain attempted to show that we were to the manner born by fastening the larger of them satisfactorily round our own otherwise naked person, had obtained the assistance of one of those very skilful eastern boys who glide about the place and create envy by their familiarity with its mysteries” (110-111). This is a space with its own rules, somewhat opaque to those who are not, like the “eastern boys,” privileged possessors of its arts. On the other hand, the editor wants to appear to be as such; he may not in fact be “to the manner born,” but he knows enough to realize that this is the position he should emulate, and between the “eastern boys” and his unfamiliar readers he will mediate the intricacies of the towel.

Towel-wearing is an art of high consequence in the Turkish bath. “Having observed the matter closely in the course of perhaps half-a-dozen visits,” the editor is comfortable to recommend a certain arrangement of two towels as being “at the same time easy and oriental” (111). When the first towel is wrapped around the waist, a bather should not wear the second towel over the shoulders, as it is a manner that produces “the utter loss of all dignity”; nor yet should he carry it under his arm which is too simple and will “rob the institution of that picturesque orientalism which should be its greatest charm.” Ideally the second towel will be worn as a turban, which produces among the other bathers “a respect which no other arrangement of the towel will produce.” Yet this is a difficult arrangement, and only the “competent” should attempt it. Ultimately, the editor will “recommend” that the second towel be trailed: “The effect is good, and there is not difficulty in the trailing” (111).
The values of towel-wearing are dictated by boundaries of self and other that favour the insider who can mimic a cultural familiarity. At the same time, there is space for a middle ground between exceedingly difficult high-level mimicry and the too easy, too familiar option. Such a range of valuations necessarily reveals the arbitrary underpinnings of some and the needless dexterity of others.

The same level of nuance applies to almost every aspect of the Turkish bath. The editor pronounces his opinion on each: how to sit on couches, “if a man be able to lie on stone for half-an-hour without a movement … the effect is not bad” (111); how to call for water, “the hollowness of the voice” is key (112); and how to clap his hands, “There should, we think, be two blows of the palms. One is very weak, and proclaims its own futility” (112). Moreover, upon becoming an initiate into the world of mysteries, the system allows some room for adaptation. The editor addresses whether or not one should carry on conversation with fellow-bathers:

The true devotee of the Turkish baths will, we think, never speak at all; but when the speaking is low in tone, just something between a whisper and an articulate sound, the slight murmuring hum produced is not disagreeable. We cannot quite make up our mind whether this use of the human voice be or be not oriental; but we think that it adds to the mystery, and upon the whole it gratifies. (112)

All of these descriptions occur before Molloy enters the scene and the action of the story begins. Thus “The Turkish Bath” and the sequence of “An Editor’s Tales” open with an extended mediation on the nature and intricacies of an unknown world, operating within London in sight of all but challenging to those who do not understand its labyrinthine
workings. As an extended metaphor for the world of publishing and periodical journalism, “The Turkish Bath” invites readers ‘behind the veil’ of the Editor’s world. The system is not rigid, and once understood it can be mastered and moulded; however, to the outsider it is not welcoming, and he risks appearing “Western,” “ignorant,” and “unpoetical” if he misreads its conventions (112). Moreover, a hint of the absurd lingers around these explanations, indicating the narrator’s self-consciousness that they are indeed conventions lacking in inherent logic, not least because in some cases (such as the appropriate speaking voice) he has determined the appropriate course entirely without sanction.

The system’s very instability is proven by the editor’s varying positions within it. While the editor sits in his Turkish bath he is joined by another bather, whose “slow, majestic step” evinces a “manner admirably adapted to the place,” one filled with “ease and dignity” (113). This is Molloy, and the editor is so charmed by his comfort with the codes of Turkish bathing that he is all the more perturbed by the play when he realizes that Molloy has planned to catch him there (an aspiring contributor, Molloy has recognized the editor and followed him inside). Their conversation turns on the impenetrability of the London publishing world, which Molloy provocatively claims to be “unintelligible,” whereas “New York or Constantinople one can understand,—or even Paris” (114). Goaded into defending his profession in his city, the editor resorts to the folly of declaring his opinion “loudly” and even slapping his thigh “with an energy altogether unbecoming [his] position as a Turkish bather” (116, 115). If the unwritten codes of the Turkish bath constitute a system akin to that of literary publication, then the editor’s quick deviance from the guidelines of one throws the logic of both into question. After insisting that London editors are just as unbiased as those Molloy claims to have known elsewhere, the editor finds himself backed into a corner when
his conversational partner reveals his position. Relaxed in his place as a bather, the editor mistakenly takes all other bathers displaying the same level of finesse as insiders who must share his sentiments in most respects. The editor misreads the signs of Turkish bathing for signs applicable elsewhere, and Molloy has proven that he is adept at using the rules of one system to gain access to another from which he is otherwise barred. Indeed, divested of their clothes and worldly associations, men in the Turkish bath are on a level playing field, and the editor’s hold on his own bathing expertise, proven to be more than tenuous, implies that his authority in the sphere of literary publishing may be equally vulnerable (as may be its hierarchies). Molloy, on the other hand, admirably proves that London is not entirely opaque as he penetrates its inaccessible ranks of literary editors. As an opening motif the scene in the Turkish bath firmly establishes several of the stakes of the collection: these tales will be concerned with systems and their subversion, authority and its defence, and failure, here encapsulated by the editor’s entrapment and his deviation from the mannerisms of respectable bathing.

Later, in the first of several meditative passages on his position, the editor questions his reluctance to consider Molloy’s application. “The man had taken much trouble with the view of placing himself where he now was. When we had been all but naked together I had taken him to be the superior of the two, and what were we that we should refuse him an interview simply because he had wares to sell which we should only be willing to buy at his price if they were fit for our use?” (121). Stark commercial language leaves implied the fact that the prompt for the editor’s negative judgement was the “tattered glove” of Molloy’s everyday wardrobe (110). The value of Molloy’s wares are provocatively linked to his shifting status, of less worth as he moves from unclothed bather to sartorially-impoverished
aspiring contributor. Of course the editor recognizes, at least in theory, that this is folly; and Trollope uses the plot to simplify the question by making Molloy’s work absolutely bad. Yet, the editor does not necessarily find a superior or more fixed scale of value. We are everywhere presented with instances of the editor’s judgment of an author before the work, such that it becomes apparent that Molloy’s “tattered glove,” Mary Gresley’s “pair of eyes … gemmed always either with a tear or with some spark of laughter,” Josephine’s “confidence,” Julius Mackenzie’s “keen intellect” (of which the editor feels sure as he “looked at him”), and Mrs. Brumby’s “strong-minded” intrusion all work to shape the editor’s responses to their literary output (“TB” 110, “MG” 237, “JM” 367, “SD” 673, “MB” 186). The person and the work are inextricably intertwined, and “An Editor’s Tales” make it apparent that so, too, are the man and the editor.

At times the editor generalises his practice until it begins to sound like a sublimated constellation of its own. He describes reacting to a starving supplicant with conflicted emotions; just as he “knows that he is bound in honesty … to steel himself against [the submission]” he is simultaneously tender, wondering “what harm will its publication do to any one?” (118). The answer depends on length: if the thing is “short” and “decently written” then the editor can almost justify the “waste” … of only a few pages if they will “save a family from hunger for a month” (118). Here value corresponds directly to scale: the shorter the thing, the less the waste. Trollope is inverting the framework that values short fiction less than novels: if one is a great waste, the other is less so. But the pages themselves are not waste, as it is the pages of the periodical that are to be wasted. Value is then
embedded in a sort of vacuous space, the space of a waiting periodical with a set number of pages, a space not unlike a market in the abstract.36

Balancing quantities of pages against the duration of hunger makes for a difficult scale of value, though, and the editor remains aware that “common honesty” and “common prudence” are not compatible with such a system (118). Often the editor is obliged to reject contributors, even those in circumstances this extreme, and one general ‘rule’ emerges out of such a condition:

Let an editor do his duty with ever so pure a conscience, let him spend all his days and half his nights reading manuscripts and holding the balance fairly between the public and those who wish to feed the public, let his industry be never so unwearied and his impartiality never so unflinching, still he will, if possible, avoid the pain of personally repelling those to whom he is obliged to give an unfavourable answer. (116)

The ideal editor, here described, is first of all a conduit. Trollope presents the image of a blind justice “holding the balance fairly” on each side. Moreover he is industrious, his impartiality is constant and sure, and yet he still shrinks from rejecting potential contributors. Even if other conditions were perfect, the editor would still be crippled by an external (personal) consideration. Like the scene in which the editor debates Josephine de Montmorenci’s manuscript, seeing a negative outcome in both options, here the editor’s difficulties and pains are unavoidable, even if he is an ideal figure. Part of the reason for this

36 I have purposely resisted offering a definition of “market” to this point, in order to preserve its flexibility as a term. A market is both tangible (originating from a physical gathering place in which vendors and shoppers meet according to a regular schedule) and very immaterial (as a modern, abstract force, or group will that makes decisions through many aggregate coincidences, as in “the market has pronounced the success of a new product”). Even in its tangible sense, a market is defined by qualities of lack and absence: it will host, or provide a space for, the things and people who will come and fill its stalls. Similarly, the later sense of a market as a condition or opportunity for buying or selling (“there must be a market for this item”) is tantalizingly indeterminate.
necessity resides in the condition of his work, which he tries to explain to Molloy during their interview. His circuitous prose bespeaks the elusive nature of the system even as he tries to pin it down in words: “there exists, and must ever exist, extreme difficulty in proving the possession of an art so difficult to define as a capability of writing for the press” (115). The euphonious, alliterative passage in a totalizing present and future tense attempts to substantiate what it seeks to describe, to prove the existence of a thing it is at a loss to clearly explain. This art, the thing that resides at the heart of the system and is its reason for being, recedes further with every effort made to locate it. Dallas Liddle has suggested that the “private discourse” of journalists is not Trollope’s main concern with representations of the profession found in *The Warden*, that “the public discourse of journalists” is more intriguing, whereas the “astute reader could have gathered directly” all that is really knowable about a private discourse (85). In “An Editor’s Tales” these descriptions of opaque and elusive systems certainly suggest that there is some aspect of the journalist’s private world that remains hidden from the outsider. But perhaps it remains hidden from the insider as well, and that is what Trollope is interested in representing; his narrator, the experienced editor fully in control of the “great WE,” still cannot pinpoint with ease the art itself (“PJ” 434).

Trollope’s editor can identify certain aspects of the process of evaluation as either arbitrary but necessary, or facile and inconsequential. The latter parts of the editorial façade he is happy to dissemble. For example, the editor contemplates calling on Josephine de Montmorenci but fears that “he might make himself too common”:

> It is essential that they who are ambitious of serving under him should believe that he is enveloped in MSS. from morning to night,—that he cannot call an hour his own,—that he is always bringing out that periodical of his in a frenzy
of mental exertion,—that he is to be approached only with difficulty,—and that a call from him is as visit from a god. (368)

Certainly, this is far from our idle narrator’s reality. This passage explicitly recalls The Warden, where Trollope describes the offices of The Jupiter as Mount Olympus, “that high abode of all the powers of type, that favoured seat of the great goddess Pica, that wondrous habitation of gods and devils, from whence, with ceaseless hum of steam and never-ending flow of Castilian ink, issue forth eighty thousand nightly edicts for the governance of a subject nation” (160). Here, Mr. Brown wishes to preserve the illusion with his contributors, but the editor who narrates is happy to reveal the truth to his readers.37

What is really at stake here is the editor’s authority to define literary value, and Trollope’s editors certainly do not presume to be infallible arbiters. Mr. Brown ponders the uncertain fate of Josephine de Montmorenci’s manuscript: it may “prove to be an invaluable treasure of arts, destined to give delight to thousands of readers, and to be, when printed, a source of large profit to publishers, booksellers, and author.” Alternately, “it might be that, with all its undoubted merits … the novel would fail to make any way with the public” (383). Here success has two components (delight and profit), whereas failure is simply singular. Trollope recognizes both the Romantic, aesthetic, and the more modern, economic conceptions of literary value, as well as their problematic relationship to one another. The worst versions of this and Trollope’s depictions are of a vast undistinguishable mass of literary writing, where even the category of literature is called into question. Mrs. Brumby,

37 Mr. Brown is an editor who features in this story alone; the tale is still narrated by the unidentified editor of the rest of the collection. Like the editor, Mr. Brown is vacuous and undetermined. Moreover, his presence in this single story, by suggesting the interchangeable nature of editors, reinforces my reading of the peripheral narrator who serves a mechanistic function.
we will see, occupies this extreme position, but most of the other characters in “An Editor’s Tales” fall somewhere in the grey area.

“The Spotted Dog,” for example, offers a decided critique of the ‘lower’ end of the periodical publishing scale, while simultaneously conceding the validity of its existence. Mackenzie has been working for the penny press, and he does not hesitate to damn the material produced for it as “blood and nastiness” (670). This system of literary production can be articulated with precision:

He knew the gentleman in the cupboard very well; and the gentleman in the cupboard knew him. As long as he took his work to the gentleman in the cupboard, the gentleman in the cupboard would be only too happy to purchase that work at the rate of sixpence for a page of manuscript containing two hundred and fifty words. That was his rate of payment for prose fiction, and at that rate he could earn forty-five shillings a week. He wasn’t afraid of the gentleman in the cupboard. He had had some words with the gentleman in the cupboard before now, and they two understood each other very well. (681)

There is no mystery here, and the constant repetition of the ‘gentleman in the cupboard’—used six times in this short passage—as well as ‘rate’ and ‘work,’ implies the simplicity of this system. It is bare exchange, and the content is equally sparse, echoing a bare cupboard: the amount of material matters more than its content. Two hundred and fifty words of blood and nastiness will look the same as two hundred and fifty words of anything else to the ‘gentleman in the cupboard,’ because it is the image of this hard, square, inflexible box that is the reigning figure in the scene. If the cupboard suggests that overly mechanized writing becomes emptied of sustenance or nourishment, then Mackenzie has been driven to the point
of desperation because as a soulful writer (the editor says it was “impossible” to look at his eyes and “think him to be one wholly insignificant”) he cannot survive on such scant fare (672). Trollope’s language, characterized by a deficient and repetitive vocabulary, conveys the limits of this system.

Simultaneously, there is something pleasing about the simplicity of the image of the cupboard, as well as the language of the passage. Trollope’s editor is, we sense, somewhat wistful that such a clean system might only work, rather than fail to suffice for Mackenzie and others like him. Prior to this passage the editor finds himself “wondering much at the great development of literature which latter years have produced. We had not even known of the existence of these papers—and yet there they were, going forth into the hands of hundreds of thousands of readers, all of whom were being, more or less, instructed in their modes of life and manner of thinking by the stories which were thus brought before them” (679). The ‘Penny Dreadfuls’ constitute a system of their own of which the editor was unaware. Yet the readers being instructed in their manner of thinking do not differ from Trollope’s own readers of Saint Pauls, and the indication of self-awareness connects the ‘Penny Dreadful’ system with the editor’s own publication in a way that emphasizes their similarities within the larger constellation of literary and periodical production. Indeed, the text even shows some understanding of this system’s workings. After explaining that he had once “struck for wages,” but that after a month or two this effort was a failure, as the gentleman in the cupboard could not profit from the work at a rate of payment any higher than sixpence a page, Mackenzie comments on “gentlemen in cupboards” generally. “They,

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38 Here Trollope echoes Wilkie Collins’s comments, made nine years earlier, on the “Unknown Public” of Victorian periodical readers. Collins describes the realization that readers of a journal like Household Words constitute a mere minority of periodical audiences, and that there exists in England “a public to be counted by millions; the mysterious, the unfathomable, the universal public of the penny-novel Journals” (217).
too, must live,” he tells the editor, and even if his work was attractive, “any price above
sixpence a page unfitted it for their market” (681). Mackenzie and the editor recognize
fairness in the principle of exchange that governs the literary marketplace, though they stop
short of condoning the work it produces.

Though base and simplistic, even the ‘Penny Dreadful’ system is a more palatable
schema than Mrs. Brumby’s. In a somewhat weighty position as the final story in the set, her
version of reality is also the most dangerous and poisonous. Mrs. Brumby “had resolved” to
become a professional writer, and therefore to “push her way” in London (184). Yet of
London as a systemic environment, and its workings, she had been grievously ill-informed.
She had been told that she would have to deal with hard people, and that she
must herself be hard;—that advantage would be taken of her weakness, and
that she must therefore struggle vehemently to equal the strength of those with
whom she would be brought in contact;—that editors, publishers, and brother
authors would suck her brains and give her nothing for them, and that,
therefore, she must get what she could out of them, giving them as little as
possible in return. It was an evil lesson. (184)

Fair principles of exchange are gradually abandoned and fellow-feeling dismissed. The
passage begins by suggesting only that Mrs. Brumby must equal what she faces: if they are
“hard” then so must she be; this is a reciprocal relationship. Yet the imagery becomes more
violent and problematic and Mrs. Brumby would be taken advantage of, would have to
struggle fiercely, and would eventually be robbed of her goods without payment. The
zombielike image specifically—that the enemy would “suck her brains and give her nothing
for them”—suggests theft not of goods, but of immaterial bodily treasure. This is the worst
possible iteration of the system. Where other configurations show work unmoored from value, merit, or reward, here the connection is inverted, and payment, recognition, or success is taken even when not earned. If the worth of success is questionable in the former situation, here it is decidedly negated. Mrs. Brumby’s narrative demonstrates this outcome when she receives a £10 payment from the editor for work which was not only never printed, but was waste, worthless, “undeniable twaddle” (191). The editor bemoans the situation: “Our treatment of Mrs. Brumby was courteous, customary, and conciliatory. We had treated her with more consideration than we had perhaps ever before shown to an unknown, would-be contributor ... We had read at any rate enough of her trash to be sure if its nature. On the other hand we had been insulted, and our clerk had had his ears boxed” (198-99). She has earned nothing, yet she has made an absolute profit. The transaction is not an exchange but the very theft with which Mrs. Brumby herself had been threatened.

Money, value, and systemic applications of labour in the pursuit of success finally become emptied of all worth in “Mrs. Brumby.” Here is a woman who can refute Trollope’s seemingly dearly-held beliefs about the reliability of hard work and diligence. The editor can unequivocally state that “no perseverance on her part, no labour however unswerving, no training however long, would have enabled her to do in a fitting manner even a review” (182). The narrator employs absolutes with abandon, but not because Mrs. Brumby is incapable of any work at all; it is only literary work which escapes her. “There was very much in her” he says, “but that was not in her.” It is “difficult” to describe the “special deficiency” that prevents “it” from being “in her,” sure as the editor may be of the fact: citing the best and worse prose stylists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, he tries, and fails, to delimit this elusive lack. “She did not know what style meant. We believe that had she
ever read, Johnson, Gibbon, Archdeacon Coxe, Mr. Grote, and Macaulay would have been all the same to her” (182); by elaborating on her inability without specifying or characterizing its nature, the narrator admits, again—as he tried to define in a positive capacity in “The Turkish Bath”—that there is something enigmatic in literary aptitude. Unfortunately Mrs. Brumby clings to her chosen profession with “persistence” (182), which is the hallmark of her deluded, narrow vision, and the bane of the editor’s existence, causing him to want to prove Mary Gresley’s insistent claim that “literature is not a lottery”: authors like Mrs. Brumby should never ‘win’ (245). When he is finally driven to sign the letter of apology that accompanies her payment of £10 for work that was neither solicited nor printed, the editor is forced to feel how Mrs. Brumby’s actions have “brought her nearer to the rewards of success than many come who are at all points worthy to receive them” (182). The deconstruction of systemic methods for the application and receipt of literary recognition is complete.

Mrs. Brumby and Julius Mackenzie are both given £10 for work that is not done or not completed, but the one could not be less, and the other more, deserving. Clarity may be available in the extremes, but the middle, literary value eludes definition. The editor laments Mackenzie’s failure as completely outside of himself: “The poor wretch had been willing to work, had been industrious in his calling, had had capacity for work; and he had also struggled gallantly against his evil fate” (73). Mrs. Brumby, however, does not exactly fail: “That in such a transaction Mrs. Brumby should have been so thoroughly successful, and that we should have been so shamefully degraded, has always appeared to us to be an injury too deep to remain unredressed for ever” (199). So with the story “Mrs. Brumby” the editor publicizes this grievance, and attempts to redress the injury done to him, but throughout there
is an awareness that nothing can undo the damage of the £10 and the letter. The value of the
ten pounds is completely and utterly exploded by its concrete allocation on a completely
undeserving object. Coupled with the intangible but equally weighty act of apology, its
symbolic value would drastically exceed a bank-note of ten times its face value. Mrs.
Brumby has triumphed, and the editor has failed, but in different ways, as the £10 occupies
an economic, the apology a symbolic, and the rectified written record a material register. 39
“Mrs. Brumby” suggests not that value is always subjective and relative, but that its
signifiers can be deeply divorced from its signified.

Throughout, “An Editor’s Tales” establish the particularity of the editor’s world,
which is made up of codes and customs not transparent or accessible to the uninitiated.
However, explication and delineation are evaded in “A Turkish Bath” when Molloy
strategically says of the “mighty mass” of London, “it’s hard enough to find the plan” (114).
“Mary Gresley” suggests that the system may be a “lottery,” and illustrates this hypothesis
through the story of a girl with some ability, good intentions, an admirable work ethic, but a
wildcard in her personal life (245). In privacy the editor has admitted his strongest “proof of
excellence,” on which he still hesitates to rely, to be that at time the work “had dimmed the
judges [sic] eyes with tears” (372). Thus the goal of publication (coming, as it does, with
payment), held by Molloy, Mary Gresley and Mrs. Brumby to be the supreme end of their
labours, is far from the end of the system.

39 Moreover, the three are not equivalent, and in the historical moment the relationship between these failures
and that of Saint Pauls itself is complex, as by this time Trollope understands that “publication is not itself a
single function, and that editorship and publishing have differing goals: one understanding the periodical as an
entity of discourse, the other as an entity of economic and legal interests” (Liddle 89).
Objects

In the middle stories, rooted firmly in the grey areas being probed by “An Editor’s Tales,” a series of objects and references to objects are paraded with a focus on their relationship to scales of value. The worth of these objects is disparate and frequently impermanent. In fact, the major shared characteristic among these representations of corresponding value is one of flux. In these ways they resemble Elaine Freedgood’s formulation of ‘thing culture,’ which is about “personal, random value” more so than exchange value, and wherein “apparently meaningless things can suddenly become legally legible, or luminous, or life-altering” (Freedgood, Dickens, 157). In “The Spotted Dog” the Doctor’s manuscript is extremely precious to its author, but the editor questions its scholarly worth. The object is “elaborate, and very learned” with all of the “complementary paraphernalia of authorship” such as the paging, the margins and the chapters, being absolutely “perfect” (673, 678). It is the work of the Doctor’s lifetime, and he considers it the pinnacle of his achievement. And yet the scholarship anticipates Casaubon, as the editor suspects that “Hot discussion on verbal accuracies or on rules of metre are perhaps not so much in vogue now as they were a hundred years ago” (682). At one turn the editor recognizes that in the manuscript lay “the work of years,” yet at another moment he doubts whether the Doctor “really understood what work meant,—even when he spoke with so much pathos of the labour of his life” (687). The manuscript’s value rests in its singularity. It is the “great object” of the Doctor’s affections, and, having “not yet reached the honours of the printing-house” it is non-fungible (63, 673). When the paper is destroyed and the Doctor cannot face the prospect of rewriting the manuscript entirely, he wonders if “it may well be that it was not worth replacing” (76). Thus the formal characteristic of singularity is
dissociated from the quality of the scholarship, but even this bifurcated valuation is recognized by the Doctor and dismissed altogether when he faces the prospect of rewriting; then the manuscript’s value is thoroughly diminished.

Less precious, but more pivotal than the Doctor’s manuscript, is a simple table. During the episode in which the editor and Mrs. Grimes arrange for Mackenzie’s work space, much is made of the table on which he is to index. The initial problem, “In what workshop was this new work to be performed?” is solved by recourse to the Spotted Dog, the public house of the title (682). Mrs. Grimes shows the editor the “little table” in the tap-room where Mackenzie’s work is often done—it is “hardly more than a long slab or plank, perhaps eighteen inches wide” (683). It is insufficient, as Mackenzie will have to “manipulate” the manuscript in ways that involve spreading “a dozen sheets before him at the same time” (683-84). Mrs. Grimes makes the alternative arrangement of taking “a big table” into her own bedroom, and on this more ample surface Mackenzie undertakes his commission (684). The space of the room is equally as important as the table. The little plank is located in a “dreary, dark” corner of the pub, very distinct from Mr. and Mrs. Grimes’s bedroom, which is “clean and sweet” (683, 684). Moreover, in direct contradistinction to the image of the bare cupboard, the bedroom boasts a “capacious wardrobe” which indicates that it will be a space in which sprawling imaginative thought can occur (684). The editor protests this proposed arrangement as a violation of the sanctity of the bedroom, and Mrs. Grimes responds with a statement that represents the larger workings of objects in the story. “I know what you’re a-thinking of,” she says, “But we’re different in our ways than what you are. Things to us are only just what they are” (685, emphasis mine). The table itself epitomizes this potential for conversion: at the story’s conclusion, when failure is everywhere evident
and Julius Mackenzie has taken his own life, the editor visits the Spotted Dog for an inquest and is dismayed to see that “the very table which had been dragged up-stairs into the landlady’s bed-room with the charitable object of assisting Mackenzie in his work” is now being used for quite another purpose (75). This table has been transferred to the tap-room, where Mackenzie had written the “blood and nastiness” of the Penny-Dreadfuls, and now his own body testifies to the limiting effects of that work. The large table had been the surface on which the work was done; it is now the surface on which the body is laid. The Doctor’s manuscript has been burned and Mackenzie’s life is offered as a substitute—the dead body for the destroyed pages. The table is also a plinth for whatever is placed upon it, as it was before emblematic of Mackenzie’s ambition to move beyond the “blood and nastiness” of his former work, but now it has become the support of his failure. In this instance value is being emptied-out, rather than located or created, as the potential worth of Mackenzie’s ability and ambition is so swiftly destroyed. Simultaneously, the table as a vehicle for value-creation has reached its end point with the end of Mackenzie’s life.

Throughout “An Editor’s Tales” money is referenced as an index of value, but while it is often employed in this capacity it frequently proves to be arbitrary or misleading. In a sea of shifting, inscrutable codes, money can be concrete and constant, but its value as such is severely questioned. When Mary Gresley publishes her two short stories the twelve guineas she is paid for them are “an El Dorado of literary wealth” which the editor sees “stretched … to cover a legion of purchases” (251-53). The money marks these material things as well as the intangible entity of Mary’s self-confidence. After payment she is filled with “renewed triumph” in her activities (251). Again, money represents the value of her writing, as the editor won’t let her publish for no money, believing that “work so done can be
serviceable to none but those who accept it that pages may be filled without cost” (252).

This reference is to the value of work in a generalized sense, and, like waste, it accommodates several meanings: the work of writing, the work as finished object, and the work of filling pages. In all of these senses it is impossible to imagine a way in which pages are filled “without cost.” There is always some cost, and money is the gauge of these other variations of the outlay. Thus in “Mary Gresley” money can translate its value in a fixed manner, several times over.

When money changes hands in “The Spotted Dog” it is an act of concretization. The Doctor gives Mackenzie ten pounds and the editor notes that “of course the thing was settled.” Yet, this money does not clearly represent that thing: “in truth the bank-note had been given, not from judgment in settling the matter, but from the generous impulse of the moment” (688). The money’s meaning is misdirected, and though its passage has fixed consequences, Trollope is loosening its assignation from a fixed correlative value. Similarly, money does not carry much weight in “The Turkish Bath.” When Molloy’s wife returns the editor’s sovereign she “spoke of herself and her husband as being altogether removed from pecuniary distress. Indeed, while the money part of the question was being discussed, she opened a little drawer in the desk and handed us back our sovereign,—almost without an observation” (127); here money is unimportant and circulates apart from any lasting value. As the editor has already established that his grief is greater for having poured “from the butter-boat of benevolence” than for bestowing a sovereign (126), the impression that money is an unreliable index is affirmed.

Conversely, for authors who aspire to literary earnings, money looks like the ultimate signifier. When Mr. Brown discovers that Josephine de Montmorenci is really Maryanne
Puffle, he desires to know what else is true about his impression of her. He first questions whether she actually wrote the novel under discussion:

“Oh, yes; I wrote it,” said Josephine.

“And you wish to have it published?”

“Yes.”

“And you wish to get money for it?”

“That is the truest of all,” said Josephine.

“Oughtn’t one to be paid when one has worked so very hard?” said Mrs. Puffle.

“Yes.”

Puffle.

“Certainly one ought to be paid if it can be proved that one’s work is worth buying,” replied the sage Mentor of literature. (382)

Having ‘spent’ the intangibles of her own time and energy on the production of her manuscript, Josephine is eager to have its worth validated by some external factor. To her money payment would be enough, but this transaction is too simple for the registers of merit operating in “An Editor’s Tales.” The editor must think beyond that single transaction, and beyond is the multifarious, unknowable world of literary successes and failures determined by the public taste. Moreover, Josephine’s story is already one of duplicity and feigned appearance, and so her desire for a system of representation that is “truest of all” bespeaks the tale’s larger insistence that such translation is impossible.

In all of these representations value is unfixed, shifting, and fleeting. The constant flux among money, objects, and value is analogous to a comic emphasis on the importance of movement and change. Ultimately, money resembles the bewitching but delusive talk of Molloy in the steam-room of the Turkish bath: “Yes; money, no doubt, is the grand
desideratum … is everything, no doubt … I don’t complain of that. I like money myself: I know its value” (114). But Molloy follows this decisive assertion with no real explanation of that value, preferring instead to provoke the editor with unilateral statements about the art market in Paris. A consideration of what is later revealed of Molloy, as well, more than undermines this speech: Molloy practically begs for the guinea of which he has no need and with which he does nothing. On the question of precisely what the value of money is, “An Editor’s Tales” remains ambivalent, and the only character who even claims to know is the affable madman performing a “little game” (119).

**Comic Relief: “The Panjandrum”**

“The Panjandrum” is a central story among the set of six, although, befitting a group of market stories, its centrality is not formally or thematically obvious. It is aberrant in setting and singular in subject, being the only market story to narrate the process of composition from the writer’s point of view, rather than that of the editor. Printed between January and February 1870, it is also unusual for its insistent comedy. Rather than treating an application to the editor made by a new contributor and the sympathetic characterization and detailed interaction that follows, “The Panjandrum” details a group of six as they attempt to found a new periodical, and expends considerable narrative space on the decisions attendant on this process. Temporally separate as well, being set back thirty years from the editor’s present life, “The Panjandrum” represents a time quite alien to the current literary climate, as “Novels were not then, as now, held to be absolutely essential for the success of a magazine” (444). As a comic departure it inverts and undermines the values of the literary world presented elsewhere in “An Editor’s Tales”: editorial benevolence is revealed as a hunger for power, adverse circumstances are transformed into blatant cruelty, extreme regimes of hard
work precede an idealized fantasy of effortless composition, and failure, when it must be borne at all, is not borne well. These exaggerations of the scenes presented elsewhere make “The Panjandrum” a particularly self-conscious market story for Trollope. After portraits of mad, sad, and deceptive would-be contributors, “The Panjandrum” turns the tables and presents the editor as an unsympathetic applicant. In his moment of hope the editor presents a ‘tale’ which he hopes will please his fellow authors, but which is rejected on generic grounds. This formal circumstance, positioned as it is in a moment of heightened self-consciousness in “The Panjandrum,” makes a assertion about the arbitrariness of genre and value that reverberates through the rest of Trollope’s “Editor’s Tales.”

While many of these discrete stories have had absurd or incongruous moments, “The Panjandrum” has the most insistent comic tone throughout. Roger Henckle, in Comedy and Culture: England 1820-1900, outlines a comic strategy whereby a work presents “serious concerns in a way that transmits the effect obliquely or ambivalently” (9). Employing Frank Kermode’s concept of ‘fictions,’ “notions that people invent to live by, or concepts that they consciously employ in order to explain or structure portions of their everyday lives and activities,” Henckle suggests that comedy recognizes the “danger” inherent in a too-strict reliance on such fictions, which become “ossified” into myths or beliefs that we see as “permanently desirable” (10). Comic characters are often “entwined” in these “self-protective patterns of behaviour” which oppose the comic spirit because they cannot be “open, flexible, or life-celebrating” (12). In this case the editor is entrenched by a vision of literary value that is exclusively Romantic, idealist, and aesthetic, and his companions are restricted by their rigid understanding of generic hierarchy. The comic outlook can extend, moreover, to the entire sphere of mid-Victorian literary and periodical production. When we
consider “The Panjandrum” as a snapshot of periodicals three decades prior to 1869, the
story’s comic tone alerts readers to “the pulse of chancy reality” that opens society up to
change and “adjust[s] its concepts so that all the psychologically necessary patterning of
human behaviour can be conceived as the building and adjusting of fictions” (13). The
literary landscape is ever-changing, and through its comic strategies “The Panjandrum”
celebrates this fact.

The first notable comic strategy of “The Panjandrum” is deflation. The editor, here,
has no power, no voice, and no success. This position presents a problem of narrative voice,
as the editor has, until now, been narrating in the first person plural. But the altered position
of “The Panjandrum” presents a crisis of editorial categorization that must be addressed
immediately upon the story’s opening.

We hardly feel certain that we are justified in giving the following little story
to the public as an Editor’s Tale, because at the time to which it refers, and
during the circumstances with which it deals, no editorial power was, in fact,
within our grasp … the ambition and the hopes, and something of a promise
of the privileges, were there; but the absolute chair was not mounted for us.
The great WE was not, in truth, ours to use. (434)

The editor’s seriousness regarding pronouns is absurd, and the burlesque is compounded by
the lengths to which he will go to preserve his dominion over the “delicious plural” (434). In
the first three paragraphs the editor performs syntactical gymnastics in order to repudiate but
maintain use of the “we.” “We shall,” he says, “therefore, tell our story, as might any
ordinary individual, in the first person singular,” but immediately following this assertion
nothing changes, and the “we” is still in use. “The ‘we’ here spoken of is not an editorial we,
but a small set of human beings,” the editor explains, who are collaborating on the proposed project. And this foregrounding continues at the next pronoun shift. “I,—for I will now speak of myself as I,—I had wished” (434); the editor is deeply attached to his favourite construction, and his readers are made painfully aware of this dependency. Indeed, the first half of the story is written in the “we” of the group, and it is not until the narrator describes a period of relative isolation in the story’s second instalment that the “I” predominates.

These ridiculous pretensions to authority continue in the main points of “The Panjandrum.” The narrative of the first number describes the weekly meetings at which the group of six contributors make decisions about their magazine. While the wrapper and the nature of the introductory number are still uncertain, the journal’s raison d’etre is firm. “We were to struggle after excellence with an energy that should know no relaxing—and the excellence was not that which might produce for us the greatest number of half-crowns, but of the sort which would increase truth in the world, and would teach men to labour hard and bear their burdens nobly, and become gods upon earth” (441). The hyperbole of this statement—concretely separating ‘intrinsic value’ (of the kind identified by Herrnstein Smith) from other, external trappings, and which anticipates Harold Biffin—suggests that our narrating editor of the present day has no such aims. Attention to material reality is repeatedly mocked: “what matters a wrapper? Surely of any printed and published work it is by the interior that you should judge it” (444). In the same vein the narrator belittles the publisher with whom he condescends to discuss matters of business. He delights in “putting him through his figures” feeling thereby “that it became us for the moment to condescend to matters of trade.” The publisher represents the commercial side of a Romantic money-art binary: “[w]e felt him to be an inferior being … We were, I think, a little proud of keeping
him at a distance when we came to the discussion of that actual essence of our combined intellects … That mind and matter should be kept separate was impressed very strongly upon all of us” (441). This totalizing dismissal of economic matters and corollary veneration of Art is an extreme version of the Romantic view of literary value. But, even by the 1860s such an interpretation might have seemed somewhat outdated and one-sided; certainly Trollope’s lampooning suggests that he sees it this way, and that he expects others to share this vision.

These hyperbolic depictions encourage readers to view the narrator with the appropriate level of sympathy: that is to say, very little. From the outset he is shown to stand apart from the group, having “already written some few slight papers for the press, it was considered probable that [he] might be able to correct proofs, and do the fitting and dovetailing” (436). This, though, should be all the editing he does. He presents himself with a false modesty, and does not take criticism well. At the slightest rebuke he reports feeling “so hurt” that he is “tempted to leave the room at once” (441). The editor’s veiled discourse fails in its attempts to hide his ego. On the evening when the wrapper is under discussion he comes with a “specimen cover,” on which he has “consulted” with an “artistic friend,” and with which he has taken “no inconsiderable labour.” Given these conditions he feels sure that he “bore well” the adjustments made by the group as a whole, which continued “until at last nothing remained” of his design, but the narrative space spent on the subject points more to his bruised ego than to any collaborative spirit (443-44).

The editor consistently reveals his desire to accumulate power as the group’s leader, and the retrospective distance of the narration undermines this desire as often through deflation and anticlimax. At their last meeting before each contributor leaves to do his or her
own separate work, the narrator makes an impassioned plea for their support of his vision for the periodical. “Rising again upon my legs” he says, and employing “all the eloquence of which I was master” in this momentous speech, a fervid attempt to attain consensus on their “great objects” while still humbling himself, he suggests that he is willing to be “the least among them” (451). The editor’s zeal is wholehearted: “I poured out my convictions, my hopes, my fears, my ambitions … I threw myself into my words, and implored them” (451). The young narrator clings to the hyperbolized vision of an intrinsically valuable product. After this wonderful sacrifice he awaits the reaction of his audience. “There was just a whispered word between our Sophronie and her cousin, and then she turned to me and spoke. … ‘Give it up,’ she said’ (452). The editor, narrating retrospectively from a significant temporal distance, emphasizes the deflationary dismissal of his younger self with abrupt language. His peers will not easily bestow upon him the editorial power he so desires.

Faced with this challenge the young narrator retreats to re-evaluate, and “The Panjandrum” presents this process with careful attention to material and physical situation and a strong self-conscious tone, reaffirming its position as market story. What the narrator has to “give up” between January and February of 1870 is his vision of a periodical that would “blend the elements” of its authors, offering “something that should be sparkling, clever, instructive, amusing, philosophical, remarkable, and new, all at the same time!” Though he is “convinced” that this ideal might be achieved, his peers are more realistic (447). Instead of a single prose work combining seven diverse characteristics, one fellow-aspirant advocates a more realistic, grounded approach to value: “We may do something, if it be ever so little” (453). And the narrator intends to take his friend Churchill Smith’s pragmatic advice, expounding in the opening of the next instalment on how he “taught
"himself to hope again” and fully intended to do the work set before him (562). Yet, the narrator’s hopes are still focused in the old direction, which is a barely-obscured bid for power over the group:

I taught myself to … look forward to a time when, by the sheer weight of my own industry and persistency, I might acquire that influence with my companions of which I had dreamed of becoming the master. … something might be done which would force them to regard me as their leader … ‘I could have put them right if they’d have let me’ … In a first number, to stir the public mind is everything. I didn’t think that my colleagues sufficiently realised that fact,—though I had indeed endeavoured to explain it to them.

(563)

The editor’s stubborn single-mindedness ironically undermines his fantasy of collaborative composition, wherein “in really amicable council, each would have corrected what there might have been of rawness in the other, and in the freedom of conversation our wits would have grown from the warmth of natural encouragement” (563). The highly idealized, organic image of wholeness and perfection points to the foolishness of the narrator’s ideas, more so when we have seen him react strongly to the slightest censure from these same colleagues. Moreover, the language of perfection prepares the ground for the fantasy of composition that will be presented in the second instalment of “The Panjandrum.”

The narrator’s depiction of attempting to write is riddled with extremes. “The twenty-one pages loom before [him] as a wilderness” and, “driven to despair,” he writes a page or two on a political subject. Then, the lack of motivation is replaced, immediately, by an interrogation of the justice of such an act: “was this the kind of work to which my gifts
were applicable?” (564). The editor is a man of ideals, and at this young age wants his writing to transcend reality, rather than to be mired in it. Accordingly, he can only conceive of artistic production in the most passive terms, lamenting that his “work did not get itself done without very great mental distress” (562, emphasis mine). He conceptualizes the physical and the intellectual as completely opposed; if a lack of exertion produces mental distress, then painful bodily application is imagined to stimulate the mind more productively. This binary opposition is ridiculed through his systemic attempts to provoke inspiration: “I drank green tea. I eat [sic] meat very slightly cooked. I debarred myself from food for several hours, so that the flesh might be kept well under. I sat up one night, nearly till daybreak, with a wet towel around my head” (564). These techniques parody a mechanized approach to writing by suggesting that the physical and the mental can be treated, and will react, dissimilarly.40 Starvation of the body will encourage abundance in the mind, and the demands of a physical existence can be overcome by an artist wishing to transcend his earthly bonds. Unsurprisingly, these regimes prove unsuccessful, and the narrator’s next step is equally extreme. He imagines being struck by a fit of passive inspiration, to this end: “I would stand up before them and confess my inability to do the work I had undertaken … In such case, the ‘Panjandrum’ would be at an end. The elements had not been happily blended; but without me they could not, I was sure, be kept in any concert” (565). Of course, though the system is a supposed paragon of collaborative effort, he is the lynchpin of the entire operation.

40 Throughout this discussion I am aware of the chimes and echoes to be made against Trollope’s well-documented writing habits, including his regimented practice of writing for two hours before work each morning, without fail. Simultaneously, the narrator in “The Panjandrum” does not embody, nor exemplify, Trollope’s motto that “a small daily task, if it be really daily, will beat the labours of a spasmodic Hercules” (120). Rather, he is parodied because he works in fits and starts, and expects the work to assume its own shape with little or no regulatory effort on his own part.
Such ludicrous imaginings on the part of the narrator prepare the ground for a real moment of inspiration, which is as passive as what has preceded it. Despairing of his ability to write anything, the narrator finds that any justification will do, and the mind-body distinction is again emphasized: “Violent exercise was needed, and then inspiration might come. Inspiration would come the sooner if I could divest myself from all effort in searching for it” (566). The narrator goes for a walk, sees a young girl, overhears a single question that suggests that the girl is going to meet someone for the first time, and is inspired.41 What follows is a veritable fantasy of the creative process: “I … devoted my mind entirely to the girl and her brother … Gradually, as the unforced imagination came to play upon the matter, a little picture fashioned itself in my mind” (568). Here the narrator inverts the Trollopian thesis of hard work and discipline put forth in the Autobiography, where the author reveals that he was “always going about with some castle in the air firmly built within my mind” (Autobiography 42). “These wondrous castles in the air never get themselves well built, when the mind, with premeditated skill and labour, sets itself to work to build them,” the editor intones. “It is when they come uncalled for that they stand erect and strong before the mind’s eye, with every mullioned window perfect, the rounded walls all there, the embrasures cut, the fosse dug, and the drawbridge down”: in other words, exertion will not yield results (“PJ” 568). Ironically, this formulation sounds like it involves no hard work at all.

Now completely beset by the throes of inspiration, the narrator is as one possessed, thinking not at all about his former life and concerns:

41 Inspiration is a word that hovers around the edges of this study, one to which I refer, but to which I can, realistically, pay only a little heed. Its etymologic roots persistently resist analysis and explication. To be inspired is to be “moved or guided by supernatural or divine inspiration”; something inspired is “outstanding or brilliant to a degree suggestive of divine inspiration” (“Inspire”). This insistence on something divine not only evades explanation but, at a certain point, closes down discussion and renders exploration redundant.
As I had made this castle for myself, as I had sat with this girl by my side … I swear that I never once thought of the ‘Panjandrum.’ I walked the whole round of the Regent’s Park, perfecting the building;—and I did perfect it, took the girl to church, gave her away to my friend Walker, and came back and sobbed and sputtered out my speech at the little breakfast, before it occurred to me to suggest to myself that I might use the thing. (568)

It is hard to imagine that readers are meant to take the narrator seriously. Having been consumed by his obsession with the magazine for weeks, and prostrated by his inability to write, we are to accept that he is so transported by his inspiration that these other considerations are utterly forgotten. He goes on to describe the fervour of transcription; having the story complete in his mind is a relief, as the work of writing becomes more and more pleasurable, and he “doubt[s] whether any five days in [his] life were ever happier than those which were devoted to this piece of work” (569). Apparently, too, the work of a real writer is never beset by second thoughts or self-questioning: “While I was at the task all doubt vanished from my mind.” These descriptions posit the narrator as increasingly mechanical: he becomes an automaton of an author, but in the most positive way, as “Each night I copied fairly what I had written in the day, and I came to love the thing with an extreme love” (569). The love is for a thing which has come to him unbidden, has assumed its formal features, details and nuances of its own accord, and writes itself without any analytical engagement from his own eye. Again, the passive construction reinforces this view: “The way in which my work went without a pause was delightful” (570). The narrator is so consumed by his story that he becomes almost beholden to it. “When the pen was not in my hand I was longing for it. While I was walking, eating, or reading, I was still thinking
of my story. I dreamt of it,” he recites (570). The fantasy of composition, exaggerated and ludicrous as it is, assumes a sinister aspect: the story haunts him. This representation is meant to parody the real work of writing, not, as some critics have suggested, to depict “Trollope’s own enthusiasm for the task of writing” and to delimit the extent of his “analysis of the creative process” (Breyer xii). The analysis is implicit in the distortion of the representation: to think that writing involves no real effort, no troublesome labour, and no unpleasant experience is to be living in a dream. Or, more significantly, making a joke.

Given its central position among “An Editor’s Tales,” “The Panjandrum”’s complete departure from the locations, time period, and power structures of the remaining five stories suggest that it operates as a keystone for the collection as a whole. It is a microcosm of many of the issues on display in the other stories, yet each one is inverted, distorted, and satirized through the comic lens. Considering this context, comedy in “The Panjandrum” becomes an index to the problems presented elsewhere in “An Editor’s Tales.” Adverse circumstances, regimes of hard work, struggle and hope are inflated until the narrator’s very sanity rests on their conquest and fulfilment. Thus it is the final, ultimate ironic turn that the narrator’s beloved story, “The New Inmate,” is summarily rejected by the group of collaborators. The story, moreover, is not only rejected, but dismissed without a hearing on the grounds that its genre is inadmissible. And the primary determinant of genre is length: an attribute of shape rather than kind, or style. They have already decided that their magazine should contain no novels, and the contributor Walter Watt denounces the entire genre of “prose fiction” most vehemently (571). While this view may have been more acceptable in the 1830s, when Trollope’s fictional account is set, the temporal remove exacerbates the difference between then and now, suggesting that any such conviction has the potential to
become ridiculous. Given the success with which this story has mocked and undermined such outmoded convictions as the intrinsic value of an idealistic project, and the corollary insignificance of wrappers and material trappings, this final hierarchical, fixed measure of valuation, based on generic forms, seems absurd.

At the meeting where submissions are to be considered, a careful system has been arranged. Each member of the group will present his work, read it aloud, and submit it to a vote by the audience. The vote is to be private, in the case of a tie the lady is to have a double ballot, and in this way all contributions are to be fairly considered. Prior to the commencement of the readings, the group decides that each person should state the name of his or her paper and describe “the nature of the work” (571). The narrator states that he has “a little tale,” and the debate commences before the paper is even read (571).

‘I thought,’ said [Walter Watt], ‘that we had positively decided against “prose fiction.”’ I protested that the decision had been given against novels, against long serial stories to be continued from number to number. This was a little thing, completed within my twenty-one allotted pages. ‘Our vote was taken as to prose fiction,’ said Watt. (571)

The argument quickly becomes heated, as Watt engages a distinction of kind and insists that the narrator should not be allowed even the reading of his story, as it is not “matter of the sort” upon which they had agreed (572). At this suggestion the narrator becomes “enraged,” and protests “loudly” against the conflation of novels with all prose fiction (572). They come to the point of taking another vote, on whether or not “The New Inmate” falls under the category previously voted against, and when Watt speaks to persuade the lady, his cousin, to align her vote with his, the narrator is again incensed, this time by Watt’s “interference”
Watt has told his cousin that “a novel is not a novel because it is long or short” (573). Absurdly they almost require another vote, on the nature and allowance of interference, before the lady votes with her cousin and the narrator is defeated. In this moment, the story’s attention to systematization, its attempts to make meaning in accordance with rigid procedural forms (decisions by voting, and votes to add sub-categories for debate), mirrors and empties out its conceptual focus on generic hierarchies, or literary meaning generated and understood according to rigid categorization.

After such an occurrence, on the heels of a fantastically idealized period of writing, the narrator’s response is complete bathetic abjection. He is “stricken dumb, paralyzed, [and] turned to stone” (574). He turns his face away from the group and lets tears run down his cheeks, recalling afterwards the likelihood that his companions “all suffered in my too conspicuous sufferings” (574). To one who is already a man of extremes, this incident sounds the death-knell of his ambitions. “For me to continue my services to ‘The Panjandrum’ was an impossibility,” he writes: “I had been crushed” (574). The absurdity of this reaction is clear enough, but the text corroborates this view of the young editor when the narrator states, in the very next line, that “they were right on the exact point then under discussion,” thus summarily conceding his own error (573). If we adhere to classificatory distinctions, they were right; even the short-sighted narrator can see this. However, what “The Panjandrum” suggests, above and beyond the narrator’s frustrated ideals, is the entire futility of such a system. Classification is an external factor that topples the narrator’s aspirations; its determining force underlines its impact as an arbiter of value. And its misdirection, here (Walter Watt’s abhorrence for prose fiction will prove futile as periodicals continue to develop the form; the story has already previewed this inevitability), enables
Trollope and “The Panjandrum” to obliquely point to another form which is still ‘beyond the pale’ according to 1860s conventions of classification, but which will, in three decades’ time, come into the mainstream: the short story.

The failure of The Panjandrum is also a failure of the Romantic ideals of ‘Art’ set in opposition to the worldly realities of trade, commerce, and labour. Now even the narrator must condescend to the market, and fit his story where he may. Thus the publisher finds a place for “The New Inmate” in a new periodical, and boasts that it “attracted no little attention,” but this was done with the help of that businessman whom the idealistic narrator had dismissed as “an inferior being” (441). A single story, “The New Inmate,” is the crux on which rests the fate of the periodical. According to the narrator, all could go well before his submission is rejected, but all must go badly after. As “The Panjandrum” is a comic iteration of several of the other stories, its version of failure must be resituated in a comic context. By sending up idealized and rigid versions of writing, the comedy would valorise a more realistic, playful vision. And by pivoting its final decisions on an arbitrary voting system, and its absurd arguments on the categorization of “prose fiction,” the story suggests that strict adherence to these systems, or “fictions,” is foolish. When we translate this to the real context of “The Panjandrum,” written for a periodical of the current day when novels are “absolutely essential for the success of a magazine,” the short story becomes just as important, just as valuable, and just as integral to that success (444). This point is made through arguments about the irrelevance of form, and the comic tone of the episode directs our mockery towards the narrator’s skewed perception: the form of his contribution becomes irrelevant, his preposterous inspiration and its attendant frenzy of composition could have been poured into any mould. Churchill Smith’s contention that “a novel is not a novel
because it is long or short” confirms that form is being dissociated from judgements of worth and value altogether (573); indeed, the very idea that form can be a reliable predictor for judgments of worth and value is shown to be ridiculous.

Conclusion

Compared with the confident assertions made by Trollope in *An Autobiography*, these stories register a profound interrogation of the principles of hard work and diligence. In this way we can read Trollope’s “Editor’s Tales” in the manner suggested by Bill Overton, who sees “a division” within Trollope as a writer: “This division is between two separate and distinct kinds of consciousness. On the one side there is what Trollope said either in his own person or in his conventional role as narrator and commentator in his fiction. On the other side is what emerges from the structure of individual novels and of his fiction as a whole” (qtd. in Hamer xii). Trollope may claim to have analyzed the firmament of literature and reconciled its tensions and contradictions within his own mind; in *An Autobiography* he seems to have tucked away all the loose ends and justified both the profession and his approaches to it. “An Editor’s Tales,” on the other hand, convey the myriad complications surrounding the editor’s, and the author’s, work.

It is worth noting that Trollope’s stories were being reviewed as they appeared in *Saint Pauls*. *The Illustrated London News*, one of the “great entrepreneurial and commercial triumphs of Victorian print culture” and an organ “firmly aimed at the middle class” included *Saint Pauls* among its review of monthly journalism (Brake 301-02). Between October of 1869 and March of 1870 it consistently took notice of Trollope’s tales in its review of the journal. The anonymous reviewer called “The Turkish Bath” “the gem of the number … one of the richest pieces of humour … for which we have ever been indebted to [Trollope]”
These positive notices continued, as the second is also called a gem, he is seen to be “perfectly at home” with his third, and the fourth is “a most amusing performance” as well as “the best thing” in the issue (471, 51, 142, 247). While the terms of this evaluation emphasize appropriate scale (“gem” and “amusing” connote smallness), the phrase “perfectly at home” also speaks to subject matter. Dallas Liddle has recently suggested that Trollope’s representation of editors at mid-century was not “an obvious, or even promising, artistic move” as only recently had “audiences began to understand the term ‘editor’ as denoting the authoritative central intelligence of a periodical” (87). Moreover, “Neither previous fictions nor existing biographies had created any shared public understanding of what such a position entailed or what its duties were”: The Illustrated London News reviews not only confirm the value of Trollope’s fictional narratives, but also the validity of their subject matter—the editor (Liddle 87).

Placing Trollope’s stories back into their moment of production re-orient them in relation to his larger career and sheds new light upon the tensions and contradictions of that success which seems so assured from a later perspective. Trollope questions not only the possibility of success for himself, but also the larger apparatus of literary judgment and valuation. In so doing, he begins to register the features of the market story: an embedded, first-person narrator observes from alongside his protagonists, recording their dissociated tales with an ironic voice that pays attention to the material features of the physical world in which writing happens. Along with these features, “An Editor’s Tales” document the awareness of the market story: that value is relative, constructed by filtering agents, and dependent on external factors. This assertion, even if made in a somewhat oblique manner,
concurrently indicates the potential of all literary genres, not just those previously valorised by rigidly constructed systems of literary judgment.
“A Goodish Profit on the Original Investment”:

Luggage, Writing, and Anxiety in Charles Dickens’s Christmas Numbers

“The rate of remuneration to unknown writers, is six or eight guineas a sheet, usually. Many unknown writers, write for nothing. I wrote for the next thing to it myself, when I was one-and-twenty.”

—Charles Dickens to an aspiring author in 1843

In mid-September of 1862 Charles Dickens wrote to W. H. Wills, his reliable sub-editor, “You will be perhaps a little surprised (and not disagreeably) to learn that I have done the opening and end of the Xmas No. (!) … I think what I have done is exceedingly droll and new” (Letters 10: 125). Dickens was referring to the Christmas Number, a popular annual feature of All the Year Round, which had come to play a significant role in the mid-Victorian periodicals market. The stories with which Dickens was so pleased became “Somebody’s Luggage,” a collection whose framework concerns a group of manuscripts found among the abandoned luggage of a former guest at the hotel where Christopher, the verbose narrator of the framework texts, is employed. Christopher inherits Somebody’s things and with them his stories by settling his outstanding bill of £2.16.6. Promptly selling off Somebody’s material possessions, his hat, portmanteau and so on, for “a goodish profit on the original investment,” Christopher is left with the writings themselves, which “remained” after several transactions of goods and currency (6). The succeeding stories are presented under the titles of the articles in which they had been found “crumpled up,” such as “His Boots” and “His Dressing Case” (5). A singularly highly self-conscious Christmas collection, “Somebody’s Luggage” presents a discourse of labour that I read as a commentary on the short story form. This text questions the possibility of appropriate labour through the lens of occupational destiny and personal fitness. A tripartite concern with material objects, value, and professional success highlights the importance of remuneration to authors both fictional and

42 Patten, “Sketches” 17.
real. As such, and as exemplary market stories, “Somebody’s Luggage” comments on the importance of professionalization for would-be authors, and, more importantly, mobilizes commercial exchange in the service of the short story as a genre. Whereas Trollope’s stories undertook the first step of dismantling an extant hierarchy of genres, Dickens’s overturn this order and subversively champion a supposedly ‘lesser’ genre.

I use the term “Christmas Number” to refer to the collaboratively written tales, usually encapsulated by a frame tale, produced for Household Words and All the Year Round between 1852 and 1867. Only at Christmas were collections of this sort issued to the Victorian reading public, and at no other time throughout the year did Dickens offer a special issue of his journal. This chapter will begin with an overview of the genre as a whole before moving into a discussion of “Somebody’s Luggage.” This overview situates the Christmas Number alongside my proposed definition of the market story; in addition, it will both provide a context for my later discussion and discourage the perception that the 1862 Number is representative. My reading of “Somebody’s Luggage” then suggests that Dickens uses this Number to interrogate the concepts of labour and occupational fitness that seemed to be making the Christmas Number a significant challenge for him.

The earliest inception of the formula on record is in a letter to James White in 1852: “I propose to give the number some fireside name, and to make it consist entirely of short stories supposed to be told by a family sitting round the fire” (Letters 6:780). To Miss

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43 It may be asked how Dickens’s Christmas Numbers compare to well-known frame tales such as Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales. While Dickens was no doubt aware that he employed a similar shape, I would differentiate these from the Christmas Numbers primarily based on the unusual authorship of the latter. While Chaucer imagined different characters for each of his tales, Dickens actually employed multiple writers whose multiple voices were somewhat beyond his control.

44 Not special issues, but separate spin-offs did exist at different times. “These were the Household Narrative of Current Events, a twopenny monthly retrospect of national, international news, and other information, published from April 1850 to December 1855 (including numbers for January-March 1850), and the short-lived Household Almanac, a fourpenny calendar and factual guide to annual, seasonal domestic and national affairs, devised and first compiled by Henry Morley for the year 1856, but discontinued in 1857” (Drew 128).
Burdett Cou tts in early December Dickens reports that the result “has cost [him] some pains, and [he] think[s] it very pretty” (6:814). Dickens’s choice of words, here, is reflective of the way in which the stories might be valued: as delicate and pleasing, but without stateliness.

Prior to 1852, Household Words marked Christmas with issues that consisted of articles for and about the holiday season; after 1867, Dickens intentionally ceased what had become an annual tradition. For sixteen years between 1852 and 1867 he produced a wide array of Christmas narratives, which can be formally categorized under two umbrellas. By far the majority of the Christmas Numbers are framework tales, the formula for which is generally as follows: Dickens conceives of, and writes, a short narrative that creates the possibility for tale-telling. An introduction in which the scene is set and the other narrators are introduced is followed by a sequence of tales (Dickens often writes the first). Excluding the matter of the framework an average number contains five or six stories. Elizabeth Gaskell, Wilkie Collins, his brother Charles Allston Collins, and Adelaide Anne Proctor are the most regular contributors. Generally a frame is concluded with some moral and narrative solution involving fortuitous events: the shipwrecked souls are saved; the mystery of an abandoned house is discovered; a sinner repents on his deathbed.

The frame tales of early Christmas Numbers advance in prominence and complexity. The first two Numbers, “A Round of Stories by the Christmas Fire” and “Another Round of Stories by the Christmas Fire” (1852 and 1853) lack a frame-tale altogether, and are unified only by the spatial reference of the title. The following year, Dickens creates an introductory

45 Publicly, Dickens announces that he will “abolish” the Christmas Number “at the highest tide of its success” because it has been thoroughly imitated and is “in danger of becoming tiresome” (All the Year Round xx.501: 596). Critics have often pointed out that privately he claims to have wearied of having his writing “swamped” by others, but Ruth Glancy establishes that Dickens would gladly have produced an 1868 Number had he been able to generate a suitable idea (Letters 12:212, Glancy, Student 71). He went so far as to offer a reward to the family member who could conceive of a good framework, but as time passed and there was nothing “which would do otherwise than reproduce the old string of old stories in the old inappropriate bungling way,” the scheme was finally, reluctantly, abandoned (Letters 12:167).
setting and narrator to identify the other speakers in “The Seven Poor Travellers” (1854). This narrator introduces the situation and tells his tale in the same segment of text, and provides only cursory links between the stories. With “The Holly-Tree Inn” (1855) the model grows more intricate, as the narrator relates some of his own history, as well as a minor plot, in the first section of the frame. By “The Wreck of the Golden Mary” (1856) the framework section of a Christmas Number begins to outweigh its tales. The plotting of “The Wreck” is more elaborate; the characters of Captain Ravender and his first mate John Steadiman are fully-drawn. “The Wreck” is followed in 1857 by “The Perils of Certain English Prisoners,” a single narrative in three large chapters written entirely by Dickens and Wilkie Collins. It would appear that Dickens becomes increasingly invested in his frame tales to the point where they subsume any other narrative.

However, this trajectory collapses in 1858 with “A House to Let,” which returns to the frame-tale model of the previous five years. Through the nine Christmas Numbers of *All the Year Round* Dickens continues to experiment with longer and more overwhelming frame tales, but is most reliant on the collection of short stories contained within a frame narrative. I will look specifically at “A House to Let,” “Tom Tiddler’s Ground” and “Somebody’s Luggage” below, but several more Numbers—“A Haunted House” (1859), “Mrs Lirriper’s Lodgings” and “Mrs Lirriper’s Legacy” (1863 and 1864), as well as “Dr Marigold’s Prescriptions” (1865) and “Mugby Junction” (1866)—adhere to the frame-tale structure. In 1867 Dickens and Collins return to the co-authored tale with “No Thoroughfare.” Clearly, no strict movement either toward or away from narrative unification is identifiable. It is tempting to look for a larger narrative over the sixteen years of Christmas Numbers, either an arc of development or an increasingly complex frame tale structure, and this is what previous
critics have tried to identify. Ruth Glancy argues for a decisive unifying trajectory of the
genre’s sixteen-year history in “Dickens and Christmas: His Framed-Tale Themes” by
suggesting that Dickens is primarily concerned to show the value of memory through
autobiographical tales that are interdependent with the frames (58). She asserts that Dickens
found his contributors lacking and that his own stories were always the most productive,
seeing the story that Dickens wrote for “Tom Tiddler’s Ground” as the only tale “which
wholly illustrated the theme of the framework and was enhanced itself by it” (66). While
Dickens’s role as conductor of the Christmas Numbers is certainly pivotal, as I will suggest,
this position is unfair to his collaborators.

“Tom Tiddler’s Ground” (1861) relates the story of a hermit who has rejected society,
preferring to live in squalor as an irritable spectacle.\(^{46}\) Dickens’s narrator, Mr. Traveler,
virulently condemns Mr. Mopes’s choice and proposes to prove that “every man must be up
and doing, and that all mankind are made dependent on one another” (5). All five
contributions illuminate this theme, thus criticism that privileges Dickens’s single
contribution to these collections disregards potential readings of other pieces. Charles
Allston Collins’s “Evening Shadows,” which tells of a disillusioned young artist who decides
to withdraw from society and stay home staring out of his window, is especially relevant
here. He soon becomes entranced with the lives of the family across the alley as seen in
shadow through the blind. In the end an estranged father and son are reunited, and the young
artist is reminded of the value of human sympathy in contrast to mere spectatorship. Clearly
this tale suits Dickens’s criteria for the larger number while being itself more resonant in the
context of a frame tale that argues the folly of human isolation.

\(^{46}\) The character is based on a gentleman who, on the inheritance of an estate, “gave up washing … and slept on
a bed of cinders.” Dickens visited the “Hertfordshire Hermit” along with Bulwer Lytton in 1861 (Letters
9:430n).
This theme of communion and interaction is embryonic of a larger concern with collaborative authorship: “Tom Tiddler’s Ground” contains the seed of a self-reflexive concern with form and efficacy that will become predominant the following year with “Somebody’s Luggage.” At this juncture, though, Glancy would mark a conscious break in the style of the framework tales and attach a value judgment to the move: “Dickens had to abandon the device of autobiographical storytelling exemplified by his best Christmas numbers” in order to create “a framework story which made the contributed tales wholly redundant” (68, 67). My argument is that “Somebody’s Luggage” does not empty out all meaning between framework and contributed tales; rather, I will suggest that Dickens mobilized “Somebody’s Luggage” as a vehicle for very particular messages about authorship and professionalism, however humorously they are being presented. While Glancy’s trajectory is identifiable in strains, it obscures many of the nuances of the actual historical record.

What is most interesting about Dickens’s Christmas Numbers is that they represent not an arc of development, but an intriguing site of intersecting forces in the nineteenth-century publishing world. At stake in the stories are the interests of multiple authors, both junior and senior, as well as editors, publishers, and readers. Moreover, the production of collaborative stories requires the careful manipulation of resources and timing, including the solicitation of prospective contributors, the collection and arrangement of materials, and the management of friendships and personal interests. This is collaboration, but directed and hierarchical. Elements of randomness are clearly visible in these texts, yet so is evidence of control and organization. They are products of Dickens’s established reputation, his access to—and control over—other authors, the annual holiday season, the journal as organ for
distribution, and the framework tale as vehicle for introduction. The sustained success of this form of publication attests to the congregation of an idea, ability, means, time, timing, and processes of production and distribution. That Dickens eventually found the management of such a complex system burdensome is not surprising. Although the Christmas Numbers owe their existence to the efforts of multiple parties, Dickens was ultimately responsible for bringing them into being, and it was Dickens who played the role of conductor with relish. Perhaps, in the shadow of Dickens’s overwhelming fame, the success of the Christmas Numbers is more of a singularity than a phenomenon. While not the biggest publishing item of the day, these texts hold their own as productions notable for their unique form and annual popularity.

Surviving letters offer typical examples of Dickens in this role, and display the necessity for shrewd management. Writing to Mrs Gordon Smythies in 1859, Dickens defends, presumably, a decision not to include her contribution in that year’s Christmas Number (“A Haunted House”):

You assume a deprecation of your abilities on my part which has no existence on this earth ... I have half a dozen stories here now, by regular contributors, quite impossible to be used for the Xmas. No., yet written for it. The No. is now being ‘made up,’ and there is not the least chance or hope of room or trial. But you may very truly say, on my authority – every year – a quantity of matter written for it afterwards goes into the regular Nos. (Letters 9:172)

Mrs Gordon Smythies is not indexed as a contributor for either Household Words or All the Year Round, but several unattributed stories with such suggestive titles as “Was it a Dream?”
or “Two Dead Men’s Stories” do appear close on the New Year of 1860. Similarly, Percy Fitzgerald recounts a letter from Dickens in 1865:

I have been vexed at not being able to get your story into Dr. Marigold. I tried it again and again, but could not adapt its length to the other requirements of the Number. Once I cut it, but was not easy afterwards, and thought it best to restore the excision and leave the whole for a regular Number. (qtd. in Fitzgerald 733)

Presumably Fitzgerald’s piece was competing with others that were already determined to be necessary to the Number. The problem of length may well have been a valid cause for Dickens’s excision. However, Dickens was also happy to keep those stories that were not among the best out of the Christmas Number, and to include them in a regular issue of the weekly journal instead.

Perhaps this letter to Fitzgerald can be taken at face value; perhaps it is a carefully worded pacifier. Although the truth of Dickens’s feeling in this matter is irretrievable, what is important to my analysis is the careful balancing of freedom and burden evidenced by this awareness of conflicting interests.

This concern with work and productivity is evident in Dickens’s letters, many of which are very vocal on the subject of his laborious undertaking during the preparation of each year’s Christmas Number. Often overextended with publication deadlines and professional obligations, he frequently complains of the arduous and little-understood task of “making up” these staples for the December market (Letters 9:176). He writes to a friend of “being constantly occupied” since the Christmas Number “obliges [him] to go over such an

47 “Was it a Dream?” AYR 2:34 (December 17, 1859): 184-188; “Two Dead Men’s Stories” AYR 2:35 (December 24, 1859): 208-212.
48 Dickens writes to his sub-editor W.H. Wills in November of 1862, reminding him that “the Xmas No. can only be made up, on a careful comparison of the relative merits and possibilities of the best things we have” (Letters 10:158).
astonishing quantity of proofs at this time of the year” (*Letters* 10:156). Of the actual composition, he queries his sub-editor Wills, “I wonder how many people among those purchasers have any idea of the number of hours of steamboat, railway train, dusty French walk, and looking out of window, boiled down in ‘His Boots’” (the lead story in “Somebody’s Luggage”) (*Letters* 10:181). “The difficulty of fitting and adapting this annual job” he suggests to Percy Fitzgerald, “is hardly to be imagined without trying it” (qtd. in Fitzgerald 733). And, to G.H. Lewes on 20 November 1859, he reports being “in a state of temporary insanity (Annual) with the Xmas No,” that is so predictable that he does not “expect to be out of it for ten days or a fortnight to come” (*Letters* 9:168). Dickens’s self-appointed task is to select “the best” six to eight contributions for the miscellany, which must “fit … both to the *general* idea and the demand for variety in the contents” (*Letters* 10:151). While the evident self-fictionalization of his laments may be taken with a grain of salt (especially since none of the activities attributed to the boiling down of “His Boots” are actually laborious), evidently the annual assemblage of short stories under the umbrella of an organizing narrative was painstaking enough to be irksome even to the inimitable Charles Dickens.

By contrast, Dickens’s contemporary Percy Fitzgerald suggests that the Christmas Numbers offered a different experience to authors working as contributors. In “Charles Dickens in the Editor’s Chair,” an article appearing in an 1881 issue of the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, the moderately obsequious former friend of Dickens documents his enjoyable experiences with the Rounds of Stories. He characterizes the “time when ‘the Christmas Number’ had to be got ready” as one of “pleasant expectancy and alacrity” (Fitzgerald 730). Fitzgerald clearly considers it a privilege “to have a seat in ‘a vehicle’ which traveled every
road and reached the houses of a quarter of a million persons,” noting with a little modesty that “I have myself furnished two [stories] in a single number” (730). He praises for their “matter-of-fact, business-like style” those “pleasantly welcome” circulars used to solicit contributors each year (731). While Dickens may be burdened by this annual editorial undertaking, his contributors are clearly tickled. Fitzgerald’s tribute offers further insight into the generic hierarchies Dickens associated with his self-appointed yearly task.

Apparently “the master” saw his Christmas Numbers as a “duty to the public,” and though he was no longer used to bending his mind to the “small but effective scale with which he had latterly grown unfamiliar” (being so grand as to work only on the large, novelistic canvas), he was never one to shy away from hard work (737, 731). Thus on one occasion he tells Fitzgerald “I have really put as much into Mrs Lirriper as would almost make a novel” and the latter understands that, as Dickens’s labour was “in proportion” to that higher class of writing, the novel, the Christmas Numbers were eventually “so irksome” that he must give them up altogether (730). Despite its supposedly small worth, Dickens makes no secret of the pain he endures for his annual issue.

If the Christmas Numbers are such a burden, why does Dickens continue them for almost two decades at the height of his success? Part of the answer, I suggest, may be found

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49 Several surviving letters to “Contributors to Household Words” in late September each year offer a fascinating glimpse into Dickens’s process. The letter of solicitation for 1856 (“The Wreck of the Golden Mary”) includes the following: “I beg to convey to you the scheme of our Christmas number for the present year: to which Mr. Dickens would be glad if you would Contribute:— An English Trading-Ship (with passengers aboard), bound for Australia, is supposed to have got foul of an iceberg, and become a wreck. The crew and passengers ... were got into the Boat ... The Captain remembering that the narration of stories had been attended with great success on former occasions of similar disasters...proposed that such as could tell anything to the rest, should tell it. So the stories are introduced. The adventures narrated, need not of necessity have happened in all cases to the people in the boat, themselves. Neither does it matter whether they are told in the first or in the third person...The writer of any story may suppose any sort of person—or none if that be all—as the Captain will identify him if need be. But, among the Wrecked there might naturally be The Mate, The Cook, the Carpenter, the Armourer (or Worker in Iron), the Boy, the Bride Passenger, the Bridegroom passenger, the sister passenger, the brother passenger, the Mother or father passenger or son or daughter passenger, the child passenger, the Runaway passenger, the old Seamen, the toughest of the Crew, &c &c” (Letters 8:195).
in the historical record, and part in “Somebody’s Luggage.” Dickens becomes increasingly aware of the labour required to produce these texts as they become increasingly popular and integral to the success of his periodical. The few surviving sales figures suggest that they were quite lucrative: “Somebody’s Luggage” is reported to have sold 191,000 copies before Christmas Eve, and “Mugby Junction” reached the “extraordinary circulation” of 256,000 (Letters 10:184, 11:295). While sales of the journals may have fluctuated from month to month, the Christmas Numbers often doubled the weekly’s circulation figures (Patten, Publishers 243). Thus the different Numbers are more closely unified by sales figures and a fixed calendar than by form. As a genre, the Christmas Numbers are not held together by subject matter or ideological purpose. Rather, they cohere through their shared response to cultural and commercial contexts that afforded Dickens a window of opportunity in the Victorian periodicals marketplace. Like market stories they emphasize production prompted by external circumstance and the framework structure, similarly, embodies and calls attention to a structure that privileges externality as opposed to that which is intrinsic. How this opportunity (and corollary expectation) was managed by producers occupies the remainder of this discussion.

“A House to Let”

Before discussing the ideological implications of the writerly plot of “Somebody’s Luggage,” turning to the Christmas number for 1858 “A House to Let” will foreground a thematic interest in labour, which is figured broadly here as a distinction (or lack thereof) between work and play. There are labouring characters, specifically Trottle, and there are the leisured, especially Sarah; Jarber tries to embody both roles and fails. These three attempt to

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50 Appendix D in Patten’s Charles Dickens and his Publishers suggests that Dickens’s profits from his periodicals were twice as high in the Spring of each year as compared to the Autumn. Given that the figures are only available for six month instalments, it may be that surges in circulation indicate Christmas sales.
‘work’ to unravel the mystery of a house to let across the road from Sarah’s residence.

“There would be coming and going, and fetching and carrying, Jarber, and you might catch cold,” Sarah warns her friend, humorously prefiguring his unfitness for the task of elucidating the mystery (4). This is no deterrent whatsoever to Jarber, whom Sarah describes as “more or less an absurd man” and whose dominant characteristic is one of littleness: “he had always little legs and a little smile, and a little voice, and little roundabout ways … doing little errands for people, and carrying little gossip” (4). Such attention to size and scale, in a collection of short stories, predicts the more metafictional version of the same discussion that will occur in “Somebody’s Luggage.” Apparently this quality is so overwhelming that it determines the work Jarber will undertake for Sarah before it is even begun: his efforts will yield little in the way of results. Yet worse, he ends up ill and indisposed, unable to even learn the truth of Trottle’s report:

His feet were in hot water; his head was in a flannel petticoat; a green shade was over his eyes; the rheumatism was in his legs; and a mustard poultice was on his chest. He was also a little feverish, and rather distracted in his mind about Manchester marriages, a dwarf, and three evenings … in an empty house. (26)

Jarber’s main selling point is his being “on terms of acquaintance with every person of respectability in this parish” (5), which is one of several indications of his status as a leisured individual, and the very thing that makes him unfit for real work. He makes initial inquiries, gathers what evidence is to hand, and presents it with a complete absence of interpretive effort. When it amounts to nothing, his declaration “that he was not in the least daunted by his want of success thus far, and that he was resolutely determined to make more
discoveries” is “languid” and empty of feeling to Sarah’s ears (26). Indeed, this assertion is closely followed by the physical collapse that amounts to his complete resignation from the job.

Jarber’s unfitness for labour is a confirmation of characteristics also displayed by Sarah. That Sarah is typical of the upper class is made clear through her management of her affairs at the story’s outset: the Doctor recommends her removal to London, Trottle finds her a house to let, her lawyer draws up an agreement, and Trottle stays behind to “take care of” the loose ends for the first month of her removal (2). Moreover, when the house begins to haunt Sarah’s mind, she makes the briefest and most preliminary of enquiries about it. Her landlord “knew no more about the house to let than I did. Neither could I find out anything concerning it among the tradespeople or otherwise, further than what Trottle had told me at first” (3). Soon anticipating that she “should work [her]self into one of [her] states” about this mystery, Sarah leaves off the effort altogether (3). Possibly her health would not hold up even as well as Jarber’s did.

Associations of work versus play, and the everyday in opposition to the holiday, are built into Sarah’s pivotal interaction with the house across the street. “It was the fifth of November when I first breakfasted in my new rooms,” she mentions. “The guys were going about in the brown fog like magnified monsters of insects in table beer, and there was a guy resting on the doorsteps of the house to let” (2): Dickens’s contributions to the Christmas Numbers frequently make some passing reference to Guy Fawkes Day, which suggests the regularity of his annual writing schedule. In 1858 the “service of commemoration” for November 5th had not yet been removed from the Anglican Prayer Book, and Guy Fawkes Day was still marked by celebration and festivities, including parades of children carrying
Guy-effigies through the streets and seeking donations from adults. These parades and bonfires sustained anti-Catholic sentiment in towns and cities throughout England, but were especially “large-scale” in London (Sharpe 153). Fittingly ensconced in a scene reminiscent of the temporary inversions associated with the medieval Feast of Fools, the spark that sets this plot in motion is out of the ordinary way of things. It is crucial that Sarah puts her glasses on to see the children react to the coins she sends through her servant, such that she “sat at [her] breakfast table on that ‘Please to Remember the fifth of November’ morning, staring at the house through my glasses, as if [she] had never looked at it before” (2). “All at once” Sarah finds herself “looking at a secret eye” which shines and vanishes almost immediately but has “struck through [her] frame, as if the sparkle of this eye had been electric” (2). November 5th would have been a day when the normal routines of working individuals were interrupted by festivities and public demonstrations, and for Sarah this deviation from normalcy, an eye where no eye should be, is almost supernatural in its aberrance. It is appropriate that Sarah should see the eye on a holiday in a story that will take herself, Jarber, and Trottle outside of their normal occupations and pastimes either temporarily, as in Jarber’s and Trottle’s cases, or permanently, as in Sarah’s. The attention to normal schedules both prefigures Sarah’s lack of real commitment to a laborious undertaking and inversely emphasizes the exertion of Dickens’s writing schedule.

The project of discovering the mystery of the House to let is a pastime for Sarah and Jarber, who do not otherwise work, while for Trottle it could be a diversion from his regular labours. The servant must ask for “a leave of absence” from his duties, and Sarah does “violence to [her]self” by granting it (26). The extreme irregularity of this request is

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51 It is worth noting the Dickensian connotations of both investigators’ names: Trottle works, trotting along, at a regular and indefatigable pace, while Jarber, unfit for strenuous exertion, jabs at a project, making infrequent and sporadic effort, but quickly abandons the practice when it does not yield results.
underlined when Trottle recounts, in relation to his explanation of the House, that “About six or seven years ago (thanks to your kindness) I had a week’s holiday with some friends” (32). That was the last time Trottle has had such a holiday, and this time the leave of absence is hardly a holiday at all, since he is employed every hour of the day (“Except at bedtime, and meals, ma’am” he tells Sarah) in solving the mystery (32). We are first introduced to Trottle as Sarah likes to have him, “looking, in his nice black suit, like an amiable man putting on coals from motives of benevolence” rather than obligation (1). What Sarah prefers in her manservant, then, is an erasure of the visible distinction between necessary and voluntary labour, and an absence of leisure. Trottle is always employed when we see him in the text: he undertakes, embodies, and represents work.

Never refraining from work (the one time that Sarah is convinced that he’s been “philandering,” Trottle turns out to have been employed in solving the mystery) has a drawback for Trottle, though (2). While he may succeed in solving the mystery, he fails in other ways, just as Jarber and Sarah fail at their attempts to do real work. “Trottle’s Report” is most notable for its obtuse, repetitive, and pretentious style. His choice to write in the third person stands out awkwardly from his first assertion that “The curious events related in these pages would … likely never have happened if a person named Trottle had not presumed … to think for himself” (26). His references, when describing new characters, are overly explicit. He identifies the charwoman of the house as a witch through several allusions: she is twice “wicked” and “the sort of old woman … who ought to have lived in the Dark Ages and been ducked in a horse-pond, instead of flourishing in the nineteenth century and taking charge of a Christian house” (27-28). In the very next line Trottle makes it painfully explicit that this woman is a “witch without a broomstick,” and this redundant
moniker is repeated again within the space of four paragraphs (28). Trottle’s insistence on the third-person voice makes it conceivable that perhaps he should not have presumed to think for himself, when he takes an excess of words (“Trottle … for once in his life, at any rate, was struck dumb with amazement at the sight which the inside of the room revealed to him”) to describe the speechlessness that Sarah conveys succinctly in the first-person (“For a minute or two I was unable to say a word”) (29, 32). Trottle is certainly effective and successful in many ways, but writing is not one of them. It seems that writing cannot be picked up, willy-nilly, the way Jarber tries to pick up a laborious task. Trottle’s insistence that he bring “written documents” in emulation of Mr Jarber only exacerbates the futility of his industry in this direction (26). He may solve a mystery successfully, but Trottle cannot write (he has also never practiced). As I will discuss in relation to “Somebody’s Luggage,” certain elements beyond a basic aptitude are required for success in a writer. Moreover, similar moments of a clumsy but pointed direction of the reader’s attention to style will be seen in Dickens’s later text, as well as Gaskell’s and Oliphant’s; they mark the market story’s self-consciousness in the same way that Trollope did through his insistence on the “editorial WE.” The framework sections of “A House to Let” repeatedly show, and dwell upon, characters failing at endeavours beyond their established capacities, and outside of the bounds of their respective class positions.

The little boy in “A House to Let” stands in stark contrast to these adults who have been raised to work either always or not at all. He appears in the scene of penultimate

52 In this respect Trottle has much in common with Mr. Micawber from David Copperfield, whose verbosity is a herald of his character. Consider the following example: “‘My dear Copperfield,’ said Mr. Micawber, putting out his hand, ‘this is indeed a meeting which is calculated to impress the mind with a sense of the instability and uncertainty of all human—in short, it is a most extraordinary meeting’ … ‘She [Mrs. Micawber] is tolerably convalescent. The twins no longer derive their sustenance from Nature’s founts—in short, … they are weaned’” (Dickens, Copperfield 250).
revelation, as he resides in the physical heart of the house, up several flights of stairs and behind closed doors. His presence there is the very reason for its being kept un-let indefinitely. The little boy’s activity is supremely confounding for Trottle: “He was, odd and unaccountable as it may appear, doing nothing more or less than playing at a charwoman’s or housemaid’s business of scouring the floor” (29, emphasis mine). This conflation of work and play is shocking to Trottle but hardly so to the woman who sees after him, as she praises him, exclaiming that cleaning is “his regular game, morning, noon, and night – he’s never tired of it” (30). Even Trottle, “though not a family man” can see that this is a poor state of affairs: “the child reduced (as he could not help suspecting) for want of proper toys and proper child’s company, to take up with the mocking of an old woman at her scouring work for something to stand in the place of a game” (30). In relation to the adults this boy would seem to stand as an embryonic representation of the need for future distinction between work and play; however, his presentation is not entirely pessimistic.

What would be a tragic sight is made comic by several aspects of Collins’s representation. The boy has an energetic self-sufficiency that resists Trottle’s insistent references to the “poor forlorn child” (31). As he finishes his “game” with the bucket and scrub brush, he asks, “looking round sharply over his shoulder, ‘what are you two stopping here for? I’m going to bed now – and so I tell you!’” (30). This last phrase is the boy’s tag line, repeated after Trottle expresses the desire to not only see him to bed, but tuck him in: “I mean to tuck myself up … I do – and so I tell you!” (31). By its rhetorical self-reference (let me draw attention to what I’m telling you) the line reminds us of the market story’s situatedness, which works to mitigate, along with comedy, the horror that is meant to be

53 Here is another reminder of the young Copperfield’s friends, as Mrs. Micawber is renowned for her profuse declarations that she “never will desert Mr. Micawber” (Dickens, Copperfield 256).
conveyed by this entanglement of work and play. If this is what happens to one boy in a very particular situation, then the ‘game’ of scrubbing may not be as tragic as we are wont to see it, and the potential for change is within human control: thus is our attention drawn to the apparatuses of interpretation which surround and shape acts of valuation.

“A House to Let” begins to offer commentary on the potential for human conditioning versus innate fitness; “Somebody’s Luggage” will go further with this line of thought. Trottle has been bred to work, just as the boy is being bred to take scrubbing for a game. However, Trottle is not trained to write, and his failure at this task points to his lack of preparation, which is a product of his class position. Jarber seems to play at his task; perhaps he takes it up too quickly and executes it in a glib manner, jabbing without real preparation. Jarber and Sarah are both unfit for real labour, and Sarah’s maternal destiny seems to remain untouchable, despite her lack of conditioning—she has always “been deeply fond of children” and regretted not being a mother (2). It is worth noting, though, that as she concludes her story she merely gazes across the street to where Trottle is looking after her charge; he has gone over “to play” and it is Trottle who “lifts [her] pet for ‘Grandma’ to see” (36). Even now Sarah is resting comfortably while Trottle does the fetching and carrying on her behalf.

“Somebody’s Luggage”

My reading of “Somebody’s Luggage” considers representations of labour at the points where attention to the intertwined threads of vocation, materiality, and value gesture

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54 Rosemarie Bodenheimer has recently offered a biographical interpretation of this scene, wherein it is significant “that in the year of his separation from Catherine Dickens chose a title and a situation that had a longstanding internal association with failure” (166). The boy’s conflation of work and play reveals “how the collapse of [Dickens’s] marriage, long concealed within the beautiful family home, has merged with the traumatic prison years of the Dickens parents. The child and the ceaselessly working novelist are one, both scrubbing away to clean up the shame of family failure” (167).
toward a self-conscious consideration of literary value. Given the often unspoken but nevertheless established hierarchy of genres in the nineteenth century, where poetry topped prose and the novel’s status was still “on the rise,” the preconception that short stories require less effort than novels, both to write and to read, is unsurprising (Poovey, *Genres* 299). Considering this, Dickens’s engagements with work and value appear to argue for the capacity and potential of the short story on both cultural and commercial levels. The question of what constitutes appropriate criteria by which to judge a literary work, the central anxiety at stake in “Somebody’s Luggage,” is addressed through a consideration of exchange, money, and materiality. These markers repeatedly point to an engagement with authorship and professionalism, which, when read through a generic lens, show that “Somebody’s Luggage” concerns precisely the position and status of the short story. And where Trollope’s “Editor’s Tales” did an impeccable job of satirizing and sending up the arbitrariness of generic hierarchies, Dickens will be more subversive. The strongest message advanced through the covert machinations of “Somebody’s Luggage” is that short stories can trump other genres, not just exist on an equal playing field.

I focus on the framework matter of each text: the story that surrounds an otherwise disconnected collection. This framework can be a lens through which to read the stories it surrounds, but I avoid attempting to reduce the meaning of the stories themselves to that which is found elsewhere. It is possible to find links and unities between the various stories, and this has been the default move of those critics who have commented on the Christmas Numbers thus far. Taking “Somebody’s Luggage” as an example, its six tales have been read as primarily about losing and finding in the way that Somebody’s Luggage itself is left for seven years before being collected by its owner (Stockley viii). Alternately, each story is
arguably about the “twin themes of public authority and recognition,” in the same way that the author finds his work published anonymously under the control of another (Gregory and Klimaszewski xiii). Having said that, my reading shows that we can privilege the attention to labour found in every piece of “Somebody’s Luggage.” The point, however, is that such reading practices flatten out what is otherwise a texturally diverse collection. Certainly Dickens chooses works that can be read informatively against each other, yet they are not to be read as interlocking units in a puzzle, as larger, singly-authored texts are read. The Christmas Numbers do not support extremes, either of coherence or disparity.

Dickens’s own “His Boots” leads the collection with the story of Langley, who journeys to a sleepy French town where he finds a young girl Bebelle and her adoptive father the Corporal, and grudgingly accepts what becomes “the occupation” of his life: “to look after the Corporal and little Bebelle” (11). Next, “His Umbrella” takes the titular article as its subject in a ghost story from John Oxenford. The narrator’s mysterious inheritance of a large gingham umbrella is followed by four years of “efforts to get rid of my gingham treasure” all of which are “in vain” as the project becomes his sole occupation (16). Charles Allston Collins follows with a two-part story under the headings “His Black Bag” and “His Writing Desk.” This tale of “the triumph of an imprudent marriage over conventional expectation,” veers between social critique and tragedy when a riding accident results in a young woman’s brutal disfigurement, but enables her marriage to her true love (Stockley ix). Here Collins takes on the task of indirectly challenging his father-in-law’s judgment in a story that refutes the commonly-held notion that Dickens did not approve of his daughter Kate’s marriage to the younger Collins brother in 1860. Collins’s traditional marriage plot is juxtaposed with a seafaring tale of adventure in Arthur Lockler’s “His Dressing Case,” in which the passengers
of a sinking ship find shelter on an iceberg, and what the narrator consistently figures as arduous labour is repeatedly belittled by the effortless achievements of his peers. The final story of the collection is a fairy tale by Julia Cecilia Stretton encompassing “His Portmanteau” and “His Hat Box.” Richard Blorage, a hardworking bank clerk who has always let others take advantage of him, is forced (via supernatural intervention) to recognize that total self-sacrifice and naïve benevolence toward others will not do as the ruling principles of life; in other words, that hard work merits an expectation of appropriate recognition.

Before Stretton’s tale Dickens appears again, with the short parable “His Brown Paper Parcel.” This story’s unnamed narrator is a “blighted public character” who speaks mysteriously of his “works” being “well known” as he is “a young man in the Art line” (30). Out one night with his friend he sees a sidewalk artist whose work in chalk is “exquisitely done” by the narrator’s standards (31). The artist is lauded with praise and money by the gathering crowd, and even offered a position as a copyist. The narrator observes another such incident shortly thereafter, this time out with a lady, and the sight of this artist having “spoilt” the work before him (by touching it up) arouses the narrator’s anger (33). He is, of course, the Artist, who will “do ’em, and … let ’em out” because, although he enjoys “originating and executing the work,” he is “not up to the shivering … the liveliness … the wanting-employment-in-an-office” that taking ownership of his Art would entail (34). This pointed commentary on the apparatus of ephemeral production suggests that knowing how to create is only part of the Artist’s occupation, and that, without attendant effort of a more professional nature, the Artist cannot expect (or may not want) to receive credit and
recognition for his or her work.\textsuperscript{55} The work’s contingency on external apparatuses becomes paramount. There are obvious thematic resonances about the ephemeral nature of periodical writing between “His Brown Paper Parcel” (being the most disposable piece of luggage among the set) and the opening and closing sections of the Christmas Number that are only slightly diluted by the sequential arranging that places Stretton’s piece between both of Dickens’s; as an artist Somebody is only slightly less irresponsible than this narrator.

“Somebody’s Luggage” concludes with “His Wonderful End,” in which Christopher, having had Somebody’s stories accepted for anonymous publication, is shocked when Somebody returns and is “in a state of great excitement” to learn that he is “In print!” after years of struggling and failing to see his writing published (48, 47). His exclamations echo Dickens’s own remembrances of seeing his work, for the first time, “appearing in all the glory of print” (qtd. in Patten, \textit{Sketches} 17). The framework of “Somebody’s Luggage” offers a sustained engagement with the processes of textual production, and this final section presents particularly resonant scenes of labour, professionalism, and “crumpling” that will be discussed below.\textsuperscript{56}

“His Leaving it Till Called For” and “His Wonderful End,” narrated by Christopher, are concerned with careers and their suitability to the individuals who undertake them. On the surface Christopher is not a writer—he is a Waiter—and this work is not only central to his identity, it practically subsumes him. “The writer of these humble lines being a Waiter, 

\textsuperscript{55} While the Artist is not “up to” the professional apparatus, he is somewhat in denial of the consequences of this choice, calling himself “a blighted public character” (34).

\textsuperscript{56} Representations of labour in Victorian texts are often studied in relation to the working classes and in the industrial novel; however, I am interested in labour as a condition of existence that occurs alongside but is distinct from the rise of industrialism and the social questions prompted by the growth of the factory system. Labour is interesting here for its somewhat paradoxical relationship to the work of literary production. Effort expended in writing ostensibly has a cumulative value: it is refining, perfecting, building upon and moving towards a goal, such as Somebody’s aim of getting into print. These goals, once accomplished, will not be repeated in the same way a second, third, or hundredth time.
and having come of a family of Waiters, and owning at the present time five brothers who are
Waiters, and likewise an only sister who is a Waitress, would wish to offer a few words
respecting his calling”: the opening line of the text begins a narrative that requires little
justification (1). Having been drawn forth, or compelled to his work, Christopher is adamant
that Waitering is an all-consuming Profession, not a hobby or a sideline business: “you
cannot lay down the tailoring, or the shoemaking, or the brokering, or the green-grocering, or
the pictorial periodicaling, or the second-hand wardrobe, or the small fancy, businesses—
you cannot lay down those lines of life and take up Waitering … You must be bred to it.
You must be born to it” (1). This comment, easily understood to be as much about writing as
Waitering, makes Christopher’s ostensible beliefs abundantly clear, but his narrative
questions the relationship between destiny and occupation early on. That he and all five of
his siblings decided to take up their parents’ line of work is explained through childhood
experiences. Christopher asks his readers to imagine that “the attraction [that] … caused your
young mind to feel convinced that you must grow up to be a Waiter too” (2). This
justification awkwardly aims to make the match look destined and desirable for Christopher,
yet the assertion is undermined by his abstract speculation on first seeing Somebody’s
Luggage: “I don’t know why—when DO we know why?—but this Luggage laid heavy on
my mind” (4). The stark implication that absolute certainty remains impossible sits in an
uneasy balance with the idea of destiny.

That Christopher was meant to be a Waiter—notice that changing only the second
letter of this title would offer him an entirely new occupation—is doubtful when we start to
see signs of his unacknowledged pretensions to writing. The choice to depict his imagined
genealogy in the second person pronoun reveals a brief moment of “engaging” narrative as
he attempts to “invoke recognition and identification” from his readers while answering his own rhetorical question, imaginatively posed by the “Fair Reader,” of how one is “born to” Waitering (Warhol 29, 1). Christopher’s “unassuming pen” addresses his readers as not only “Fair,” but also “gentle,” “discerning,” “highly intellectual,” and “observant” (6, 45-46). This “sophisticated awareness of his craft” extends to the realm of allusion when Christopher’s reference to “the sable wing of that fabled bird” in *The Jew of Malta* is left unspecified because it is assumed to be “easily identified by all right-minded individuals” (Gregory and Klimaszewski xiii, 45). On the other hand, Somebody’s exclamatory allusion to “The golden bowl” of his achievement is not easily traced (48). Christopher’s literary sophistication, then, meets and potentially surpasses that of his authorial counterpart, although the latter has been practicing his craft “from boyhood’s hour” (48).

Somebody makes no secret of the fact that he has endeavoured, “unremittingly and unavailingly” to attain the status of published author since his childhood (48). Moreover, his ambiguous reference to that “first flight of ambition emanating from my father’s lowly cot, [which] is realised at length” suggests that this writerly career may have been passed down from father to son, or, at least that Somebody has been destined for it from his birth onwards (48). In either case, Somebody has not laid down any other profession to take up writing. Like Christopher, Somebody exemplifies the common nineteenth-century practice of male children following in their fathers’ professional footsteps. Especially for members of the working classes, it was expected that sons would undertake their fathers’ line of work; among the working poor “a future of manual labour was almost certain” (Vanden Bossche

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57 While this type of narration ostensibly recalls and echoes Trollope’s “editorial WE,” I do not focus on it this aspect of it here, as there are later moments of heightened stylistic self-consciousness in “Somebody’s Luggage” that will warrant a more extensive comparison.

58 Gregory and Klimaszewski suggest that it is either a misprinting of “golden bow” or “a somewhat awkward reference to Ecclesiastes 12:6” (132).
86). For both Christopher and Somebody, this cultural practice has been internalized. The Waiter’s shocking discovery, on opening the Writer’s luggage, that “There was writing in his dressing-case, writing in his boots, writing among his shaving-tackle, writing in his hat-box, writing folded away down among the very whalebones of his umbrella” has been read as a literal substitution of the writer’s fiction for his live body (5, Gregory and Klimaszewski xii). Additionally, it suggests that a writer is a writer in every part of his being, that writing is a profession which permeates and saturates one’s feet as well as one’s hands and head. In “Somebody’s Luggage,” and anticipating the discussion of Gaskell that follows, it is the physical stuff of writing that remains and marks the individual’s efforts.

Thus, whatever his avowals or pretensions, Christopher is not a writer, nor an editor, for that matter. In all of his adventures with Somebody’s stories and his luggage, there is an ever-present awareness that he is stepping into “His Boots,” as it were, and that this role is not his own. This explains, in part, the anxiety about the texts, their form, and their worth traceable in Christopher’s blasé criticisms of Somebody’s writing, which I also read as allegorical commentary on short stories. After announcing that he has titled the stories that Somebody left without headings, Christopher flippantly observes, “Alas! Was he likely to have a Heading without a Head, and where was his Head when he took such things into it!” (6). The root of Christopher’s derision is editorial anxiety. His petty statement of defense, “If there should be any flaw in the writings, or anything missing in the writings, it is Him as is responsible—not me,” points to a greater insecurity than the Waiter is willing to acknowledge (6). Christopher’s imagination, fluency, and literary ease break down only once throughout “His Leaving it Till Called For,” in a moment that thus becomes especially charged. Wishing to bring the writings themselves “under the candid attention of the
reader,” Christopher feels obliged to explain his reasoning, which is itself a notable
difference from his discussion of Waitering (6). He continues, “I wish to do so without
postponement, for this reason. That is to say, namely, viz., i.e., as follows, thus:” (6). This
cumbersome wordiness is entirely meaningless, as Christopher gives six expressions for an
empty transition, all of which say nothing. Together they speak to his verbally paralyzing
insecurity. And they come at a key moment in the narrative, when the stories are just about
to be introduced. After all of this, the only “reason” that Christopher presents is that “the
writings themselves ought to stand forth to view” (6). After repeated derogations of form
and style Christopher asks his audience to judge who is the better writer. Clearly authorial
anxiety is at work here, and it is doubly concerned. The story questions what writing is
worthy of publication, where Christopher within the text, and Dickens outside of it,
legitimize Somebody’s stories for publication. Also, there is an anxiety about the presenter’s
comfort level with his own writing sitting so close beside that of another’s—Christopher and
Somebody are uneasy bedfellows.

Conversely, traces of Dickens’s own work are still visible here. In his letter to
prospective contributors, Dickens specifies that these stories are meant to be “in writing”
(Letters 10:126). The directive differs from most previous Christmas Numbers, in which
scenes are set for the oral-delivery of tales. Such a change registers a different impression of
labour, since spinning a yarn for a captive group effaces the work involved in planning and
composing a story. An oral narration is more likely to look effortless, whereas these stories,
existing in writing, are supposed to have been written already. Such writing presumably
entails, at the very least, time, attention, and an expenditure of physical energy. Apparently
Dickens’s earlier suggestion that contributors might consciously fragment their narratives
was unheeded, for his own meta-textual gestures are the most overt of any in “Somebody’s Luggage.” Christopher refers to “a certain gentleman in company … of whom it will be sufficient to remark … that whether we regard him in the light of—*” and the corresponding footnote states “* The remainder of this complementary parenthesis editorially struck out” (48). Three such instances of this editorial intervention are found in “His Wonderful End” and one in “His Leaving it Till Called For.” Christopher appears to be on the verge of collapsing the functions of author and editor; however, some hand is clearly still above his own. As a stylistic feature fragmentation amplifies the interests of the market story as a part of a larger whole (collection and periodical), or as a part that suggests the interminable incompleteness of texts, the impossibility of ever reaching a state of wholeness.

Dickens, by 1862 a superlative literary figure in London, was more than confident in his abilities. Christopher, on the other hand, cannot be so assured that this work he is about to have published is actually of quality. Though Dickens was well aware that the Christmas Number was an extremely popular and widely-read form, his authorial—and editorial—anxiety about choosing contributions, and presenting the work of multiple authors together in one text, is manifested through Christopher’s verbal reluctance to authorize Somebody’s stories. My reading of “Somebody’s Luggage” does not seek to equate the text with Dickens’s oft-quoted justification for ending the tradition altogether, that he is “weary” of having his own writing “swamped” by that of others (Letters 12:212). Nor am I pointing to a general problem with multi-authored publications; obviously Dickens’s thorough

59 From Dickens’s letter of solicitation for 1862: “The slight leading notion of the No. being devised with a view to placing as little restriction as possible on the fancies of my fellow-writers in it, there is again no limitation as to scene, or first person, or third person; nor is any reference to the season of the year essential. It is to be observed that the Tales are not supposed to be narrated to any audience, but are supposed to be in writing. How they come to be in writing, requires no accounting for, whatever … If any contribution should be of a kind that would derive any force, or playfulness, or suggestiveness of any sort, from the pretence that it is incomplete—that the beginning is not there, or the end, or the middle, or any other portion—the pretence will be quite consistent with the general idea of the No.” (Dickens, Letters 10:126-27).
commitment to the periodical form would oppose any such argument. Rather, the particular anxieties presented in “Somebody’s Luggage” relate to form, specifically a literary form that is neither a novel nor a single short story.

Characterized by condescension and viewed through these revolutions of the wheel that represents their balance of power, the Waiter’s relation to the Writer is notable for its focus on material form. Christopher’s easy sense of superiority is cowed when the writings are sold and his conscience begins to whisper that Somebody might “appear in the Coffee Room,” a highly specified location, “and demand reparation” (45). Somebody does appear, and soon (to Christopher’s mind) reveals himself a fool: his “wild laugh” and tendency for “dashing the proofs over and over as if he was bathing in them” promptly relieves Christopher’s guilt (47). The Waiter is now confident that his “presence of mind” exceeds that of the author, whose frenzied physical contact with the printed proofs only proves his lunacy (48). The text’s ongoing attention to materiality signposts the struggle between the two would-be authors. From the outset, when Somebody’s luggage is found to contain an “extraordinary quantity of writing-paper” Christopher is quick to assert that it is “not our paper neither—not the paper charged in the bill, for we know our paper—so he must have been always at it” (5). Somebody is also “a smeary writer” and “utterly regardless of ink,” “lavish[ing] it on” such “undeserving” objects as his desk, hat, and toothbrush (6). His habit of writing in bed, which Christopher deduces from “evidence … upon the pillowcase” is figured as a veritable murder, wherein “he immolate[s]” his “fifth pen and paper” (6). Christopher ultimately links this physical messiness to the content of Somebody’s writing when he suggests that by stuffing a manuscript into his Boots the author is “involving his style in greater obscurity” (6). This comical attempt to undermine writing based on its
physical appearance, rather than its internal qualities, is of course a part of the conceit that Dickens takes so much pleasure in teasing out over the course of “Somebody’s Luggage.” More importantly, it showcases writing that carries its own traces of laborious effort. Somebody’s manuscripts are besmeared, wrinkled, and irrevocably marked by his physical expenditures. This relationship between value and form recurs in Christopher’s derogation of the multiplicity of Somebody’s texts, below.

Close attention to the materiality of written work is coupled with the text’s physical objects, the luggage, bags, and portmanteaus of the title. The headings Christopher gives the stories, denoting “the articles of Luggage to which they was found attached” encourage readers to be attuned to the material objects out of which the stories have supposedly come (6). The portmanteau itself, a large, leather traveling case made up of two distinct halves with a hinge between, symbolizes the disparate nature of both market stories and the various texts that constitute a Christmas Number. “His Portmaneau” is the title given to the first half of the final story of the set, and it is fittingly paired with “His Hat Box” to make up a two-part tale. Although portmanteau’s second meaning, of “two meanings packed up into one word,” was not coined by Lewis Carroll until 1871, an anticipation of this sense of the word is surely evident here (“Portmanteau”). The symbol effectively characterizes the

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60 It is comically relevant that a majority of scholars find Dickens’s own handwriting cramped and “excruciatingly difficult to read.” The famed author even admits, in a letter to a friend, that “printers can read anything, and they have made me lazy about the shapes of my letters, and the clearness of my loops, and the roundness of my O’s” (qtd. in Brattin 117). Moreover, when writing manuscripts for printers, Dickens pointedly avoided making fair copies, so that his work, being harder to read, would be given to more experienced compositors and would, as a result, have fewer errors in the proof (Brattin 117).

61 Byron playfully refers to a second resonant association between paper and portmanteaus, the practice of lining luggage with discarded printed sheets: “And though these lines should only line portmanteaus / Trade will be all the better for these Cantos” (Don Juan 14.111-12). The paper that is first considered worthless, as writing, achieves a re-constituted value, as lining. In “Somebody’s Luggage” the manuscripts figuratively occupy this position before Christopher rediscovers them, but his recovery and sale of the writings is arguably a second re-constitution whereby they are valued once more for their immaterial properties, as writing.
relationship between Christopher and Somebody, the Waiter and the Writer who are yoked together to form a text whose meaning is compounded by their affiliation.

Also yoked together are two types of written document. In a pivotal para-textual moment the narrative breaks away from Christopher’s enthusiastic imaginings to present a “true copy” of Somebody’s bill, formatted as it would have been in the ledger (4). This break in the text spans the break between pages four and five, and it is notable that the last line on page four lists the balance “Carried forward” such that the top of page five begins with the £1.40 “Brought forward” from the previous section of the bill (4-5). Given Dickens’s close involvement with the arrangement of these Christmas Numbers, even to the point where he will “take a line here, and a line there, out of every paper” in order to maximize the forty-eight typeset pages, this significant page break was most likely intentionally arranged (Letters 9:176). Somebody’s unpaid bill is one of many unequal exchanges, all of which explore the possibility of goods, services, and especially art having a meaningful relationship to a fixed scale of value. The bill highlights this concern by pointing our attention to a list of precise equivalencies: “pen and paper” are worth 6 pence, exactly, while a “Bed” is valued at 3 shillings (4). Interestingly, nothing on the list is worth less than pen and paper, as even “Eggs” are one shilling (4). Of course, economists and especially theorists of the economics of cultural products have long accepted the impossibility of developing an absolute theory of value.62 While “the capacity for price to represent a true index of value is at best limited for any commodity,” any such attempt for cultural goods

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62 This brief discussion of the economic dimension of cultural products is most relevant to Dickens’s representations of price: money plays a more purposefully arbitrary role in Trollope, and in Gaskell we will see that its importance is yoked to plot. In Dickens, however, price provides the register for a separate and separately-influential statement about value. It is linked to the ‘non-plot’ of “Somebody’s Luggage,” but not in a deterministic manner; rather, it is allowed to stand apart as indicator. In this way it represents Dickens’s engagement with cultural value in an abstract or theoretical sense.
becomes even more problematic, since in “cultural markets” the consumer’s taste is
“cumulative” and “time-dependent” (Throsby 23-24). While the utility-value of a broken
saltcellar may be assumed on the part of Christopher and his establishment, even here value
is socially-constructed (Throsby 22). Thus the worth of Somebody’s stories must be ever
more dependent on the “social context” in which the process of value-determination takes
place (22). And we have seen that Christopher, as the first arbiter of this value, is
particularly attuned to material form as context: ink smears, wrinkled pages, boots and
saltcellars are as important as the content of the actual stories.

This bill provides the link between textuality—the term I use to refer to the textual
condition—and materiality—meaning attention to physical states and properties—in
“Somebody’s Luggage.” The text pays attention to the shape, size, and collapsibility of its
physical objects. These things are there as symbols (of Christopher’s mental stability) but
they are also linked to the condition of written text through Somebody’s bill, which is both a
‘thing’ in the text and a ‘thing’ on the page. The bill is a piece of writing (Christopher calls it
“the document”) that constitutes a break in the story, and that is not a narrative; rather, it
approximates the state of an accounting ledger as described by Mary Poovey: something that
aims to be “rule governed, impartial, accurate, and sure” (“Writing” 47). It lists physical
objects such as the saltcellar, pen and paper, but these objects differ from the objects in the
story; as they are not in a narrative, they need not serve a symbolic function. Their function
is more literal: the bill draws attention to physicality without employing an object as a
marker for an abstract or symbolic meaning. So the “Bed” or “pen and paper” are extant in
the story for the purpose of reminding readers that they are there. Specifically, they remind

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63 See also Hutter and Throsby, Beyond Price (2008); Keat, Cultural Goods and the Limits of the Market
readers that intellectual activity never actually transcends the world of material things. An act of writing will always involve “pen and paper” (6 pence), and a completed manuscript will always necessitate a storage unit, be it a collapsible bag or a pair of boots.

While Christopher is not able to articulate this, “Somebody’s Luggage” is quite clear in its pronouncement that the production of imaginative literature remains firmly grounded in the material world. In the mid-Victorian sphere of literary publishing, this attention to material reality involved the short story. And a writer, businessman, and realist like Dickens knew this very well. Fanciful and wondering as his nature may have been, his mind was never far from the practicalities of his chosen line of work. This consciousness was an aspect of professionalism, as writing for money was both “a necessity” and “a principle” for Dickens. Though previous generations would have “deplored” the attitude, Dickens “thought of himself” as a professional writer throughout his career (Patten, Publishers 10). Whether or not one’s profession involves an act of destiny, once chosen it must be practiced. And this work requires attention to realities such as sleeping arrangements, bills, and income. Of course, such an approach undermines Christopher, who, in attempting to escape his pragmatic profession, would rather ignore reality and keep his head in the clouds, up with the fabled birds of the Renaissance masters. Thus an inverted structure is the most appropriate for Christopher’s efforts: he uses tangible signs, like ink smears, to denigrate Somebody and his skill as a writer.

Throughout the whole of “Somebody’s Luggage,” the relationship between price and value is not fixed, the exterior and interior are not necessarily connected, and bad penmanship is not really to be taken as the hallmark of poor writing. My three lines of interest in this text, value, materiality, and occupation, converge in one trebly-charged
moment. When Somebody returns the Waiter notices that he possesses “one of those newfangled uncollapsible bags,” which Christopher dislikes: “I don’t see why you shouldn’t collapse … as your fathers collapsed before you” (46). Christopher, as we have seen, would like to reduce the literary value of Somebody’s stories to their external appearance. Moreover, as Christopher has been preparing for a fraught confrontation with his Author, he is shocked by Somebody’s ecstatic reaction to the theft and unauthorized publication of his stories. Any potential conflict between the two men dissolves at this moment, although the confusion very nearly produces a crisis of identity. Somebody, whose name we never learn, must know immediately the moniker of his “Benefactor.” The Waiter’s response fragments his own sense of self in a moment of textual eruption, as his very utterance is invaded by a declaration of instability: “‘My name, sir’ (I was crumpled, and puzzled to make him out), ‘is Christopher’” (47). Given that the writings were found “crumpled up … in every part and parcel of his luggage,” interest in authorship and occupation evidently centers on this image of crumpling and collapsing (5, emphasis mine). Christopher, whose father was a Waiter before him, opposes the crumpling and puzzling of social roles and vocations on the grounds of arbitrary adherence to tradition (3). And the signs are clear that Somebody has not changed over the years, although his bag has: “He smeared himself and smeared the Proofs, the night through” after his discovery that he will be published (48). His dedication to the profession of authorship is as unshakable as his bag is uncollapsible, but Somebody is not as attached to outward signs; he can change his bag without altering his vocation. Yet the author who has subscribed to his calling “from boyhood’s hour … unremittingly and unavailingly” is set in opposition to Christopher, who is slowly transforming from Waiter to Writer over the course of the text (48). At the end of the story Christopher is both published and paid, the
latter more so than Somebody. For Christopher this is a transformation, but not a complete loss of identity.

In the same way, when the stories are crumpled they change their shape but are not destroyed. Instead they must undergo a figurative metamorphosis. Somebody informs Christopher of his rationale for abandoning the Luggage along with the stories:

Hopeless of getting rid, through any effort of my own, of any of the manuscripts among my Luggage—all of which, send them where I would, were always coming back to me—it is now some seven years since I left that Luggage here, on the desperate chance, either that the too too faithful manuscripts would come back to me no more, or that some one less accursed than I might give them to the world. (48)

Somebody’s wording emphasizes context: the stories will be ushered into publication by an external figure, and the determining factor seems to have little to do with the stories themselves, and more to do with how “accursed” this external figure is or is not (how easy is the relationship to the market). As a commodity, written materials are a good that an author does not want to accumulate *ad infinitum* in their original form, as an author with an abundance of manuscripts does not look very ‘good.’ Besides having no inherent value, the value of unpublished manuscripts diminishes as they grow in number. However, Christopher finds and transforms the writings by introducing them under new headings and being himself a new vehicle of sale. Somebody is forever sending notes to printers and booksellers, intermediaries influencing the market for books, notes which are always returned or ignored, prompting the impression that he carries a sort of taint, that booksellers and publishers know him by name (which we do not) and are not interested in what he has to offer (47).
Conversely, Christopher is a fresh face, and the writings are suddenly acceptable, saleable, and valuable coming from him. Thus this focus on crumpling and collapsing (a change that comes from the outside) bears relation to Somebody, Christopher, and the writings themselves, yet the translation of meaning is not, nor should it be, perfectly easy.

Contradictions and paradoxes are embedded in the crumpling metaphor. The writings may have sold for more now, but they are not inherently worth more. Christopher may be in the process of becoming an author, but this would not sit well with his belief that he conforms to the work of his father. Finally, Somebody is admonished for carrying an “uncollapsible” bag and mirrors his piece of luggage insofar as his adherence to his work is steadfast; yet, what is notable about the bag is that it is “newfangled,” and as such represents a departure from tradition and continuity (46). These contradictions upset any straightforward readings of value in the text, and suggest that meaning and worth cannot be made absolute. The Waiter has known from the first that Somebody “was a smeary writer, and wrote a dreadful bad hand,” thus he is not surprised to learn that the printers are “unable to make out” Somebody’s extensive revisions (6, 48). The text closes with a self-referential flourish of collapse by reporting that the editor (of the “present journal,” thus Dickens himself) “laughed, and put the corrections in the fire” (48). The last of Somebody’s labour that we see in the text is, quite simply, thrown away. Somebody’s style is equated with his handwriting in the end; insofar as the content of his revisions is ignored, the inner value of the stories is made translatable to the outer value of their aesthetic form.

Moreover, Christopher sees grounds for criticism in the fact that Somebody’s texts are stories, plural, and not a single narrative: “his Boots was at least pairs—and no two of his writings can put in any claim to be so regarded” (6). These short stories are hard to
commodify, judge, and value appropriately. That they are a group characterized by disjunction and plurality is clearly detrimental (to Christopher, whose acumen as an index of market forces remains untested). However, the text simultaneously suggests opposing criteria for value as, apart from Christopher’s limited perspective, a different picture of the stories emerges.

In circulation Somebody’s stories present a pattern of repeated accumulation. Their worth increases in accordance with their exchange value, beginning even before Christopher purchases the luggage wherein they lay dormant. Initially, they must be worth the entire value of Somebody’s luggage for the author to choose to leave them behind; accordingly, what primarily puzzles Christopher about Somebody is “why he should leave so much Luggage against so small a bill” (4). The Landlady next sells Somebody’s luggage to Christopher for the price of discharging his bill, which is a “deal” so good that even our narrator “rather took to the idea from the first moment” (5). He turns a profit on this bargain, selling Somebody’s luggage and clothing for “a goodish profit on the original investment,” although the gain is never quantified (6). The stories are a surplus, enabling Christopher to make a second profit, the precise value of which is also obscured: we know only that he sells “the writings … on most satisfactory terms” (45). What is given a monetary value, though, if not the ‘market price’ of the stories, is Somebody’s gratitude. He insists on paying Christopher another £20 for the immense service of seeing his writings into print. This number bears little relation to the actual worth of Somebody’s stories as contributions to the All the Year Round Christmas Number, which can be roughly calculated at around £63.64.°

The omission of a precise figure for this sale implies that it could have been quite high,

° I make this calculation based on the payment figures available for the Christmas Numbers of Household Words (Lohrli 161), and estimate specifically from the average rate of £0.8 per column as calculated from “The Wreck of the Golden Mary.”
especially as Christopher seems reluctant to detail his earnings. Moreover, this £20 is entirely gratuitous, when the Waiter knows that it is he who should be sharing his profits with the author, and not profiting in excess of what he has already received. Repeatedly, “the writings themselves” are the light weights on the scale in a series of unequal balances. They circulate in a sequence of transactions that bring Christopher more and more unlooked-for income, and as such they are shown to be worth, quite simply, an awful lot. Not stopping at £2.16.6, or even £20, or perhaps even £60, the value of these short stories becomes almost unimaginable. The repeated accretion of their value mirrors the multiplicity of texts: this equation does not involve just one figure for one narrative, but something more like six figures for six stories. Christopher’s reluctance to specify his earnings suggests a consciousness that they are in excess of what is deserved. Simultaneously it suggests, as did Trollope, the unrepresentable, that something in the grand equation of literary publishing and profiteering remains inscrutable.

**Conclusion**

In response to the preconception that stories, being shorter than novels, are therefore easier to write, the Christmas Numbers, with their common thread of attention to labour, work, and the expenditure of mental and physical energy, make an argument for the equal worth of short stories. For Dickens, the implication is that they are just as much work to write as a novel. Discernable through the effort he puts into the arrangement and coherence of a whole Number is his attempt to place these texts in a position to compete with the novel and part-issue serial. Regardless of whether or not this was a conscious intention, such work produces a short story text that offers a model of literary worth on par with that of the novel. This par is based not on an abstract Romantic model of literary worth, but rather on a
modern, business-orientated attention to marketability. And writing is not always divine inspiration, but sometimes blurs the line between work and play, like a little boy playing at scrubbing a floor. As stories and identities are crumpled, Dickens packages these stories without changing their content, adapting their exterior characteristics as testimony to a professional imperative, making them market ready. “Somebody’s Luggage” features the author labouring away to no purpose, at tasks for which he is unfit. As the unsympathetic narrator of “His Brown Paper Parcel” is denigrated for his selective approach to the production and sale of Art, so Somebody, our familiar author, is made into a fool. Clearly his frazzled, absentminded, undisciplined approach to writing will not yield results, and it takes some of Christopher’s pragmatism to produce a successful combination. In a similar manner, the Christmas Numbers combine stories and authors, themes and associations, in a framework narrated by a first-person observer-participant: there is no centre, only the extant apparatus of a Charles Dickens with control of either a *Household Words* or an *All the Year Round*. Value is constructed through context, being neither essentialized nor inherent.

As products successful for a span of nearly two decades, the framework tales reinforce a publishing trend whereby the “size and importance of the Christmas season grew dramatically” after 1850 (Eliot 42). Yet they are not inherently related to the emotional drive of the Christmas season, as they can be read fully and productively in relation to other, more pragmatic and commercial interests associated with the time of year. Dickens began thinking about the Numbers in August or September of each year, well before the actual Christmas season. He was aware of the very practical, and material, realities of his professional life, and wanted to capitalize on the opportunity to boost the circulation of the journal that kept his name always before the public. By utilizing his respective talents both as a creative
writer and as a businessman, he produced a model with which to do so. There is a parallel to be drawn between the text’s doubled message about worth and Dickens’s own posture as the overworked author. Like Christopher’s egregious criticisms of Somebody’s work, I have shown Dickens adamantly bemoaning his task as editor of the Christmas Numbers. Yet, as the text contains a second message refuting the first and arguing for the incredible worth of these stories, it is possible to see, in the publishing history, a Dickens secretly in awe of what he was ‘pulling off.’ While Fitzgerald, along with Dickens’s characters, has made the small scale of short stories the subject of embedded value judgments, it is no small matter that they provide the key for the successful manipulation of this Christmas model. The professional writer does not shy away from the potential of the short story form. Indeed, it speaks to Dickens’s singular position as both author and editor that he can bring together amateur, professional, and established authors of varying styles and combine their work within his own in order to turn a very tidy profit.
“This is not Waste”:

Careful Consumption in Elizabeth Gaskell’s “The Cranford Papers”

“I am so much pleased you like ['Cranford']. It is the only one of my own books that I can read again;—but whenever I am ailing or ill, I take ‘Cranford’ and—I was going to say, enjoy it! (but that would not be pretty!) laugh over it afresh!”
—Gaskell to John Ruskin, 1865

Elizabeth Gaskell’s stories of Cranford life are strewn with memorable images: a cow wrapped in flannel, newspaper paths on a precious carpet, and oranges sucked in the privacy of a bedroom. Several of these vibrant anecdotes are on display in the first instalment, “Our Society at Cranford,” originally published as a self-contained piece in the December 13th issue of Dickens’s Household Words in 1851. It is now well-known that Gaskell “never meant to write more” as she tells Ruskin in 1865, but this single story grew into nine instalments, which were eventually collected into one volume and published as Cranford (Letters 748). Cranford has received significant attention as a single volume; however, the existence of each “Cranford” story in its original state merits more critical attention than has yet been paid. The publication of the “Cranford” stories occurred over an eighteen-month period: at one point nine months passed without an instalment of the narrative, and at other times anywhere between three and eleven weeks could elapse between “Cranfords.” Individually the “Cranford” stories function as market stories and can be read as advocating for the value of small pieces of written work.

Through images and scenes of writing that comment on materiality and consumption, “The Cranford Papers” produce a record of value that begins to articulate the place of the market story in the mid-century periodical (Gaskell’s texts predate “Somebody’s Luggage” by roughly a decade). The stories display a variety of configurations of object valuation and

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65 Letters 747.
generate value through a pattern of what I am calling careful consumption. By foregrounding ostensibly perverted, deliberately elongated processes of consumption that also yield enjoyment, many of the textual moments I will read do not value newness or immediate consumption; rather, objects are appreciated for their preservation, or for the retention of what can be re-used, worn out, or used-up over a maximized period of time. This suggests that use and worth cannot be limited to a single prescribed form, and attests to the value of alternative shapes and modes of receipt. My reading of Gaskell’s work then articulates the position of the original texts in and through the context of *Household Words* by giving attention to the periodical itself and its production in the early 1850s. This reconfiguration of “The Cranford Papers” within a larger cultural landscape makes legible a number of codes and strategies at work in Dickens’s weeklies that are obscured by the one-volume version of the text.66 These codes come from the letters of Gaskell, Dickens, and their contemporaries, as well as formatting conventions at work in *Household Words*. To save something, to use it only appropriately, and to allocate and manage its consumption has more in keeping with market story-ness than what is typical of mid-Victorian periodicals.

Here I refer to Gaskell’s text as “The Cranford Papers”; the question of its generic status is reflected in the issue of titles. “The Cranford Papers” sounds like a collection of stories, while *Cranford* is visually designated a novel. Some scholars have suggested that “The Cranford Papers” was Gaskell’s working title for her collection, and that this was shortened to *Cranford* when the stories were collected into a bound volume.67 Evidence for or against Gaskell’s own use of either title is slim: in a letter to Forster she acknowledges, “I

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66 This reading emerges out of recent assertions in bibliographic, textual, and book history studies that, given the impossibility of ever achieving a stable “ur-text” for works that appeared in multiple versions and with various revisions, we may consider “the first printed issue, whether in serial part or magazine … at least as important a document as the ‘definitive’ book edition” (Jordan and Patten 5).

67 Schaffer 236.
do not now remember if I have written six or seven Cranford papers”; in this same letter she also refers to the text more succinctly: “I must come to the fact about publishing Cranford” (qtd. in Collin 94-95). In both cases here no distinct format marks the title, but Gaskell’s letter was informal and this is usual in her references to her work. Nor is Dickens more specific in his references, which are also infrequent. During the nine-month hiatus he writes to Gaskell on another topic and adds a postscript that simply reads “Cranford???” (Letters 6:812). This dearth of evidence leaves the door open, and since my discussion will usually refer to each “Cranford Paper” individually by its original title, a somewhat dissociative name for the whole is useful as well as faithful to the original state of the text. The formal change to Cranford erases key associative characteristics of the longer title—those redolent of multiplicity and fragmentation, and the way that each “Cranford Paper” came to be scattered among the paper pages of various issues of Household Words. “The Cranford Papers” evokes the separateness of each issue and each instalment while maintaining a focus on materiality that gestures toward the ephemerality of a weekly periodical system. Thus, embedded in the earlier name are traces of the texts’ original states and contexts.

I will return below to a more detailed discussion of periodical conventions in the early 1850s; for now I wish to consider the focus on materiality that is evident in the content of “The Cranford Papers.” Gaskell’s plot mimics its objects: it is random, uncollected, and disunified, while a pattern of careful consumption is evident through its anecdotal structure. This is especially true of the first four “Cranford Papers.” Charlotte Mitchell points out that Gaskell’s narratives fall into two distinct halves, before and after the forty-week break (xxi). Certainly there are differences: the first half contains fewer threads of continuity between instalments, and its pages are frequently peppered with “Cranfordisms” and episodic events.
In the second half, a strong storyline predominates and incidental anecdotes are fewer and further between. Which is to say that the first half of “The Cranford Papers” looks more like a set of stories and less like a novel, while the second half looks less like a set of discrete stories and more like a single narrative. And yet the two halves cannot be sharply defined on opposing sides of a narrative spectrum. The issue of classification is central here, as I am interested in the generic affiliations to be found between “The Cranford Papers” and the short story. However, to attempt to prescribe a single generic category to Gaskell’s work would be problematic and unproductive: clearly the stories become closely involved with a continuous overarching plot line that arguably gains prominence after the forty-week break such that the text “acquires teleology as it progresses towards a narrative resolution” (Huett 39). And yet, it is just as clear that the first four “Cranford Papers,” while they feature recurring characters and a single setting, each tell individual stories that can stand alone entirely.68 Amanpal Garcha acknowledges “the progressive narrativization of the text, as its initial, almost static anecdotal structure gives way to a more traditional plottedness” (207). I would suggest, therefore, that it is important to mark two types of “Cranford Paper” without relying on absolute distinctions: those written and published before the forty-week break, which are easily read as self-contained and which figure a much greater number of ‘Cranfordisms,’ and those printed after the hiatus in which Gaskell completed Ruth; these stories are more dependent on one another and move deliberately towards the resolution of a central plot.

Because Gaskell collected her “Cranford Papers” and published them in one volume in 1853, the work is primarily analyzed as a novel. Yet, in order to analyse it thus, most

68 Margaret Case Croskery links these stories with a movement away from traditional narrative developments, suggesting that Miss Matey is somewhat absurd in company with Mr. Holbrook, as she cannot embody a traditional romance plot: “These moments reveal the consistency with which Gaskell allows the teleological plot to emerge in Cranford so she can resist it” (216).
critics are compelled to note its formal aberrance: for example, it “defeats novelistic expectations” and “largely takes a recursive and fragmentary form” (Schor 106, Miller “Subjectivity” 150). This deviance is often attributed to the conditions of Cranford’s original publication, and any formal strangeness is then considered squared away. Miller suggests that “the fragmentation of the text derives from its publishing history” while Case Croskery proposes that “Cranford’s publishing history [is] an excellent metaphor for an unplanned (but nonetheless effective) escape from teleological narrative,” yet neither scholar explores these propositions further (Miller, “Fragments” 97, Case Croskery 202). Only those who are additionally invested in the periodical form itself (as is Huett, above) give more than a cursory nod to the original context of “The Cranford Papers.” Linda Hughes and Michael Lund suggest that “Gaskell and her audience found a congenial form” in the intermittent serial, while the verb ‘found’ suggests something both sought and discovered (85). And yet, still no interpretation has pursued the formal structure of these texts completely apart from the framework of the novel.

I want to resist clear generic categorization altogether and concentrate on the extant texts as cultural and commercial artefacts. It is my contention that the irregular sequence of “The Cranford Papers” differentiates Gaskell’s text from most serialized novels of the mid-nineteenth century. Of course, there was no precise formula for this style of publication in the first place. The crucial factor is that, whatever the frequency of appearance (weekly, 69 Schor goes on to comment that Cranford “doesn’t, as should be clear by now, have a plot, and can barely be said to have characters” (106). Tim Dolin refers to the text’s “celebration of narrative discontinuity (most often discounted as formal imperfection)” (186). Margaret Case Croskery sees in Cranford an “experiment in formal representation [that] compels without plot” (199). Audrey Jaffe, conversely, suggests that “Cranford is loose and episodic, its generic affiliations more with the sketch or short story than with the novel” (47). See also Schaffer 223; Kapetanios Meir 1. 70 The twenty-part format published over nineteen months was very common, and Dickens produced the better part of his novels in this mode. Yet some were published weekly in Household Words, beginning with Hard Times. Some monthly parts were published as stand-alone pamphlets, while others were contextualized within a
monthly, bi-monthly), these modes of serialization all occur according to regular schedules. Once a format is fixed, the increments of time between instalments are uniform. As well, certain features became characteristic of the serial novel, including the cliffhanger, or the author’s practice of ending an instalment with an unfinished piece of plot, leaving readers desirous of narrative resolution (Hughes and Lund 8).

In contrast, “The Cranford Papers” eschew any kind of regular temporal structure. Moreover, almost every instalment ends with a story wrapped up and loose ends tucked away. “Our Society at Cranford” concludes with the deaths of Captain Brown and Miss Jenkyns; “A Love Affair at Cranford” with Mr. Holbrook’s death; “Memory at Cranford” with the end of Peter’s (albeit eventually resurfacing) story; and “Visiting at Cranford” with the end of the visit to Mrs Jamieson. The two instalments of “The Great Cranford Panic” function as one unit of story, thus there is a bridge between them when Signor Brunoni’s performance prompts a rash of criminal speculation in the town. As well, “Stopped Payment at Cranford” initiates a part of the larger plot that remains open-ended, although considerable narrative resolution is offered with “Friends in Need, at Cranford” when Miss Matey is successfully established in her tea shop. Framing Gaskell’s stories in terms of their individual resolution, then, highlights one way that a majority of the stories are concluded in a manner antithetical to, rather than in keeping with, mid-Victorian conventions of serialization.

This focus (on the first half) is also related to the generic self-reflexivity of the texts. I have argued that Trollope was purposely employing the serialized but discrete “Editor’s Tales” in order to elongate his tenure at Saint Pauls, and thus that he was likely quite

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monthly journal or magazine. Trollope was, at times, simultaneously publishing multiple novels on different schedules, and George Eliot’s Middlemarch was notably issued in eight bi-monthly half-volumes when it first appeared (Eliot 44-45). Despite variations, monthly part-issues were still the dominant mode of the period.
conscious about his generic choices (whereas a novel would have required a new contract with publishers who were not eager to retain him, short stories could be inserted on his own authority). Then, Dickens falls into the Christmas Number format, so to speak, but after a number of years he begins to take it seriously, to take stock and become self-reflexive about the form (this is a conscious employment of genre). Gaskell, similarly, discovers the initial format of “The Cranford Papers” as she writes, always with the knowledge that editorial Dickens is waiting on the other end, eager to take her next piece. However, she consciously shifts gears for the second half when the form becomes more novelistic, implying (at the very least) an appraisal of the earlier (more piecemeal) form before a shift away. This conscious evaluation of genre is less deliberate than Trollope’s, certainly, and even slightly less than Dickens’s when he is writing “Somebody’s Luggage.” It also speaks to the chronological position of “The Cranford Papers”: Gaskell is writing at the beginning of the mid-Victorian periodical surge, before the establishment of *The Cornhill, Macmillan’s, and Temple Bar* (among others) at the end of the 1850s, and well before the commencement of *Saint Pauls* in 1867. Our familiarity with the forms of the market story as seen in Dickens and Trollope allows for their retrospective emergence in Gaskell’s work. We have seen the editor’s contributions as well as the occasional collection. Now we add the intermittent serial as a third possibility for the market story.

Gaskell’s text is markedly different, moreover, in its content. While Trollope and Dickens directly addressed subjects of writing and editing in the public sphere, Gaskell submerges these commercial concerns under the surface of life in a small village. Thus “The Cranford Papers” can easily be read, and often are, as a commentary on industrialization, a nostalgic yearning for life before the railroads, or a subversive championing of women’s
domestic roles. Hilary Schor and Amanpal Garcha come closer to my interests in the text when they suggest that Gaskell offers “the novelist as heroine [through] her most original experiments with narrative and social observation” (Schor 83), or that “Cranford expresses the modern, capitalistic sensibility that Gaskell brought to her literary career” (Garcha 210). Thus, as other critics read the text as a metaphorical vehicle for the tenor of industrialization, domesticity, or female authorship, I will read it as a vehicle for the tenor of generic awareness and the values of the market story. “The Cranford Papers” are about the authority to define value, as were Trollope’s “Editor’s Tales” and Dickens’s “Somebody’s Luggage.” Each author writes from the position in which he or she has experience, be it a public or private, professional or domestic space. Trollope may know that he has authority as an editor, but we have seen moments of self-questioning in the privacy of his editorial office; similarly Dickens creates a thinly-veiled waiter-writer in order to act out his anxieties about textual appropriation. Now Gaskell, in the closed sphere of a female village where every penny counts, will interrogate material and written objects to explore disparateness, fragmentation, contextual influence, and consumption.

“A Curious Proceeding”: Distorting Consumption

Gaskell’s text presents two very explicit paradigms for consumption: elegant and private economies (the latter to which I will return below). The phrase “elegant economy,”

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71 For example, Peter Keating asserts that its “remarkable unity of tone ... comes from Mrs Gaskell’s rigorous exploration of a dying way of life” (10) and Elizabeth Langland suggests that “In its understanding of the ways in which women’s discursive practices and their quotidian details constitute society and its meanings, [Cranford] constructs another reality, another truth that counters that of women’s marginality, passivity, and dependence” (131).

72 I base a framework for ‘normal’ consumption loosely on our current understanding of the nineteenth-century conception of use-value, when around 1871 economic theory began to focus on “the individual’s subjective demand for goods. The labor theory of value, which had seen the human body and human labor as the ultimate determinants of price, was abandoned in favour of consumer demand. Value [now inhered] in others’ demand for the goods ... one of the corollaries of marginal utility theory, as it came to be called, was that consumer choice ceased to be a moral category” (Gagnier 54). This focus on the consuming end of the equation led to the tenet that unrestrained consumption contributed to economic growth.
used to mark the peculiar Cranfordian lifestyle, has become emblematic of the text entire. Mary Smith first defines a dominant mode of operation wherein “economy was always ‘elegant’ and money-spending always ‘vulgar and ostentatious;’ a sort of sour-grapeism, which made us very peaceful and satisfied” (90:266). Here economy refers to “the management of a household and then the management of a community” rather than its later sense as “the description of a perceived system of production, distribution, and exchange” (Mulvihill 337-38). Thus Mary Smith speaks of village life, particularly the central grouping of characters: Miss Matey, Miss Pole, Miss Jenkyns, Mrs Jamieson, Mrs Fitz-Adam, Miss Barker, and Mrs Forrester. Their self-governance orbits around a suspension of disbelief that enables quietness of mind. However, this coda for a system of “elegant economy” is far from all-pervasive or universal. It is like many aspects of life in Cranford: perfectly neat and seamless on the surface, yet roiling with exceptions underneath. In the first place, to quote Gaskell, “money-spending” is too limited a term to cover all aspects of the economy presented in “The Cranford Papers.” As we will see, economic consumption is a practice that extends well beyond the initial outlay of money. The principle of careful consumption applies with equal seriousness to previously-acquired goods, items of food, and immaterial articles like gossip. Moreover, careful preservation often goes hand-in-hand with deliberate consumption: the two have a reciprocal rather than oppositional relationship.

Gaskell’s second instalment, “A Love Affair at Cranford,” is peppered with scenes of eating, and these objects constitute this instalment’s primary engagement with careful consumption. Food is acquired to be ingested and, as the two everlasting decanters of wine confirm, an ‘edible’ does not have a permanent value (92:350). As objects in the text, oranges and peas will be read for the attention given to them by the story in which they
appear. This attention is not a lengthy description of colour, texture, or smell, the physical properties of the objects. Rather, the lengthy description is accorded to the means of consumption. The “curious proceeding” is described, and justified, in great detail as it relates to the oranges:

Miss Jenkyns did not like to cut the fruit; for, as she observed, the juice all ran out nobody knew where; sucking (only I think she used some more recondite word) was in fact the only way of enjoying oranges; but then there was the unpleasant association with a ceremony frequently gone through by little babies; and so, after dessert, in orange season, Miss Jenkyns and Miss Matey used to rise up, possess themselves each of an orange in silence, and withdraw to the privacy of their own rooms, to indulge in sucking oranges. (92:350)

Apart from its function as a fantasy of control (the juice cannot be allowed to disappear “nobody knew where”), the primary objective of this “ceremony” is to minimize waste: the orange juice is too precious to be sacrificed to decorum, and a number of complex proceedings are worth the trouble in order to use the oranges properly, meaning in order to fully appreciate their value. It almost seems obvious, but everything important about this system involves a manipulation around and outside of the orange in order to extract its interiority. The end of this process is pleasure: Miss Jenkyns has ascertained “the only way” to “enjoy” an orange, but the process required to achieve that pleasure is convoluted and painstaking. By taking us through every step of Miss Jenkyns’s logic Mary both constructs and portrays this system as unnecessarily elaborate; and yet, in “The Cranford Papers” such seemingly obtuse regulations for consumption and preservation are not unusual.

Similarly, Mr. Holbrook’s peas present a problem only when the necessary tools for
their appropriate intake are missing.

When the ducks and green pease came, we looked at each other in dismay; we had only two-pronged, black-handled forks. It is true, the steel was as bright as silver; but, what were we to do? Miss Matey picked up her peas, one by one, on the point of the prongs … Miss Pole sighed over her delicate young peas as she left them on one side of her plate untasted; for they would drop between the prongs. I looked at my host: the peas were going wholesale into his capacious mouth, shoveled up by his large round-ended knife. I saw, I imitated, I survived! (92:353-54)

Again, the peas are too precious to be wasted. Moreover, we know as much about the physical properties of the knife (large, round-ended) and the fork (two-pronged, black-handled, bright, steel) used to move the food as we do about the peas themselves (green, delicate, young). The emphasis here is as much on the surrounding utensils and the particular forms of ingestion they facilitate. There are highly specific scaffolds in place around the oranges and peas that confirm the contingency of their value: such rare foodstuffs are only good if they can be consumed according to proper practice.

The difference between these two scenes is that the ‘special needs’ of the oranges can be accommodated, while the peas force a disruption in the preferred system. Either they must be wasted, or decorous behaviour must be abandoned. Mary knows, as others discussing social form have demonstrated, that eating peas with your knife is not “the thing” (146:393), but she opts for this alternative system nonetheless. It is still a contingent eating

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73Kent Puckett analyses the pea-eating scene as an example of bad form: “eating peas with your knife is its [the historical unconscious of the text’s] parapraxis, the slip in the form of which that repressed historical content makes its untimely return … Mary gets both to now like no one else how one should not eat peas and to eat them that way too … [and] her gesture’s exceptional status is preserved in such a way as both to foreground
insofar as what matters is the knife, or the fork: the shape of the tool that facilitates the eating of the peas. By surviving, succeeding, even thriving according to an ‘alternate’ system, Mary champions something that can allegorically represent an alternative form. The oranges are representative of Miss Jenkyns’s archaic preferences for ‘sesquipedalian prose’: the convoluted system is her brainchild and not Miss Matey’s. Drawing our attention to forms for consumption, the inevitability of contingency, and the possibility for breaking away from extant norms, the oranges and peas present a microcosm of the market story’s values. In a sense this generates the values of the peas as well as the oranges: yes they seem young and delicate on their own, but if Miss Pole misses out on the experience of eating them, they are like a text never opened: their value is lost, has disappeared “nobody knew where,” or did not even exist to begin with.

If things in “The Cranford Papers” have, as I am arguing, the kind of “elasticity and capaciousness of value” identified by Elaine Freedgood, the other primary object to function as a register of alternative modes of consumption are the ladies’ caps (148). In several key scenes these objects of everyday wear are paralleled with personal characteristics and presented as something that must be carefully managed. In “Visiting at Cranford” Mrs Jamieson explains to Miss Matey, in the most roundabout and indirect possible manner, that she is not invited to call upon Lady Glenmire. Mary observes that her friend, “a true lady herself,” has difficulty understanding Mrs Jamieson’s wishes. When she does perceive the thrust of the communication, “it was pretty to see with what quiet dignity she received the intimation thus uncourteously given. She was not in the least hurt—she was of too gentle a spirit for that” and the word gentle doubly suggests Miss Matey’s softness as well as her narration’s own exceptional resistance to history’s pull in Cranford and to disclose this mistake’s exemplary position within the novel’s etiquette system” (28).
inborn nobility (106:59). Later Mrs. Jamieson retracts her ban by inviting the ladies for tea, but Miss Matey’s sense of right discourages her from accepting the invitation. It is only after a long lecture on “the great Christian principle of ‘Forgive and forget’” that Miss Pole can convince Miss Matey to change her mind (106:60-61).

While Miss Pole’s speech in this scene is entirely focused on her moral arguments, Mary tells us that “Miss Pole, in addition to her delicacies of feeling, possessed a very smart cap, which she was anxious to show to an admiring world” (106:60). Thus Miss Matey’s original impulse is not undermined by the changed response to Mrs Jamieson’s invitation. Her morals are unwaveringly correct, while it is Miss Pole’s desire that equates an aspect of character with an aspect of dress: principally a wish to “wear out” her new item, the value of which will be reaped through public display. Here, by aligning gentility with the use of caps, Gaskell invites a reading of the latter in terms of the former. As Miss Matey will “put on” a dignified manner to exchange her gold for a bank note, Miss Pole will put on her cap and become yet more ‘genteel.’ Miss Pole’s cap is ostensibly devalued through satire. However, Gaskell also resists this reading. When we examine various other moments of ‘cap-meaning’ in “Visiting at Cranford,” we see that display and spectatorship are key features of a cap’s value in a Cranfordian economy. A lady’s cap must be worn at all times, but its value inheres in its exhibition more than its functionality (such as covering hair, or providing warmth).

The moment in which Miss Matey’s goodness is presented as innate and indestructible we are also asked to compare characteristics to commercial items. In a single sentence at the instalment’s opening Mary presents the complexity that the cap-system can attain (reminiscent of towel-wearing in the Turkish Baths): “it was before twelve o’clock, and Miss Matey had not yet changed the cap with yellow ribbons, that had been Miss
Jenkyns’ best, and which Miss Matey was now wearing out in private, putting on the one made in imitation of Mrs. Jamieson’s at all times when she expected to be seen” (106:55). Miss Jenkyns’s old cap must be ‘worn out,’ and the process of wearing out is a daily, repeated, value-able activity for Miss Matey. It is deliberate, and we are to understand that she takes little enjoyment from it: like using up the last of any household item, it is a dutiful use that provides an ascetic sense of satisfaction, a strategy of maximization. However, the illogic of this strategy is highlighted a moment later when Miss Matey, surprised by a visit from Miss Barker, accidentally dons her second cap without removing her first. Miss Barker is too polite to acknowledge the “unusual weight and extraordinary height” of the “head-dress” born by the daughter of the late Rector of Cranford as they run down a hierarchy of rank in the town while discussing a potential list of invitees (Miss Matey is second only to Mrs Jamieson) (106:56). In this scene a cap cannot compromise Miss Matey’s dignity, as it could not save Miss Pole’s a moment before; in “The Cranford Papers” Gaskell resists utilizing the cap as a simple inverse index to another kind of non-material value. This immaterial worth, gentility itself, is the furthest thing from a cap, as Mary refers to Miss Matey “put[ting] on the soft dignified manner peculiar to her, rarely used, and yet which became her so well” when she takes responsibility for the bad bank note in “Stopped Payment at Cranford” (158:113). Thus, caps exist separately, and their value can be explored for its own sake and therefore can circulate with more meaning in the text. Mary Smith’s persistent attention to the style and placement of caps articulates their worth in terms of repeated, daily wear. The value of the cap is generated and increased through (rather than being depleted by) its familiar use (rather than exchange).

One almost imagines that a complete ‘wearing out’ of an old cap will be a triumphant
achievement rather than an exhausting negation. Caps always exist in relation to an index of fashion: Miss Matey wants an avant-garde sea-green turban, and Mary buys her instead a practical “neat, middle-aged” bonnet in a conservative lilac colour (146:390-91). Miss Barker spends her life “wearing out” the old stock from her now-defunct shop; she has a plethora of caps and “outrageous ribbons” to use up, but they are none of them fashionable or current (106:55). Finally, Miss Matey is also purposeful to commission caps in the style of a widow’s after Mr. Holbrook’s untimely demise in “A Love Affair at Cranford.” Gaskell repeatedly employs caps in situations that undermine the ladies’ claim that it does not “signify” how they dress in Cranford; Miss Matey and others are highly attuned to the material properties and fashionable potential of their head-gear (90:265). Caps attain a sophisticated level of signification in “The Cranford Papers” and function as a constellation of meaning, but not, I would assert, as an allegory to be overlaid on another reading of the text. The meaning of each cap is highly contingent upon its own materiality: a choice of yellow ribbon is significant because it is not black ribbon, and not because it represents an abstract sense of nobility. Miss Matey can be just as foolish, or dignified, wearing two caps piled one on top of the other on her head, or fumbling to offer a poor farmer a five pound note on behalf of the Town and Country Bank when she is appropriately head-geared. The value of the cap is its own value, in relation to other caps, and this is a worth that does not transcend material form.

While my interrogation of “The Cranford Papers” is focused primarily on the use of material objects, there are certain textual moments at which this status becomes productively ambiguous, and these instances cluster around the character of Miss Pole. Her insistence on the value-in-use of the new cap is echoed and amplified by the example of gossip. During
“The Great Cranford Panic” fearful reports and exaggerated accounts of robberies are managed by Miss Pole, as she is “delighted to recount” events which soon become legendary “to all inquirers,” in such a way that “every time she went over the story some fresh trait of villainy was added” to the appearance of the supposed robbers (147:413). Miss Pole views her stories as property, to be intimated, repeated, and recycled according to her own inclinations and no other’s. Mary and Miss Matey prove that they understand and respect such a conception on another occasion, when Miss Pole comes with the first gossip that Mr. Hoggins and Lady Glenmire are engaged. As soon as another person enters the scene, Mary relates, Miss Pole “had a most out-of-place fit of coughing ... I shall never forget the imploring expression of her eyes, as she looked at us over her pocket handkerchief. They said, as plain as words could speak, ‘Don’t let Nature deprive me of the treasure which is mine, although for a time I can make no use of it’” (158:110). And when Miss Pole does not have the pleasure of an immediate audience, when she cannot deliver her gossip face-to-face in exchange for the gratification of her hearer’s visible reaction, she resorts to different tactics. In letters she “carefully ration[s] [her] disclosures in return for other articles,” as Mary reports that “at the end of every sentence of news, came a fresh direction as to some crochet commission which I was to execute for her” (Mulvihill 351, 90:269). Gossip’s value is based in novelty; like news (but unlike exaggerated report), gossip is partly defined by its quality of being largely unknown. Like a new cap, gossip cannot be kept forever out of sight: its value exists in employment before an audience, which is an especially contingent kind of value.

In this discussion I have so far been emphasizing a series of objects and images abstracted from plot. These oddities of small town life were referred to by Gaskell as
“Cranfordisms,” bizarre tales and instances of queer minutiae (flannel-clothed Alderney cows, red silk umbrellas, and tea-trays stored beneath sofas) that are distributed throughout the instalments with varying frequency. The shape of the “Cranford Paper” offers a model for the market story that my reading brings to the surface: small plotless moments are emphasized over narrative pace or coherence, and value is constructed through external assemblages rather than adherence to an internal centre. As Garcha observes, “the women fetishize the signifier—the name, the rule, the title, the piece of clothing or ornamentation—at the expense of the signified” (207). In a May 1854 letter to John Forster Gaskell asks, or rather states: “Shall I tell you a Cranfordism. An old lady a Mrs. Frances Wright said to one of my cousins ‘I have never been able to spell since I lost my teeth’” (Letters 290). This pithy passage comes near the end of a very lengthy letter, and is the only one bestowed upon Forster among all of Gaskell’s other news and communication. The second and last relation of a “Cranfordism” to have survived among Gaskell’s letters does not come for another eleven years, and is granted to John Ruskin, although it is ostensibly given for his mother. This time Gaskell prefaced her story with a defense that is telling in light of her previously published work. In response to Ruskin’s praise she writes “I am so glad your mother likes it too! I will tell her a bit more of Cranford that I did not dare to put in, because I thought people would say it was ridiculous, and yet, which really happened in Knutsford!” The content of the “Cranfordism” is almost irrelevant,74 as it is always tangential to the subject

74 And yet I would include it here if only for the pleasure of reading: “Two good old ladies—friends of mine in my girlhood, had a niece who made a grand marriage...The bride & bridegroom came to stay with the two Aunts, who had bought a new dining room carpet, as a sort of wedding welcome to the young people—but I am afraid it was rather lost upon them, for the first time they found it out, was after dinner, the day after they came. All dinner time they had noticed that the neat maid servant had performed a sort of ‘pas-de-basque’, hopping & sliding with more grace than security to the dishes she held. When she had left the room, one lady said to the other: ‘Sister! I think she’ll do!’ ‘Yes’, said the other, she managed very nicely!’ And then they began to explain that she was a fresh servant, and they had just laid down a new carpet with white spots or spaces on it,
under discussion. Yet this very peripheral status is what gives the first four “Cranford Papers” an enduring value: the beauty and precision of these eccentric moments remains, not as things apart, but things embedded within.

“Envelopes Fretted his Soul Terribly”: Textual Objects

I wish to consider textual objects separately from other material items presented throughout “The Cranford Papers.” Gaskell’s self-conscious commentary on writing and signification has been traced elsewhere, most effectively as “affairs of the alphabet” by Hilary Schor (112), yet two key scenes of letter writing and the description of written material offer a self-reflexive expression of the market story. The key difference between oranges and letters in “The Cranford Papers” is that written texts are double signifiers. They are objects that represent things through their material properties, but they also represent a second layer of discourse that is their linguistic signification. We have already seen examples of such textual objects that highlight the potential for distance between the meaning to be found in writing and content (the Doctor’s MS in Trollope is carefully footnoted worthless scholarship; the wrinkled sheets of Somebody’s manuscripts are messy but profitable), yet I would suggest that “The Cranford Papers” pursues a slightly more nuanced engagement with textuality. In Trollope, or Dickens, these written-on objects in the texts always interact with a plot that is also already about writing. In Gaskell, plot is static, or merely “vibrate[s]” around the objects that constitute our main focus (165:284). When we shift away from the threads that can tenuously enable novelistic coherence (as I am arguing we should), back towards the disparate bundles of string that exist chiefly in an immediate context, where little in the way of an overarching plot actually exists (“There had been neither births, deaths, nor

and they had been teaching this girl to vault or jump gracefully over these white places, lest her feet might dirty them!” (Letters 747-48).
marriages since I was there last”), the allegorical importance of these objects is allowed to stand out (90.270).

This allegorical reading is foregrounded through Mary’s description of the second central paradigm for consumption. Next to “elegant economy” Mary describes “private economies” that, while particular to their cultivation on an individual basis, share a general foundation of privileging the irrational management and hoarding of one specific item (paper, string, butter) over all others. This is a structure of value in preservation: “I have often noticed that almost every one has his own individual small economies—careful habits of saving fractions of pennies in some one peculiar direction—any disturbance of which annoys him more than spending shillings or pounds on some real extravagance” (103:588). Their purpose is actually quite distinct from the usual aims of parsimony, since “what may pass as a rational economy is actually a personal compulsion, ‘almost mesmeric,’ whose bottom-line satisfaction is ‘relief’ rather than savings” (Mulvihill 346). The private economies encapsulate the ironies attendant upon Cranford’s entire schematic of “elegant economy” insofar as saving is as much for an outward appearance, or imagined peace of mind, as it is for material necessity. As Mulvihill suggests, “Real or nominal in their utility, such economies serve certain emotional needs beyond any concrete necessities they might originally have been conceived to meet” (346). For Gaskell they emphasize form as a generator of meaning.

The “private economy” is especially compelling as an external (contextual) element that skews and distorts the interpretation of the subject, or the thing itself. Mary first describes an acquaintance whose “small” economy is of paper: “I see him casting wistful glances at his daughters when they send a whole instead of a half sheet of note-paper, with
the three lines of acceptance to an invitation, written on only one of the sides” (103:588).

The next economy is Mary’s own, and is string. She sees Indian-rubber bands as a “deification” of string, and keeps her only one as a “precious treasure” along with the “little hanks” of used string that fill her pockets, waiting for “uses that never come” (103:588-89). Mary’s private economy is not only saved compulsively, but given the opportunity she often cannot exercise the use of it: she says of the elastic band, “I have really tried to use it; but my heart failed me, and I could not commit the extravagance” (103:589). Mary’s strings can be saved, potentially indefinitely, without losing their value, but only because their worth (irrational and personal) has become entirely divorced from use. This is careful consumption taken to an ironic extreme. The third “private economy” is also ascribed to an anonymous acquaintance, and it makes explicit the mockery of these obsessive habits: “Small pieces of butter grieve others … they are really made happy if the person one whose plate [the butter] lies unused, suddenly breaks off a piece of toast (which he does not want at all) and eats up his butter. They think that this is not waste” (103:589). An unnecessary use provides psychic comfort because it seems to prevent a waste; Gaskell’s three materials speak to the value of accumulating objects not for their own sake, but for the satisfaction of some exterior desire. The construction of the private economy emphasizes arbitrary associations between things: it does not matter that the bread and butter is enjoyed, only so long as the latter is not wasted. Like the linguistic sign which bears no intrinsic relation to its signifier, this coda highlights the limits of meaningful consumption. Moreover, the phrase that forms my title, “this is not waste,” is a negative figuration, defining the thing only by being clear about what it is not. Together these relational configurations draw attention to the distance between, or proximity of, two things, to the ways in which they are different as well as alike. Their
categorization emphasizes their contingency, and the figure of the private economy replicates, which is to say embodies, which is to say creates, the values of the market story.

“Memory at Cranford” prominently features the letter as an object of value, introduced by way of Miss Matey’s private economy, candles. Very literal depictions of documents written by hand are featured in a long scene of letter-reading and burning (two kinds of consumption) that pays careful attention to the material states of paper, ink, and seals. My discussion of the letters-as-objects in “Memory at Cranford” will elucidate the text’s suggestion of the contrivance and arbitrariness of form through a disparity between the two letter-writing economies featured in the story. There is the “pale, faded ink” of the old letters from Matey’s parents, and the “square sheet” on which Miss Deborah Jenkyns wrote. Despite their different styles, these letters share an economical elegance in their use of paper and ink. Either the lines are “very close together” and in a “straight hand,” or, when crossed, the “hand [is] admirably calculated” and the paper square and neat for that purpose (103:591). These old letters had an initial use-value in their first readings. However Mary writes of being called back into the time when the letter was written in the present, “which seemed so strong and full, as if it could never pass away, and as if the warm, living hearts that so expressed themselves could never die, and be as nothing to the sunny earth” (103:589). She finds these “vivid and intense” impressions to have a rather opposite effect, though, on her own reading experience, as they make her more “melancholy” for their happiness (103:589). These items are capable of passing through multiple stages of use, wear, and movement while their ‘internal’ state, their signification, is preserved. But the outside has changed: the effects of re-consuming the letters necessarily differs from their initial reception.
This experience is heightened by a letter that has remained sealed until now. Letters from Miss Matey’s parents and sister occupy the early part of this account, but attention soon shifts toward a fourth letter writer, Miss Matey’s long-lost brother Peter. Miss Matey tells the sad story of his departure from Cranford: a letter from her parents to Peter had been returned unopened, “and unopened it had remained ever since” (103:595). Mary does not aim to translate this reading experience but attempts to offer direct access to the letter by reprinting it entirely with only the succinct introduction “This is it:—” (103:595). As a gesture toward an original and supposedly more authentic act of consumption, this moment is singular in “Memory at Cranford” (after it Mary returns to her customary mode of relating her own impressions of the letters: such a one “was full of love, and sorrow, and pride in his new profession, and a sore sense of his disgrace”) (103:595). The first reading of a sealed letter becomes pivotal, and draws added attention to the object that has, for a very long time, remained in a supposedly uncorrupted state. However, everything around the letter is different, and Mary is attuned to the impossibility of direct communion with its author: “The writer of the letter—the last—the only person who had ever seen what was written in it, was dead long ago—and I, a stranger, not born at the time when this occurrence took place, was the one to open it” (103:595). Mrs. Jenkyns’s words are heightened and exacerbated by the context in which the letter is first read, and by the fact of its having waited so long to be consumed. Mary’s interaction with the past warrants direct transcription into the story in an attempt to preserve and convey some of its meaning and force; yet the text remains

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75 Interestingly, the letter is referred to as a “little simple begging-letter” (103:595); Daniel Hack has discussed the “identification of authors with begging-letter writers” as an act that “tends to reinforce the **figurative** equivalence of the two occupations” insofar as “the actual movement of individuals across the boundary between the writing of books and articles and the writing of begging-letters underscores not only the notorious economic precariousness of authorship but the conceptual precariousness of this boundary as well” (Hack 107). For this discussion attention to begging-letters yokes the figure of the letter writer to artist and author figures in a commentary about literary form.
ambivalent about this possibility. Indicative of this external change, Miss Matey hesitates to relate Peter’s jokes “because they might not shock you [now] as they ought to do,” and after this letter the remainder of the story relays Mrs. Jenkyns’s “fading away” after the loss of her son (103:593, 596). What brings Miss Matey to tears now, and registers on Mary’s emotional scale, was a cause of much greater grief, amounting to a loss of life, for Peter’s mother. These two responses are irreconcilable: the authentic experience suggested by the text cannot be recovered, Gaskell insists.

The careful use of paper and ink evidenced in older letters is juxtaposed by a mysterious note that has survived from Peter’s school days. Mary calls his other correspondences “show-letters” insofar as they are overly formal and impersonal, but this mould is broken by “a badly written, badly-sealed, badly-directed, blotted note” (103:592). A note rather than a letter, it represents the culmination of Peter’s letter-writing oeuvre, as the “animal nature” kept under wraps in his show-letters is now fully revealed (103:592). And this poor economy of paper and ink—the letter is blotted, badly written and directed—is matched by the writer’s profligate use of words. Peter pleads: “My dear, dear, dear, dearest mother, I will be a better boy—I will, indeed; but don’t, please, be ill for me; I am not worth it; but I will be good, darling mother” (103:592). The excessive repetition of the word dear, and the phrases dearest mother, darling mother, and the twice-made promise to be a better boy all contrast strongly with the “very superior,” but emotionally bereft, style of Miss Jenkyns’s epistles (103:591). Like Trollope’s passage about the “gentleman in the cupboard,” and Christopher’s verbose wavering (“That is to say, namely, viz., i.e., as follows, thus”), this moment draws attention to the language and textual status of the letter, working self-reflexively alongside the letter as image. The material properties of the letter
upturn more conventional standards for letter writing: words are blotted and ink is spilled where Miss Jenkyns writes only in neat straight lines and crosses. Linguistically, Peter displays no mastery of style, but it is his anti-Johnsonian rhetoric that has Miss Matey unable to speak “for crying” (103:592). Again, the alternative, peculiar material form of a thing is that which can be championed in a Cranfordian economy.

Perhaps the most compelling aspect of this scene of ritualized reading is its motivation. Miss Matey’s entire purpose, in revisiting these old letters with Mary, has been to prepare to burn them. She finds it desirable to look over “all the old family letters, destroying such as ought not to be allowed to fall into the hands of strangers” (103:589). The letters have had a purpose and a value, but the purpose has been served, and the value was particular to Miss Matey and her close family. Yet, as in most acts of Cranfordian consumption, the different letters are processed according to strict codes of operation. Mary and Miss Matey agree to look over the letters separately, “each taking a different letter out of the same bundle, and describing its contents to the other, before destroying it” (103:589). This plan is sufficient for those letters from Miss Matey’s parents and grandparents. However, Deborah’s letters “Miss Matey did regret to burn” (103:591). To Miss Matey these letters are different in kind from those of her parents. While the latter were “only interesting to those who had loved the writers” Miss Deborah’s letters are finely written, and being “so very superior” it is clear to her that “Any one might profit by reading them” (103:591). In order to habituate herself to the unpleasant task at hand, Miss Matey undertakes a new system for processing the letters before their destruction: “She would not let them be carelessly passed over with any quiet reading, and skipping, to myself. She took them from me … in order to read them aloud with a proper emphasis, and without stumbling
over the big words” (103:591). This provision, along with the intentional disruption of her own private economy—Miss Matey lights a second candle to read these letters—pacifies her sense that Deborah’s letters are receiving their deserved consideration.

Ironically detached from the claim for Miss Jenkyns’s superior style (“how I wanted facts instead of reflections, before those letters were concluded!”), Mary focuses on a lengthy description of the exterior form of both types of letters at this point in her story (103:591). Those from an older generation are contrasted with Miss Jenkyns’s relatively newer artefacts:

The Rector’s letters, and those of his wife and mother-in-law, had all been tolerably short and pithy, written in a straight hand, with the lines very close together. Sometimes the whole letter was contained on a mere scrap of paper. The paper was very yellow, and the ink very brown; some of the sheets were (as Miss Matey made me observe) by the old original Post, with the stamp in the corner … Now, Miss Jenkyns’s letters were of a later date in form and writing. She wrote on the square sheet, which we have learned to call old-fashioned. Her hand was admirably calculated, together with her use of many-syllabled words, to fill up a sheet, and then came the pride and delight of crossing. Poor Miss Matey got sadly puzzled with this, for the words gathered size like snow-balls, and towards the end of her letter, Miss Jenkyns used to become quite sesquipedalian. (103:591)

By focusing on the materiality of these letters, Mary draws attention to the characteristics of paper and reminds readers of the private economy that opened her story. Those letters that do not carry the emotional force of urgent communications between Peter and his mother are interesting for their physical states. Words are like “snow-balls,” picking up surrounding
matter indiscriminately; sentences are valued for their ability to fill a sheet rather than convey a thought; and crossing is a point of pride rather than a semantic necessity. Essentially, form is privileged over and above content, context is paramount, and what Miss Jenkyns actually wrote is of little importance. As an allegory for the process of writing, these letters function as a parallel to Trollope’s and Dickens’s self-reflexive scenes of authorship. That they are described in such careful physical detail underlines the traces of effort and bodily expenditure involved in the process of composition.

Compared with this, the emotional force of Peter’s letter seems to disrupt the principles of the market story: that value exists outside, but not in. The value of Peter’s letter is in its apparently genuine emotional force. When Miss Matey comes to Peter’s urgent letter, discussed above, she must find another standard of processing: this letter cannot be burned. After reading the “blotted note” in which Peter begs his mother not to be ill, Miss Matey “got up and took it to her sacred recesses in her own room, for fear, by any chance, it might get burnt” (103:592). Thus we have a three-tiered criteria for value among these letters: antiquarian form, admirable style, and sentimental force, and it is the last that ranks highest, that can pull hard enough on Miss Matey’s memory and override the systemic consumption intended for the letters as a whole. Peter’s letter is also, notably, the embryo of what becomes the driving ‘plot’ of the second half of “The Cranford Papers.” The mystery of Peter will prompt Mary’s bold epistle to India which brings him home to save his sister from financial ruin. In this way, the letter’s pivotal emotional force proves the argument that, when plot is less important, value resides in context. Thus by breaking from the pattern of the market story at the halfway point and allowing us to retrospectively read back through its earlier images, Gaskell’s texts demonstrate the exception that proves the rule.
Simultaneously, it is also always the case that these letters have meaning to Miss Matey, who is outside, and that the stories that connect them, the narratives that link them, must be explained to Mary in order for any emotional force to be conveyed. Thus their value is hardly entirely intrinsic, in the way that “there is therefore nothing in any aspect of our experience of anything that could ever be, in the required sense, pure” (Herrnstein Smith 69).

Images of preservation or consumption are myriad in “The Cranford Papers.” Like Mr. Hoggins’s well-worn boots, which have “been new-pieced, high and low, top and bottom, heel and sole, black leather and brown leather, more times than anyone could tell,” the stories emphasize their status as a complex assemblage of parts (106:110). Miss Matey’s diary provides the other strong image of this aggregate physical status. In “The Great Cranford Panic: Chapter the Second” the diary is thematically suited to an account of differences between real and illusory experience. Here Miss Pole is invested in exaggerating and circulating the barest evidence of crime and unusual behaviour throughout Cranford, while Mary’s narrative makes clear that “one or two robberies” give birth to reports that “fl[y] about like wildfire” especially among ladies living alone (147:394, 395). While the diary is only mentioned in passing, several details of its structure are of interest:

“My father once made us,” she began, “keep a diary in two columns; on one side we were to put down in the morning what we thought would be the course and events of the coming day, and at night we were to put down on the other side what really had happened. It would be to some people rather a sad way of telling their lives”—a tear dropped upon my hand at these words—“I don’t mean that mine has been sad, only so very different to what I expected.” (147: 418)
This diary juxtaposes in writing the contrast between an imagined and a factual account of the same thing. On the one hand, Miss Matey’s diary preserves a record of the past in potential, a version of what could have been. On the other hand, the dominant note is one of deflation and disappointment: her awareness of the difference between imagination and reality is equated with sadness. This represents idealism versus pragmatism, and grounds an experience of writing in the reality of the everyday. Once spent, a single day (a period of youth, or a lifetime) does not in reality bring the same satisfaction and reward that was held in its promise. Crucially, it is the act of writing that makes this disparity unavoidable: a promise could be easily forgotten if it had not been indelibly recorded. By the very act of saving, preserving, and writing down, something is lost. Moreover, the diary preserves two shapes that emerge from the same origin (the same day), but that are disparate and only partially connected. This formal structure emphasizes contingency and invites comparison: what goes into the diary is entirely determined by what happens outside of it, and imagination is never allowed to transcend reality.

The diary also gestures toward generic structures: here Miss Matey is writing to a certain format, the diary is a private communication structured around a temporally repeating event. In this respect it is similar to Household Words, as a genre whose identity is based on a fixed relationship to time. The automatic recurrence of a moment in time—a new day or week—prompts a writer, or editor, to fill the empty space now available. For someone like Dickens, the need to “make up” a number every seven days arguably creates an artificial demand for material. Like a new day in the diary, a new week rolls around regardless of what is waiting to fill it. These open-ended repeating structures create a vacuum, a demand for material, essentially a market. Ultimately, value is created by this apparatus: asking for
things to supply a market invests those things with worth for so doing.76

The imagined reader of Dickens’s *Household Words* and Gaskell’s first printing of “The Cranford Papers” waits, as Mary anticipates a break from the monotony of Miss Jenkyns’s letters, for another instalment of “The Cranford Papers” sometime between December of 1851 and May of 1853. With no fixed schedule for publication the last episode of Cranford life may be forgotten, and yet it is likely that this reader would not forget the pyjama-clad Alderney cow, or the delicate green peas slipping between the two prongs of an old-fashioned fork. These images and objects, vivid and disconnected, stand out as the defining feature of “The Cranford Papers.” Gaskell’s work (especially the first four instalments) is more unified by these bizarre happenings than by any overarching sequence of events. Plot is a thin film that yokes together the memorable and resonant images and objects of value scattered through the text. That which is not waste has value, is of some use and can be mined for worth, and in a world where “fragments and small opportunities” are all made use of with thoughtful care, it is clear that these stories advocate a similarly elegant approach to valuation (90:271).

**Making Titles: “Cranford Papers” in *Household Words***

The foregoing discussion suggested the thematic resonances between Gaskell’s stories and my ongoing articulation of the market story. Placing “The Cranford Papers” among the pages of *Household Words* heightens and reaffirms these associations. Although each instalment appeared in the same journal, each was also contained within a separate

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76 Finally, it is suggestive that *Household Words* was itself printed in two columns. The two-column format reflects the cultural status of Dickens’s journal: weightier periodicals like *Blackwood’s* were printed in a single column in order to more closely resemble a book; *Household Words*’s format was more like a newspaper—a record of the day’s events. Readers encountering Miss Matey’s description in these pages would have been alerted to the similarity in format, and Gaskell’s choice of both a form (the temporally-regulated diary) and a format (double columns) so reflective of *Household Words*. 
issue, appearing amongst different authors, and at a distinct time of year (the season was often referenced by Mary). Moreover, there was no regularity or pattern to the serialization: the first story was printed on December 13th, 1851, as already noted. It was followed by “A Love-Affair at Cranford” three weeks later, on January 3rd, 1852. There is a longer break before another “Cranford Paper”: ten issues have been printed when “Memory at Cranford” appears on March 13th, 1852. This story is trailed in relatively close succession by “Visiting at Cranford” three weeks later, on April 3rd, 1852. These first four stories have appeared almost as two pairs, each three weeks apart, with a ten week separation between the first and second pair. This process covers a span of four months. Forty weeks then pass without an instalment of “The Cranford Papers.” This is over nine months, and Mary Smith acknowledges it to have been “the greater part of that year” when the narrating voice returns on the 8th of January 1853 (146:390). After this long gap the two parts of “The Great Cranford Panic” are issued back-to-back, on the 8th and 15th of January. There follows another eleven-week pause before “Stopped Payment at Cranford” appears on April 2nd, 1853, precisely a full year after “Visiting at Cranford.” Readers must then wait five weeks before “Friends in Need at Cranford” on May 7th. This instalment is followed closely by the concluding “A Happy Return to Cranford” only two weeks later, on May 21st, 1853.

Publishing “The Cranford Papers” has taken seventy-five weeks, from the 90th issue of *Household Words* through Number 165. Cranford stories have appeared in two main bundles, the first spread over four months and the second occupying nearly five.

Within this span, the number of weeks between issues is hardly consistent: anywhere from one, three, five, ten, or forty issues of *Household Words* appear between instalments of “The Cranford Papers.” Thus, its publication schedule does not have a frequency, in contrast
to its journalistic parent, whose very structure is defined by temporal regularity.\textsuperscript{77}

*Household Words* has a rhythm; “The Cranford Papers” has none. Gaskell’s composition habits seem to have been without habit; knowing that a vehicle for the publication of whatever was “the latest intelligence” of Cranford life waited patiently (most of the time) in the form of Dickens’s weekly journal, she could write randomly but always with a slight sense of compulsion. Temporally, when the instalments are pulled further and further apart from one another, their function as market stories is made apparent. They fill a need for the weekly periodical in which they are embedded, constructing its value as a whole through an assemblage of disparate parts.

Considering the placement of “The Cranford Papers” in relation to the temporal structure of Dickens’s journal, one can point to the larger organizing agents and forces at work on this publication. I refer to ‘Dickens’s journal,’ but agency must be attributed to both Gaskell and a single editorial unit made up of Dickens and his sub-editor W.H. Wills. At the same time it is difficult to parse this unit and ascribe particular choices to either Dickens or Wills without specific historical evidence. During this period the relationship between the two men is characterized by “professional balance”: while “artistic and stylistic concerns remained Dickens’s forte” it was Wills’s “business acumen” that became prominent (Spencer 147-48). In this case, Dickens may have arranged titles, but perhaps it was Wills who, with a far-reaching gaze, distributed and allocated Gaskell’s stories among other offerings of short fiction, from week-to-week in the pages of *Household Words*. In a letter dated December 1851 Gaskell suggests that she has “a couple” of tales in to the journal: Gaskell refers to being “all spick and span for Xmas,” suggesting that the timing is close to the holiday,

\textsuperscript{77} For more on periodicity see Lyn Pykett, “Reading the Periodical Press: Text and Context” and Margaret Beetham, “Towards a Theory of the Periodical as a Publishing Genre” in *Investigating Victorian Journalism* (eds. Brake, Jones, Madden).
perhaps after the December 13th printing of “Our Society” but before the January 3rd appearance of “A Love Affair” (Letters 174). If Gaskell had submitted more than one tale at this time, it is possible that Wills and Dickens held the second story until the New Year.

Situating “The Cranford Papers” in relation to the dominant forms being published contemporaneously in *Household Words* illuminates its generic singularity. In its first few years, at least, the journal developed a practice for printing different types of material. Articles predominated, and a single long-running serial, such as the non-fictional *A Child’s History of England*, was common. A feature called “Chips” became a normal practice early on: this section consisted of three or four very short items. One poem could appear per issue, but not more than one, and poetry was infrequent overall. Similarly, pieces of short fiction were not featured to excess. One short story per issue was normal, but never more than one, and many issues did not contain any fiction at all. It was not unusual for short stories to appear only every other week, or every third week. This is in contrast to several non-fictional articles per Number. Clearly, Dickens and Wills are managing the amount of fiction that appears in *Household Words*, and arranging Gaskell’s work beneath the umbrella of the journal, which exists as both parent text and a layer of textuality governed by its own codes and principles of distribution.

When consciously read as discrete market stories it becomes clear that Gaskell’s texts stand in sharp contrast with other serials of the period, and not only for their curious focus on slight material states. Several longer narratives were being serialized in *Household Words* at the same time as “The Cranford Papers.” Dickens’s own *A Child’s History of England* was the longest of these, running from January of 1851 until December of 1853. For the period spanning the printing of “The Cranford Papers” *A Child’s History* appears with some
regularity: generally an instalment is printed every four to six weeks, and during the seventy-five weeks in which the nine Cranford stories appear there are seventeen numbers of Dickens’s serial. Only once do a “Cranford Paper” and a “Child’s History” appear in the same issue; on January 8th, 1853 “The Great Cranford Panic: Chapter I” is printed alongside a “Child’s History” at the end of that number. It seems likely that Dickens and Wills were managing their weekly issues in order to not overload on their more significant serials, so for the most part Dickens and Gaskell are staggered, appearing only in alternate issues. However, with Gaskell writing again after a forty-week hiatus, it may have been important to publish her story as soon as possible. Meanwhile, Dickens had not had a number of his serial for four weeks already, and if he had waited until after Gaskell’s “Cranford Panic” was finished (it ran for two weeks in succession) he would have left readers for seven weeks without an instalment (the longest gap is only ever six weeks). Thus, in tandem with its irregular serialization “The Cranford Papers” are being managed according to an economy of publication within *Household Words*, one in which valuable serials are carefully rationed.

Moreover, no other series is titled like Gaskell’s. *A Child’s History of England* uses the same title for each instalment and chapter numbers are the only things that differ from one to the next. Similarly, serials like Richard H. Horne’s “A Digger’s Diary: In Occasional Chapters” repeat the same title each time. Furthermore, the subtitle “In *Occasional* Chapters” suggests a formalizing of this type of irregular serialization insofar as it offers readers a signpost to the text: they can know that each instalment is part of a larger narrative, and that they should not expect that sequence according to a regular schedule. Indeed, many texts deploy this strategy of mapping through titles: “The Three Sisters: In Four Chapters”; “Phases of Public Life: In Three Chapters”; and “Transported for Life: In Two Parts” are
representative examples in Dickens’s magazine. The majority of articles and narratives serialized in *Household Words* are delimited as instalments by their titles.\(^7\) It is useful to keep in mind, here, that *Household Words* is still a year away from undertaking the weekly serialization of a full novel. Dickens’s *Hard Times* commences on April 1st, 1854, and Gaskell’s *North and South* begins the following September. “The Cranford Papers” are, in this sense, predating the publication system of which they are often considered a part. Thus the absence of signposts for “The Cranford Papers” does specific work: if instalments are never accompanied by a formal indication of when the next number will appear or how many are left in total, readers are encouraged to think that each number of “The Cranford Papers” could be read as a discrete, freestanding tale. Indeed, the only exception to what I identify as standard Cranfordian formatting is that which proves the rule.

“The Great Cranford Panic” is one ‘story’ broken into two instalments, and titled according to the conventions observed in other *Household Words* serials. “The Great Cranford Panic. In Two Chapters: Chapter the First” and “Chapter the Second” are more consistent with “A Digger’s Diary” and “The Three Sisters” than “Memory at Cranford.” That it appears on two successive weeks is also in keeping with *Household Words*’s conventions: other pieces that are broken into multiple parts unfailingly appear in successive issues without breaks, and this is the first and last time two “Cranford” pieces appear in back-to-back issues. On either end of this there are forty and eleven weeks without a “Cranford Paper.” Thus the temporal arrangement, identical titles, and formatting of “The Great

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\(^7\) Only one other story published during the run of “The Cranford Papers” is not denoted as “in two instalments” in its title, and it therefore stands out for its singularity. Wilkie Collins’s “Gabriel’s Marriage” is published over two weeks in April of 1853, and in the first number no indication is given that the story will be resumed the following week. From my own reading experience I can attest to making an attempt, after finishing the first instalment, to create resolution from the events of the story before I realized that the narrative was to be continued the next week.
Cranford Panic” work together to reinforce the pattern through deviation. Like the scene of Peter’s letter in “Memory at Cranford,” this is also the beginning of the second ‘half’ of the collection, when plottedness becomes dominant and the text more closely resembles a novel. By both conforming to the standards for serialization in *Household Words*, and differentiating itself from the rest of “The Cranford Papers,” their discreteness is clearly emphasized.

The reasons for such a deviation from standard practices of “Cranfordian” formatting seem clearly strategic: *Household Words* had been without a “Cranford Paper” for forty weeks before “The Great Cranford Panic” was ready. Consequently, as Dickens and Wills arranged the number, the former’s instalment of *A Child’s History of England* likely made the issue full enough without all of Gaskell’s story. And yet, as suggested above, they may have wanted to get her work out as quickly as possible. Therefore, following this editorial logic, by splitting the instalment into two pieces Dickens and Wills could economize on its appearance by spreading it out over the course of two weeks. Moreover, by titling the pieces in accordance with the conventions applied to most other works, Dickens offers a signpost to his audience. “The Great Cranford Panic. In Two Chapters. Chapter the First” guarantees for readers that there will be a “Chapter the Second,” and those who read regularly will know that this usually means “in the following issue” as clearly as if it is printed on the page. Regular readers who have remained faithful to the journal are being rewarded with both a double-dose of “Cranford” and a legible signpost; after such a long wait, they are offered a quick return on their investment.

I am making much of titles within *Household Words*. In part, this is because there is ample evidence to suggest that Dickens formulated and assigned titles himself. In July 1851
he writes to Wills regarding a proposed article by James Hannay. The last line of his letter is “In the name of the prophet—Smith! would be a better title,” and this is the title under which Hannay’s article is printed in the next *Household Words* (*Letters* 6:430). For Gaskell, as well, this editorial move is not uncommon: Dickens comments to Wills on “The Heart of John Middleton” (December of 1850) that “The name I have given it, expresses it better than any other I can think of” (*Letters* 6:231). For Dickens this is a routine act of packaging, wherein the stories are given to him as raw material, to be finished, formatted, and titled such that they are prepared for marketing under the brand of *Household Words*. His capacity for idiosyncratic attention to detail is evident in a letter to Wills during the period of *North and South*’s serialization: although Dickens claims to “write hastily: having several letters to dispatch” he is still able to be particular as to the formatting of the novel. “I hope the first portion is not printed Part I. It ought to be, ‘Chapter’” he instructs (7:403).

And this practice continues for “The Cranford Papers,” as Dickens writes to Gaskell in December 1851, “I have called it ‘A Love-Affair at Cranford’, and sent it off to the Printer” (6:558). Gaskell’s letters are explicit regarding her ignorance of titles, as she says to Forster in a letter dated May 1853, “I did not know what ‘Friends in Need’ was, at first; you know the HW people always make titles for me” (*Further Letters* 87). Without the “at Cranford” suffix Gaskell almost misrecognizes her own story; this fact confirms both the level of Dickens’s agency, in managing and distributing the texts, and their potential for independent states of existence. Gaskell’s phrasing, that the editors “make titles” for her, suggests her authorial distance from the details of magazine publication, as though in her role as creator she does not worry about trivial matters like titles, as long as the content of the

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79 See also *Letters* vol. 6 pp. 188 n.1, where reference is made to Gaskell’s thought that “The Well of Pen-Morfa” would have been called “Pen-Morfa” before Dickens “must have decided that the title” be altered.
story is as she desires. It also, more importantly, attests to the contingency of each story as a
 textual object: “Friends in Need” is unrecognizable to its author when it has passed through
 the title-making phase. As an individual story it is being packaged into a new context and its
 meaning is becoming dependent on its situation as a part of *Household Words*; the market
 story is a product of, and testament to, mid-Victorian periodical printing as a collaborative,
 interpersonal enterprise.80

“The Cranford Papers” were begun, and continued, in response to various market
 forces exerting themselves on Gaskell and, to a lesser extent, Dickens: the demands of a
 weekly journal, an audience’s interest in an ongoing collection of tales, and Dickens’s
 preference for Gaskell as a contributor to *Household Words*. Thus “The Cranford Papers”
 first functioned as market stories within *Household Words*, filling out an issue, providing the
 weekly quotient of fiction, and leaving readers both with an unspecified desire for another,
 and somewhat satiated by an episode’s conclusion. They came into being in a periodicals
 market that was driven by interest in both supplying and generating demand, but by
 remaining unmarked and entirely without signposts they challenged typical models for
 unrestrained consumption.

I have argued that Gaskell wrote the first several “Cranford Papers” as an exercise in

80 *Cranford* was not reviewed until its publication in a single volume, which was announced in *The Athenaeum*
as well as *The Literary Gazette* in the week of June 18th, 1853. Henry Fothergill Chorley reviews the volume
within a week, calling it a “collection of sketches” and stating that Gaskell “has wrought it out just enough and
not too much” (qtd. in Easson 194). Chorley’s references to generic disunity reveal that the spaces between and
among different “Cranford Papers” were still visible to its first audience. Other reviews emphasize duration, or
lack thereof. In a letter from 1865 Ruskin tells her: “I do not know when I have read a more finished little piece
of study of human nature (a very great and good thing when it is not spoiled). Nor was I ever more sorry to
come to a book’s end. I can’t think why you left it off!” (qtd. in Easson 198). Charlotte Bronte echoes his
sentiment, but from a markedly different time and place when she writes to Gaskell on May 22nd, 1852: “I read
‘Visiting at Cranford’ with that sort of pleasure which seems always too brief in its duration: I wished the paper
had been twice as long” (qtd. in Easson 193). Bronte is responding to the serial publication of Gaskell’s work,
specifically “Visiting at Cranford,” which appeared in *Household Words* on April 3rd, 1852. All of these
contemporary records construct value as something perceived in (and increased through) the practice of
restraint.
form, specifically a meditational dwelling on things, situations, and their relationships to other things, situations, and people. The products of this experiment are visible in the way that different objects have certain uses, and these uses are carefully designed to maximize value in most “Cranford Papers.” Value in “The Cranford Papers” is dissociated from plot, and resonates around not fragments, but small wholes: the orange, the letter, the bundle of string are all self-contained, but relatively empty of worth until they are picked up and processed idiosyncratically. These resonating values articulate a model of contingency that is reflected in and through the form of the market story, here “The Cranford Papers” as a bundle of small wholes that appear, not according to anyone else’s schedule, but sporadically and piecemeal. Gaskell’s composition follows Herrnstein Smith’s model of artistic creation as a paradigm of evaluative activity insofar as the moment of completion is “a temporary truce among contending forces, achieved at the point of exhaustion.” Gaskell is finished with a story “at the point when she simply has something else—more worthwhile—to do: when, in other words, the time and energy she would have to give to further tinkering, testing, and adjustment are no longer compensated for by an adequately rewarding sense of continuing interest the process or increased satisfaction in the product” (Herrnstein Smith 44). This moment occurs at the end of every story as an expression of a certain ‘situation’ in Cranford and, on a larger scale, at the moment between the first and second halves, when Gaskell decides (however consciously), to deviate from the cultivated pattern and fall into a more familiar model of novelistic writing. It is no longer necessary, worthwhile, or in her interest to prolong the open-ended structure. However, in doing so she has begun to demarcate the forms of the market story.
“Across the Verdant Lawns”:

Arrangement as Contingency in Margaret Oliphant’s “Dinglefield Stories”

“I remember making a kind of pretence to myself that I had to think it over, to make a great decision, to give up what hopes I might have had of doing now my very best, and to set myself steadily to make as much money as I could ... there is no doubt that it was much more congenial to me to drive on and keep everything going ... than it ever would have been to labour with an artist’s fervour and concentration to produce a masterpiece.”

—Margaret Oliphant 81

This ongoing articulation of the mid-Victorian periodical market story has established self-reflexivity, an awareness of a narrative’s constructed state, as a perpetual occupation throughout the tales and one of the genre’s key features. Christopher refers directly to the editor of “the present journal” All the Year Round; and Trollope insists that readers “avoid the fault of connecting the personages of the tale … with any editor or with any ladies known to such readers either personally or by name” (Dickens 48, Trollope 366). One of the results of this self-consciousness, as we have seen, is a text that insistently evinces and draws attention to its own production, specifically the labour of writing and publishing. Self-reflexivity forces attention to how the story is getting told as a time-consuming, painstaking process. Mary Smith is highly aware of her own intrusions into the narrative world, Christopher is beset by anxiety, and Trollope’s editor is almost as adept at complaining as he is at editing. Moreover, in the previous examples attention to labour often took very material forms, as Christopher scoffs at Somebody’s “smeary” writing, noticing time and again how he spills ink on all of his possessions. Less explicitly, Mary’s attention to her own writing is channelled through the idiosyncratic practices of her subjects: the Cranfordians’ careful attention to the preservation of scraps (of paper, string, or fabric) models an economical consumption that manifests the narrator’s valuation of stories. For Trollope’s editor, neat handwriting is inversely related to literary ability, and unread manuscripts occupy a

81 Colby, Equivocal 122.
menacing corner of his office, often ignored but seldom forgotten. Each author also uses these tangible concerns to explore an abstract agenda: Trollope probes the weight of personal inclinations on the sphere of periodical production, Dickens evinces an anxiety about exchange value, and Gaskell prescribes an exemplary system of careful consumption.

In Margaret Oliphant’s stories about life in the fictional village of Dinglefield, concerns about work and writing are yet more implicit than they were in Gaskell. Four stories which were printed intermittently over twenty months between 1868 and 1869 in the *Cornhill*, “My Neighbour Nelly,” “Lady Denzil,” “The Stockbroker at Dinglewood,”82 and “Mrs. Merridew’s Fortune,” are discrete episodes in the common setting of a fictional village called Dinglefield, and insofar as they are a collection of stories united by a linking mechanism Oliphant’s narratives dovetail with “The Cranford Papers,” the Christmas Numbers, and “An Editor’s Tales.”83 The shared fictional place, mentioned in the first sentence if not the title of every story, localizes the action around a communal space. Importantly, this is a space that often feels like an absent centre (as will be discussed below), which reflects the market story’s value-in-context. And yet, Oliphant’s tales do not mount an argument for the destabilization of genre, like those of Dickens and Trollope. Nor do they, like “The Cranford Papers,” unfurl a detailed alternative economy of objects valued primarily through consumption. The stories are concerned with valuation not in terms of objects and

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82 Oliphant was notoriously imprecise about character and place names, as we will see again below. During the third Dinglefield story the setting is actually referred to as ‘Dinglewood,’ though in every other respect it is identical with the village described in the other three stories.

83 These are not the only stories Oliphant set in the fictional town of Dinglefield and had Mrs. Mulgrave narrate; they are followed, significantly later, by a series that continues and re-affirms the open-ended possibility of the market story form. The dates of these later tales fall outside of the purview of this study, and, as they continue the patterns established by the first four tales, I have considered it prudent to restrict my discussion to these formative examples. Eventually a number of these tales (though not all of them) are collected as *Neighbours on the Green* and published by MacMillan in 1889. Further stories include: “Lady Isabella” (*Cornhill*, April-May 1871), “The Scientific Gentleman” (*Cornhill*, Nov-Dec 1872), “The Barley Mow” (*The Graphic*, Christmas 1877), “An Elderly Romance” (*Cornhill*, Nov 1879), and “My Faithful Johnny” (*Cornhill*, Nov-Dec 1880).
their use, but in terms of configuration and arrangement: of spaces, people, and hierarchies. On the surface, Oliphant’s “Dinglefield stories” are unsurprising tales of village life and domestic drama. Two star-crossed lovers are united, a young couple falls from wealth into poverty, and a hardworking family receives a well-deserved inheritance. The primary tensions involve familial relationships, romance, or money, and at the level of plot resolution is both achievable and deserved. However, these stories also draw attention to acts of telling by persistently cataloguing arrangement and proximity. Mrs. Mulgrave is the key figure—the one constant—throughout the four stories and the defining characteristic of her ‘position’ is that she is an embedded, first-person narrator. Mimicking the review, Oliphant’s stories embody the market story’s contingency and separateness in a way that illustrates the degree to which the form has been integrated into the discourses of Victorian periodical short fiction.

In a key moment in “Lady Denzil” Oliphant explicitly interrogates the question of position and value. Mrs. Mulgrave wonders about her role as messenger for her friend:

> When I found myself driving along the wet roads, with the rain sweeping so in the horses’ faces that it was all the half-blinded coachman could do to keep them going against the wind, I was so bewildered by my own position that I felt stupid for the moment. I was going to the Tower, to see Sergeant Gray, in confinement for disrespect to his superior officer—going to persuade him to exert himself to take his child from his wife’s custody, and give her to his mother, whom he did not know. I had not even heard how it was that little Mary had been stolen away. I had taken that for granted, in face of the

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84 While valuation has a similar definition to ‘evaluate,’ I choose to use the former term more consistently in this discussion for its implied emphasis on the positive act or dimension of evaluation, as opposed to the negative.
immediate call upon me. I had indeed been swept up, as it were, by the strong wind of emotion, and carried away, and thrust forward into a position I could not understand. Then I recognized the truth of Lady Denzil’s words. I had nobody to restrain me: no husband at home to find fault with anything I might do; nobody to wonder, or fret, or be annoyed by the burden I had taken upon me. The recollection made my heart swell a little, not with pleasure. And yet it was very true. Poor Mr. Mulgrave, had he been living, was a man who would have been sure to find fault. It is dreary to think of oneself as of so little importance to any one; but, perhaps, one ought to think more than one does, that if the position is a dreary one, it has its benefits too. One is free to do what one pleases,—I could answer to myself; I had no one else to answer to. At such a moment there was an advantage in that. (453)

Mrs. Mulgrave here exposes herself as a rather unperceptive agent, as she “had not even heard” parts of the story that led her to her current position, in which she is “bewildered” and does “not understand.” She even admits to taking things “for granted.” The language of the passage aligns her with the horses driving the coach: just as the rain is “sweeping” in their “faces” Mrs. Mulgrave has been “swept up,” she says, “in face of” the call made upon her. The horses must be kept moving “against the wind,” and our narrator has been carried by “the strong wind” of emotion. Repetition suggests that, like the dumb animals, Mrs. Mulgrave is “thrust” into a situation which she cannot comprehend. The animals are controlled and driven by external forces; Mrs. Mulgrave uses a passive construction to emphasize that she is being moved rather than moving herself: she “had indeed been swept up … and carried away, and thrust forward.” This is a dirty and unpleasant errand, and Lady
Denzil, Sir Thomas, and even the maid all stay at home in warmth and comfort, while Mrs. Mulgrave travels through bad weather into an alien environment. In this passage she is explicitly, physically and emotionally, devalued.

What Mrs. Mulgrave *can* see, if not a complete picture of why she occupies a particular position in a particular configuration, is one angle that emphasizes her dissociation. The construction of the passage highlights both multiplicity and contingency as characteristics of valuation. The “truth” of her friend’s request is that Mrs. Mulgrave is expendable, and of no permanent value to another human being: there is “nobody to restrain [her] … nobody to wonder, or fret, or be annoyed” by any choice she makes. As a childless widow Mrs. Mulgrave is relatively unmoored, uncommitted, and alone; no one is in closer proximity to her than Lady Denzil at this time. Without her own immediate family she becomes emptied of individual meaning and capable of operating as a vessel to promote, organize, or solidify the value of others. The value of the vessel is also the value of the reviewer, and Mrs. Mulgrave initially admits it to be a “dreary” consideration, to be “of so little importance” to others—literally, of so little value. However, unlike the singular, accurate “true light” through which Mrs. Mulgrave mistakenly believes that she sees the lives of her poorer neighbours, this is not the only “true” aspect of the situation (“LD” 435). In recognizing and articulating an alternative point of view, Mrs. Mulgrave acknowledges that there is always an inverse side to valuation. Simultaneously, the language of address shifts to an impersonal pronoun as she speculates that “one ought to think more than one does” about the benefits of such an unencumbered position. “One is free to do what one pleases”: the anonymous language allows Mrs. Mulgrave to repeat her point in a more specific mode as she continues, “I could answer to myself; I had no one else to answer to.” She can choose to
whom she will be of value and how, and her repetition emphasizes assertion as an act of valuation, as Herrnstein Smith notes, “the value of a literary work is continuously produced and re-produced by the very acts of implicit and explicit evaluation that are frequently invoked as ‘reflecting’ its value” (52). Mrs. Mulgrave creates her own valuation through an act of construction that claims to be reflective rather than constitutive. Finally, the narrator acknowledges that this “advantage”—this value—is visible at “such a moment”: at a particular time, which is not eternal or fixed, but changing and contingent, the product of “a continuously fluctuating or shifting system” (Herrnstein Smith 31). Value is here acknowledged as relative, based on position and temporality, and perhaps as transient as the coach that carries Mrs. Mulgrave to Lady Denzil’s son.

**Reviewing Value**

The value of the narrating figure has been implicit in Trollope, Dickens, and Gaskell. However, it is the primary interest in Oliphant’s stories, and functions metaphorically to represent the position of the reviewer as an arbiter of literary value. Reviewers, editors, circulating libraries, and readers: all exist along a spectrum of assessment, continuing the movement begun at the point of creation (itself an evaluative activity). Reviewing is an extension of the threads pursued in the other chapters, and a useful tool to bring to light the market story-ness of Oliphant’s four texts. Like market stories, reviews are compelled by something outside of themselves, namely the work of which they take stock. A review is a self-conscious evaluative piece of writing in a specific genre, and in the mid-Victorian periodicals market it comes preloaded with a set of “rhetorical tools” and “ideological assumptions” (Liddle 101). To be useful, to fulfil its generic function, a review must have a point. It should come down on one side of the question or another, and ‘the question’ is
always related to value (is the work *good*? does it *succeed*?). The easiest way to accomplish this task in the 1850s and 1860s may have been to assume the persona of an “omniscient public oracle”: authoritative, informed, and clear-sighted (Liddle 103). Often this perspective can shift focus, however slyly, away from the text under review and towards the reviewer him or herself, as Thomas Pinney suggests that George Eliot eventually “learned” to “take advantage of the licence given the Victorian journalist to express himself [sic] with magisterial anonymity under pretext of noticing other men’s books” (qtd. in Liddle 104). According to this model, whether favourable or dismissive, the reviewer transfers his or her own personal values and perspectives to the public through the medium of the text under review; the text itself, though, is a hollow centre, functioning only to enable the messages requiring transmission by the authoritative literary figure. Thus reviewing as an evaluative practice is skewed away from the thing itself, towards a contextual element that assembles and constitutes the process of valuation. A review exists as a kind of appendage, operating primarily in relation to something else; like the market story it is highly contingent.

Oliphant began reviewing early in her literary career, and continued the practice throughout a variety of forms and publications. Her major occupation was as a regular reviewer for *Blackwood’s*, which began in 1854 and carried on for almost half a century, and she often composed reviews simultaneously as she wrote novels and biographies (Jay 15, Robinson 199). Writing more than two hundred critical articles and essays for this single publication on a vast range of subjects including art, travel, theology, and literature, reviewing seemed suited to her particular talents, namely “unlimited energy and industry, a capacity for enormous reading, adaptability to almost any subject-matter, and a shrewd critical sense” (Colby 183). However, any consideration of what constitutes a “critical
sense” immediately calls attention to the reviewer’s mode, point of view, and values.

Evidence of Oliphant’s attempts to theorize the work of the literary critic can be found in an omnibus article on “New Books” printed in *Blackwood’s* in 1871, where she wrote of the reviewer:

He must have the power of close observation—the eye to see, the skill to analyse; he must combine much positive knowledge, and confidence in his own power and judicial authority, with so much intellectual modesty as will make him ready to perceive excellence, and, above all, he must have true sympathetic insight. (qtd. in Colby, *Equivocal* 187)

This passage suggests that closeness and clarity of vision are being privileged, and clearly acknowledges the agency of the reviewer to interpret properly; the skill belongs as much to the reader as to the writer of the piece under review. The reviewer is also constructed passively (“ready to perceive”) in a way that elides the more intrusive critical activities, especially combining “much positive knowledge” and a strong amount of “confidence in his own power and ... authority.” As I have already shown, Trollope’s editor belies this possibility insofar as an editorial reading and an act of review are similarly evaluative: his responses and perceptions are always affected and channelled by more than just the text itself. We will see these patterns of judgment and disavowal repeated through Oliphant’s character Mrs. Mulgrave.

In an 1894 letter to William Blackwood Oliphant sets out a plan for a series of reviews that echo the Dinglefield stories in multiple respects. As she proposes: “I had been thinking of perhaps offering to you a series of perhaps four articles to appear, at intervals called The Spectator or the Looker-on or some such title… I dont [sic] know if you would
care for them, but I have rather a fancy for doing them” (qtd. in Robinson 202). I have removed Oliphant’s description of the content of these proposed pieces, because it is their structure that warrants attention. They will appear at intervals, but not necessarily according to a regular structure, and they are something for which she has a fancy—if she has a fancy for writing reviews this suggests her interest in thinking about the process and the likelihood that she might incorporate it into other aspects of her work. Moreover, “the Spectator” as a possible title emphasizes the position of a viewer in a way that is reminiscent of Mrs. Mulgrave, who more than once refers to herself as a spectator of her friends’ lives. Most resonantly, “the Looker-on” as a proposed title codifies not only the act of viewing, but standing-place.

In making numerous parallels to reviewing work I want to assert that, in some ways, Oliphant’s stories can be read as reviews written in fiction: Mrs. Mulgrave embodies the reviewer who observes and synthesizes in order to report outward, and her subject matter is various, disconnected, and not really centred. I construct the “Dinglefield Stories” this way, as a set of fictionalized reviews, in part to emphasize the functionality of the market story. We have seen Trollope mining his work for material that will be salacious to readers wanting a glimpse “behind the veil” of the editorial office; in a complimentary way Gaskell’s “Cranford Papers” were suited to her particular position and availabilities during a single two-year period. Dickens’s Christmas Numbers are the strongest example of this, filling as they do a place on the Christmas market that would have seemed a shame to waste. Finally, Oliphant writes always under pressure, and perhaps the modes and manners of the review article come most readily to hand.
Simultaneously, I do not want to suggest that Oliphant was entirely self-conscious in these generic choices; in fact, part of my argument is that the ‘model’ of the market story has entered the ether of the mid-Victorian periodical sphere and become an available mode in a way that enables its practitioners to operate somewhat inadvertently. Trollope, writing contemporaneously with Oliphant, provides a striking example of how self-awareness and generic choice can combine to produce a blatant articulation of the market’s principles and valuations. It was useful to begin with Trollope and move backwards, through Dickens and Gaskell, where generic choices became somewhat less precisely-formulated (“the phase of assembly may of course be largely unconscious” Fowler suggests) yet still meaningful and resonant, in order to arrive back in the late 1860s and see these patterns at work in Oliphant’s texts (159). Oliphant may be the least self-aware of these four authors about her formal choices. Yet this serves to reveal the importance of the market: a choice of genre always compels some consideration of form, and Oliphant can choose the set of associated short stories with ease, not having to undertake an exploration or justification of the form while working in it. This exposes the extent to which the market story has become one of the discourses on hand for professional writers in the periodical context.

A bit of history will be helpful here. Margaret Oliphant is most known for her prodigious output; in many ways she functions as a female equivalent to Anthony Trollope. She wrote over 125 books and countless pieces of periodical prose, was intent upon her industrious work habits, and had to face criticism about the relationship between the quantity

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85 Ironically, she herself made this comparison and found her own position wanting. As the Colbys note, “Her principal complaint against her publishers was that she could never make as much money as she would have liked with her writing. She was never in a good bargaining position, always desperate for money and forced to accept the first offer … ‘Anthony Trollope’s list of his own earnings gave me a great shock—for he had evidently got twice and sometimes three times as much as I ever did. And though I suppose at the beginning and height of his career he was far more popular than I ever was, I don’t think this would be the case towards the end’” (142).
and quality of her writing. However, unlike Trollope, she found it difficult to accumulate a financial reserve. As Vineta and Robert Colby discuss in *The Equivocal Virtue*, as a writer Oliphant was always “in debt, working simultaneously on so many projects for so many publishers … Her writing was her collateral, and she paid off her debts, when she paid them, in stories and articles, rarely in cash” (140-41). Oliphant worked constantly: In 1862, for example, *Salem Chapel* (a novel in her Carlingford series) was issued in monthly parts in *Blackwood’s* (Feb 1862-Jan 1863), *The Last of the Mortimers: A Story in Two Voices* was printed in three volumes by Hurst and Blackett, and *The Life of Edward Irving, Minister of the National Scotch Church, London* appeared in two volumes from the same publisher. Simultaneously she wrote eight articles for *Maga*, including her famous review of “Sensation Novels” which appeared in May 1862.86 It was not until the early 1880s that she sought a more regular situation, writing to George Lillie Craik that it would “relieve [her] a little from the necessity of perpetual writing,” since she found that as she aged she had “more and more desire of a regular quarter day, a regular occupation, and so much money coming in” (qtd. in Colby, *Equivocal* 173). Propositional letters to Messrs. Blackwood—“I shall be very glad if you could give me the price of two miscellaneous articles which I shall send you within the next two months”—were not unusual (qtd. in Colby 34). Oliphant covered a lot of terrain in the middle of the century and, as the epigraph to this chapter suggests, it was not always unpleasant to her to think that she sacrificed the pinnacles of artistic achievement for a professional reputation and a quick return on her investment. Harold Biffin she was not.

Partly this intense cycle arose through circumstances: at her husband’s death Oliphant was left with two children, pregnant, abroad, and in debt. Over the course of her career she suffered many personal tragedies, including the deaths of her children, and had to continue earning money to support her entire family throughout any and all hardships. Accordingly she wrote in many different genres for numerous organs and several publishers: review articles for *Maga*, novels for publication under the *Blackwood’s* house label, history, translation or biography for Hurst and Blackett, and stories for *The Graphic, Scribner’s Magazine*, or *The Cornhill*. Oliphant’s relationship with the literary marketplace, then, reveals its shaping influence. Though she was “reluctant” to work in the sensation genre, stating in the 1862 review that its effects are “invariably attained by violent and illegitimate means” which are “contradictory to actual life” (565), it appeared that “the demands of the literary market for sensation novels, stories of intrigue and violent action, were persistent” and eventually she “yielded to pressure” (Colby, *Equivocal* 135). Oliphant was not a writer to make claims to freedom from influence, and the persistent situational pulls on her decisions to compose reinforce the role and importance of the market-driven story.

Thus her contributions to the *Cornhill Magazine* do not stand out from her continuous volley of production. In some respects, it is difficult to say that the *Cornhill* would even have been a highly particularized placement for Oliphant. The magazine certainly carried a great deal of prestige when it was first introduced to the Victorian middle-class readership of 1859, warranting initial printings in excess of 100,000, and keeping its editor Thackeray up all night counting his subscriptions (Colby, “Into the Blue Water” 217). However, by 1868 when Oliphant’s four stories appeared, it was no longer such a resounding success. After

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87 For more on the *Cornhill Magazine’s* inaugural success, see Robert A. Colby, “‘Into the Blue Water’: The First year of *Cornhill Magazine* Under Thackeray,” Barbara Quinn Schmidt, and Andrew Maunder.
Thackeray’s departure in 1862, sales continued to drop so consistently that not even Leslie Stephen, who assumed the editorship in April of 1871, could revive them. The most praise critics give the later *Cornhill* is that it remained “a reliable literary miscellany” (Schmidt 207). Moreover, the magazine did no literary reviewing of its own: for Oliphant’s Dinglefield stories, with their implicit argument about the act of fictional reviewing, to be printed here, suggests an attempt to comment on the subject of reviewing from a textual distance. However, given her prolific habits and dealings with a variety of publishers, it could also very well be that *The Cornhill* placement was accidental, or somewhat meaningless.

Moreover, no historical evidence remains of the production and printing of these stories. Whereas Dickens wrote many letters detailing the processes and pains involved with soliciting, editing, and compiling the Christmas Numbers, Trollope leaves behind a series of letters and reflections on *Saint Pauls* magazine and his work as editor, and even Gaskell makes references to titles and the work of re-publishing her “Cranford Papers,” we have no such evidence for Oliphant. Between 1868 and 1869 her letters refer to a proposed book about religion on the continent, a paper on Richardson, and essays on the period of George the Second; nothing is mentioned about short stories and there are no letters to anyone associated with *The Cornhill*. This dearth of account suggests that these stories were indistinguishable from her continuous stream of work, and this is significant in two ways. First, insofar as it attests to their real conditions: compelled, somewhat mechanical labour that is far from the idealized forms of inspiration and composition narrated by Trollope’s editor in “The Panjandrum.” Second, by affirming that the discrete, dissociated set of short stories hung together only by a first-person peripheral narrating figure could be written off-

hand, as it were, Oliphant’s stories attest to the presence of the market story at this mid-Victorian moment.

**Perspective: the Engaged Spectator**

“It was a curious little Paradise that one looked into over the ha-ha across the verdant lawns that encircled the Lodge,” Mrs. Mulgrave comments at the opening of “Lady Denzil,” highlighting not only the scene in front of her but also the position from which it is viewed (431). Perspective was an ongoing preoccupation in nineteenth-century novels, as authors and critics tried to ascertain the ideal point of view for prose fiction. When Thackeray’s omniscient narrator speaks directly in the opening pages of *Vanity Fair* about the “acute observer” who “might have recognized” the small faces in the window of Miss Pinkerton’s academy for young ladies, he draws attention to that observer’s standing-place (1).

Presumably this figure is positioned close enough to the scene to pick out such details from “the narrow windows of the stately old brick house” and yet not far enough back to see the house in its relation to neighbouring structures or the larger street (1). ‘Larger’ perspectives enable more expansive views of a scene, but at the expense of its smaller elements like faces in windows. Building on an understanding of subjectivity as inescapable and human perception as “always structured upon a relationship of perceiver to perceived—upon a point of view,” which is a position enacted through Oliphant’s stories, the texts use Mrs.

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89 Mrs. Mulgrave prompts readers to ask what constitutes perspective. As a noun the word can be modified as either positive or negative; one speaks of ‘gaining’ or ‘losing’ perspective on a situation or scene. In either case perspective concerns the “appearance of viewed objects” with respect to relative position and distance from the viewer (“perspective”). There is no final or ultimately superior position from which to view an object; perspective shifts and changes as a viewer moves around in relation to what is viewed. The viewer’s position, or standing-place, is important; in this discussion I will favour the latter term when referring to Mrs. Mulgrave, as its connotations of physical location support my argument. At the same time, one can ‘have perspective’ without that view being ultimately capacious or objective. As used here, perspective implies an ability to see that can either be present or lacking, thus it also means “a realistic sense of proportion” (“perspective”). Admittedly, ‘realistic’ is also an equivocal term, and while one tendency may be to equate ‘having perspective’ with greater distance, too much distance from one’s subject can result in “distortion” or “idealization” (Anderson 3). Going too far back can hamper one’s ability to see small details.
Mulgrave’s perspective to comment on evaluation (Lanser 4). Throughout the Dinglefield stories Mrs. Mulgrave attempts to judge, codify, and assign value to the subject matter she narrates. However, her efforts to do so are repeatedly problematized by her positionality: her stance, moments of extreme proximity, and unusual physical access to her neighbours’ lives draw attention to her critical distance, or lack thereof.

Thus point of view invokes valuation but also models—or ideals—of critical distance. As Amanda Anderson discusses in *The Powers of Distance*, in the Victorian period the concept of detachment was at the centre of debate. Some writers and philosophers wished to “valorize” certain forms of detachment and promote an “ideal” of critical distance while others “displayed a complex ambivalence toward the powers of modern distance,” and the question was by no means settled (5, 4). Even today, pragmatist critics (Herrnstein Smith is one) dismiss detachment as “an illusory ideal” while its defenders assert the “critically transformative effects” of a sustained “interrogation of cultural norms” (Anderson 24-26). While I am wary of the “all or nothing” position Anderson identifies as aligned with the “frustrated idealism” that dismisses critical efforts to attain objectivity, as a literary critic I am more invested in exposing contingencies and situations of entrenchment within the current oeuvre of short fiction criticism than in attempting to formulate an ideal of critical distance (Anderson 32). Moreover, this impulse mirrors my subject matter: it is my aim to expose the ways in which Oliphant’s short fiction is itself arguing for the contingency of valuation and the subjectivity of cultural hierarchies.

The Dinglefield stories are sprinkled with comments about fiction and art—the locale is “such a village as exists chiefly in novels;” a character is “the highest light in the picture, as a painter would have said,” or does not resemble “a heroine of romance”—that draw
attention to their textual status (“NN” 210, “LD” 443, “MM” 332-33). Mrs. Mulgrave is not self-conscious, but I am reading Oliphant’s self-awareness into this careful configuration of her narrator as an unknowing reviewer. She frequently operates as a lynchpin figure, accessing and managing the sensitive affairs of her friends with tact and efficiency, and with either extreme physical or rare emotional proximity. At the same time, she occasionally comments self-pityingly on the difficulties of her position. Comments such as “I have had a good many things put into my hands to manage, but I don’t think I ever had anything so difficult as this,” and “It would be hard to imagine a more difficult position than that in which I found myself” forge the link between self-consciousness and positionality (“SD” 327, “MM” 336). As a self-conscious embedded narrator drawing the reader’s attention to his or her own proximity to her domestic subject matter, Mrs. Mulgrave keeps this position in the reader’s mind, and by so doing enacts Ludwig Wittgenstein’s observation that “The language-game of reporting can be given such a turn that a report is not meant to inform the hearer about its subject matter but about the person making the report” (190). Each story contains a scene wherein Mrs. Mulgrave witnesses something very private and very revealing in a friend’s life, and in each case her proximity is, as well as being crucial, either suspect or absurd.

In “My Neighbour Nelly” Mrs. Mulgrave employs figures of physical proximity to establish her narrative authority. In describing the arrangement of the houses in detail, particularly how her cottage faces the house in which two sisters live with their father, the

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90 Her awareness of her own position is evident through several self-reflexive references: she sometimes feels like a spy, sometimes calls herself merely a spectator, and sometimes refers to the difficulty of the things she has to manage.

91 Though, as Lanser indicates, narrative authority does not necessarily mean reliability. The question of authorization concerns “the relationship of the narrator to the story he or she is attempting to tell” while reliability is one of mimetic authority, where “some degree of mimetic authority is [whenever possible] granted to the narrating voice ... readers conventionally try to ‘make sense’ of (infer felicity in) the most frustrating instances of narrative incompetence” (157, 170).
Admiral, she offers an assurance of narrative reliability. Her house stands with its “gable-end” facing the Green, and it fronts the hedge which is “the boundary” of the Admiral’s grounds: his “big gate and [her] small one were close together” (211). The implications of this physical closeness are made explicit when Mrs. Mulgrave reveals that “If the hedge had been cut down, I should have commanded a full view of the lawn before his house … and nobody could have gone out or come in without my inspection” (211). The Admiral’s family and Mrs. Mulgrave even discuss this possibility, and refrain from removing the hedge only out of fear that should something happen to either of the neighbours, new inhabitants, whose inspection “might not be desirable,” could take up residence (211). Mrs. Mulgrave reports this discussion to demonstrate her sense of her position as a very privileged observer. The family only keeps the hedge out of a fear that someone else might be a voyeur, not because they wish to keep her at any distance. She is as good as family, and she wants her readers to know it.

What is more, the hedge itself is a physical thing as well as a figure for the relationship between observer and observed. The section of hedge that runs between their two dwellings is not “a thick holly wall” like that which encloses the rest of her property, but “a picturesque hedge of hawthorn” (211). This partition is ornamental, being “very sweet” in the spring and full of morning glory (“convolvulus”) in autumn. The particular section of hedge is also characterized by “gaps … and openings”—it is neither solid nor opaque. As a representation of the narrator’s position as observer of her peers, the hedge establishes that Mrs. Mulgrave, while being physically separate from their lives, has a privileged (if partial) access, one which is pleasant to both parties and sought on both sides. Mrs. Mulgrave has a partition with a view, as Nelly (Mrs. Mulgrave is careful to specify which sister to indirectly
reassert her value) even “made a round cutting just opposite my window, and twined the honeysuckle into a frame for it” (211). The hole in the hedge is crucial not only as a clearly-demarcated opening, or window, but as one framed by honeysuckle; Mrs. Mulgrave’s perspective is shaped and tunnelled through sweetness and good feeling. In this way Oliphant makes literal what theorists of visual perspective such as Mieke Bal recognize, that “whenever events are presented, they are always presented from within a certain ‘vision’”; and that “Perception depends on so many factors that striving for objectivity is pointless” (Bal 142). By drawing attention to how the sisters are seen Oliphant self-consciously links standing-place to the ensuing act of valuation. Moreover, as a material thing eccentrically manipulated, the hedge is reminiscent of Cranford.

Key moments in the story thus become figured in terms of what is or is not seen (either through the hedge or around it): on the day when Martha receives a letter of proposal meant for Nelly, it is notable that the weather “prevented” Mrs. Mulgrave “from going out,” though it was “rarely that a day passed” when she did not see the sisters (215). The fog “closes in over the Green, so that you cannot see an inch before you” (215). Mrs. Mulgrave is equally surprised that the girls do not visit her, and to underscore the symbolism of the weather she speculates that perhaps the Sisters have had a visitor who has kept them away, though she has not heard any carriage, and “As for seeing, that was impossible” (215). The next day an awkward conversation with Martha ensues when the older woman learns of the young girl’s engagement; the day of the blanketing fog was the day when the misdirected letter of proposal had arrived at the Admiral’s home, and all vision became obfuscated, all possibility for seeing obscured. Martha broadcasts Llewellyn’s written assurance that his intended “must have seen how it was from the first day,” and we are not surprised to learn
that Martha, in fact, did not see, this being Mrs. Mulgrave’s province alone (217, emphasis mine). The choice of words, moreover, reinforces Mrs. Mulgrave’s reading that the young man’s affections are misdirected.

Prior to Llewellyn’s arrival at Dinglefield Green for his first meeting with his betrothed, our narrator grows anxious; “Sometimes I fancied that I could read in his face, at the first look, what it all meant” (221). Not coincidentally, she finds herself in the Admiral’s living room when he arrives. Her self-conscious statement, “I knew I should have gone away, but I did not” (222), underlines her awkward proximity to the family in this private moment; here Mrs. Mulgrave’s ability to see and read is as much about physical access as interpretive skill. When she is momentarily alone with Llewellyn, the correct interpretation of his true feelings seems hardly difficult to determine: “Notwithstanding the ruddy firelight, I could see he was quite haggard with the awful suspicion that must have flashed upon him” (222). Mrs. Mulgrave’s perspective is supremely privileged as he beseechingly asks her “for God’s sake, tell me, what does this mean?” (222). She clarifies that Martha, not Nelly, is his betrothed, and his reaction—“He covered his face with his hands, and gave a groan”—confirms Mrs. Mulgrave’s interpretation of events beyond any shadow of a doubt (223). In this moment Oliphant makes reading easy for Mrs. Mulgrave, allowing her to suggest that a close, seeing observer can be a ‘good reader’ insofar as she can accurately ascribe value judgment.

Simultaneously, though, we are aware that part of this accuracy is due to close proximity, and Oliphant’s placement of Mrs. Mulgrave in the room shapes the scene’s meaning. To this Mrs. Mulgrave is oblivious.

While at times alternately enabling or limiting valuation, point of view thus reinforces the subjectivity of Mrs. Mulgrave’s embedded, peripheral, first-person narration. The
culmination of “My Neighbour Nelly” shows that this subjectivity can skew Mrs. Mulgrave’s reading and her actions to a troubling degree. The characters in Dinglefield, namely Mrs. Mulgrave, the Admiral, and the Sisters, work themselves into a frenzy of misunderstanding and potentially disastrous misalliances as time passes. Llewellyn has stayed away on pretence of work, but eventually he must return and fulfill his engagement. As this time draws closer even the Admiral, though “not very quick-sighted,” can sense that “something was wrong” with Nelly (227, 228). Mrs. Mulgrave grows certain that Martha either prefers her former suitor Major Frost (who has returned to town with the financial wherewithal to marry, which he previously lacked), or does not care which man she weds, liking them both with equal detachment. As Mrs. Mulgrave determines to intervene rather than observe, to say something to Martha and potentially alter the course of events, she thinks of her own suffering in addition to Nelly’s. Ostensibly, Nelly’s position as sister of the bride is uppermost in her mind. Mrs. Mulgrave narrates that she thinks of “the bridal pageant” and of all the ceremonial details to be gone through, and she “knew all that was in [Nelly’s] mind, as well as if she had told me” (232). Speaking of the wedding itself she claims that being the “closest spectator” is “very hard to bear”; she says this of Nelly, but she knows it from first-hand experience (232). The younger sister will be “the witness” of “everything,” just as she has been to the preceding drama (232). Thus Mrs. Mulgrave moves from supposedly disinterested to decidedly self-interested observer, motivated by her own feelings of unease and desperation. The most she admits about her own emotions is that “The sight of [Martha’s] placidity made me desperate” (232), yet the very fact that she becomes the principle actor makes the scene about her to a degree. She is no longer observing and recording, but acting and interfering in the culture. While readers would expect, based on the
rapport Mrs. Mulgrave has self-consciously established, that Nelly would remain her primary object, she states that it is “not even Nelly I was thinking of” (233). At this juncture in the story Mrs. Mulgrave’s allegiances and motivations are becoming muddled. She does not go so far as to make herself the decided centre of activity, but where before this position was undoubtedly occupied by Nelly, the “little nut-brown maid’s” primacy is no longer assured. By undercutting Mrs. Mulgrave’s narrative sincerity and authority Oliphant decentres the tale.

Mrs. Mulgrave is not, necessarily, an unreliable narrator. Readers have no real reason to suspect that she misrepresents facts, scenes, or events. However, she is limited, and her perspective is the only lens through which the stories are filtered. Thus when her voice becomes suspicious through a rhetoric of disavowal and self-aggrandizement we become attuned to Oliphant’s formal operations. In “Lady Denzil” this negotiation takes place primarily with Sir Thomas and is figured through a visual matrix of gazes. Lady Denzil throws a “brilliant” lawn party at which little Mary (the child on whose behalf Mrs. Mulgrave will later go to the tower) sits on the lawn providing a “centre” to the picture (448). The beautiful scene is violently marred by a strange and slovenly woman who appears, announces herself Mary’s mother, and reveals to the crowd that Lady Denzil has a secret: “To marry that old man, she deserted her child at two years old, and never set eyes on him more” (446). This revelation figures Lady Denzil’s secret as an absence of physical viewing, someone on whom she does not “set” her “eyes”.

Meanwhile, the scene articulates a structured set of gazes. The woman, Mary’s mother, had stood “on the approach to the house … gazing” down at the party (443-44); once she enters the scene and begins to speak all of the guests “crowded round” with a shared
“look” of consternation (445); Lady Denzil stands “like a statue” in the middle of the scene, as an object, until she suddenly makes a move and an exit. Similarly, Mary’s mother is at first static with a superior vantage point, but this she sacrifices in order to enter upon and impact the scene, while Lady Denzil snaps out of her frozen position to grab little Mary and “disappear” with the child into her house, which effectively ends the action; once the objects of everyone’s gaze are no longer visible, there is nothing worth staying for. In the aftermath Sir Thomas “stood by himself,” unable “to face any one, to lift his eyes to the disturbed and fluttering crowd” (446). Meanwhile the guests stand “staring in each other’s faces” (446). Sir Thomas’s emotional pain is registered through an inability to look, while the guests who remain unaffected can freely gaze and be gazed at.

The scene constructs an “oligoptic space,” what Chris Otter describes in *The Victorian Eye* as a viewing arrangement that “lacks a central, dominant vantage point” and is instead “an arena within which a small group of people observe each other” (74). It is usually a semi-public space, here the lawn of Lady Denzil’s party, as opposed to the private domestic spaces where Mrs. Mulgrave is more used to exercising her vision. Therefore, while Mrs. Mulgrave has watched it all, and gazes at all of these figures from her vantage point as they variously gaze at and away from each other, hers is only one among “many, trivially chaotic, and unpredictable lines of sight” (Otter 74). In this way Oliphant undercuts her claims to a prophetic observation, as before the disruption she notes that “As I raised my eyes, my attention was all at once attracted by a strange figure” (443). Mrs. Mulgrave narrates herself into a position that aims towards omniscience, while Oliphant repeatedly circumscribes this authority: her involvement in events is limited, as is her privilege, thus her relationship to the story she tells is foregrounded and its status as an artifice repeatedly
stressed (Lanser 157). She tells us what she sees, but structural irony suggests that her ‘true light’ does not illuminate with accuracy. By insisting on the embeddedness of the narrator Oliphant adheres to the market story’s ideological scope and its particularized, discrete, contingent morals and acts of valuation.

A narrator is constantly reading, interpreting, processing, translating, and construing information. These processes always, necessarily, involve some alteration of source material, of the ‘what is’ into the ‘what is seen.’ What is more, they parallel and evoke the activity of reviewing, with which Oliphant had much experience. Mrs. Mulgrave draws attention to her interpretive abilities when it suits her self-championing purposes. Several times she is asked to act as translator for her friends. In “Lady Denzil” an acquaintance insists that our narrator “must tell [her] anything [she] know[s]” about Sergeant Gray after seeing him (454). Similarly, after the shocking news of Harry’s flight a distraught Ada asks her maternal friend: “What does it mean? … Oh tell me, you are our friend! What does it mean?” (“SD” 331). Mrs. Mulgrave is somewhat stymied in this overwhelming moment, feeling that her “own mind could not take it in,” but she is still better able to process the information and manage the situation than the young wife, and she keeps Ada from divulging too much information to the investigators who come calling (331). The scene perfectly mirrors Llewellyn’s anguished request to Mrs. Mulgrave in “My Neighbour Nelly,” as it began to dawn on him that he was engaged to the wrong sister, “for God’s sake, tell me, what does this mean?” (222). In this instance Mrs. Mulgrave knows exactly what has transpired and the reasons for Llewellyn’s confusion. Repeatedly, Mrs. Mulgrave must elucidate and explain for the protagonists of her stories, just as her entire act of transcription—the stories themselves—are the product of a process of decipherment.
I have begun to suggest that Mrs. Mulgrave is an unintentionally deceptive narrator, and that I think Oliphant uses her as a punching bag; this tension is showcased in the final scenes of “Lady Denzil.” Yet another “truth” of her perception is that Mrs. Mulgrave adores Lady Denzil and wants to supersede both Mary and Sergeant Gray in the old woman’s eyes. The crucial scene, where Mrs. Mulgrave visits Lady Denzil’s lost son to ask for not only the return of little Mary who has been stolen, but a son’s sympathy for his estranged parent, presents a contest between the narrator and the title character’s son, both supposedly peripheral characters who are angling for centrality. The description of the scene is lengthy, occupying over two pages of the story, and in it Mrs. Mulgrave’s narration emphasizes the power of the gaze to create sympathy, specifically hers for Sergeant Gray, and his for his mother Lady Denzil. However, at the same time Oliphant points to self-centred orbits that do not really extend sympathy beyond the realm of one’s own ego. Mrs. Mulgrave sees Sergeant Gray and forms a “rapid impression,” finding him less “refined” than she had expected, considering his mother’s noble status (454). The two immediately engage in a knowledge-related power struggle as Mrs. Mulgrave asserts that she comes from Lady Denzil, who “has told me all her story” and the son responds defensively that “If she has told you all her story … you will know how little inducement I have to listen to anything she may say” (455). Mrs. Mulgrave rebuts that Lady Denzil had told her “everything, more than you can know” and with an assertion of superior visual access: “if you had seen her [you would listen],” suggesting that an outline may be filled in by physical proximity (455). Thus she gains leave to make a brief case, to represent Lady Denzil to her unknown son; here Mrs.

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These lines foreshadow the later comments about the ‘outlines’ of Mrs. Merridew’s story, which will be discussed below, as Mrs. Mulgrave and Sergeant Gray compete to see whose picture is fuller and clearer.
Mulgrave’s importance could not be more critical. Moreover, she gives her own speech, as she makes her case, in full quotation, allowing it ample narrative space.

What finally completes the narrator’s case, bringing Sergeant Gray apparently into sympathy with his mother, is her photograph. Mrs. Mulgrave describes his response: “He gave one glance at it, then he fell back into his chair, and gazed and gazed, as if he had lost himself. He was not prepared. . . . he knitted his brows over the little picture as if it was hard to see it” (456). Mrs. Mulgrave takes this opportunity to remind readers of her keen perception when she says that “I saw how it was . . . I knew his eyes were filling with tears” though he pretends that he cannot make out the likeness (456). It is a charged moment in the story, and while Mrs. Mulgrave attempts to describe the photo, the real effect is of the tableaux: the narrator gazing at the man gazing at the photo. When Sergeant Gray finally speaks, his words indicate not what Mrs. Mulgrave had hoped, that he is full of feeling for his mother, but a rather more self-interested concern. “Why did she cast me upon the world? Why did she give me up? You are a good woman, and you are her friend. Why did she cast me away?”: the ejaculation again asks Mrs. Mulgrave to elucidate and convey information for another, but information about himself (457).

This pattern is amplified in the next part of the scene. Mrs. Mulgrave narrates that she “told him all the story,” and spends a long paragraph describing how she “gave him every detail” and how he appeared to respond: his interruptions, impressions, and reactions (457). While outlines and incomplete pictures are what she hears from others, when she herself is narrating Mrs. Mulgrave makes bald claims of completeness. Soon Mrs. Mulgrave begins to track Sergeant Gray’s “almost imperceptible” changes in response to the information she is giving him, including that of Lady Denzil’s aristocratic title. She sees Sergeant Gray “turn it
over in his mind” and imagines him “reflecting, putting this and that together.” She assumes him to be determining his attitude to his mother, who she says stands “at the bar before him” (457). The scene builds suspense, and when finally he “open[s] his lips” to speak, Sergeant Gray reveals that he was not thinking of his mother; he was, rather, thinking of himself. Mrs. Mulgrave calls it “foolish,” and exclaims that “it was his own life he had been turning over in his mind” (457). She imagines that his sympathies are extending to his mother, but in reality he is self-interested and absorbed by thoughts of his own misfortunes. In a story narrated in the first-person by a character, this perspective denies the possibility of omniscience (and centrality) altogether.

Moreover, Mrs. Mulgrave’s reaction to this disclosure reveals her own egoistic bias. She unsympathetically skims over his entire life story in her narrative, calling it “a burst” and referring only to “the chances he had lost; the misery that had come upon him” and “his poor little desolate child” without giving any details of what those chances or that misery might be. More importantly, all of this happens without Mrs. Mulgrave as narrator giving any voice to Sergeant Gray as a character. She has spent pages detailing her presentation of his mother’s case to him; long paragraphs of her direct speech plead Lady Denzil’s cause with Sergeant Gray, and yet his life story is reported through her mediation and allotted a mere three lines of text. The effect of this response is to confirm what Sergeant Gray’s egoism suggests about perspective: that people are at the centre of their own lives. And this is as true of Mrs. Mulgrave as it is of anyone else: when she returns to Lady Denzil bearing little Mary as proof of her success, the old woman is overjoyed. Mrs. Mulgrave’s narration, moreover, is keen to assert her position at the centre of the story’s orbit, if only temporarily: “When I took her back Lady Denzil held me in her arms, held me fast, and looked into my face, even before
she listened to little Mary’s call” (460, emphasis mine). Mrs. Mulgrave skews the centre of
the story: the child Mary has been called “the pet of the Green … all alone like a little star,”
but the culmination of Mrs. Mulgrave’s narrative about Lady Denzil and her beloved little
Mary ends with a tableaux of Mrs. Mulgrave herself as the object of the Lady’s gaze, and her
own usurpation of little Mary’s place at “the centre of it all” (442, 460). As in “My
Neighbour Nelly”, Mrs. Mulgrave’s narration attempts to sublimate her own self-interest, but
through the extrafictional arrangement Oliphant insists, now more effectively, upon its
disclosure.

Arrangement

I wish now to bring this awareness of Mrs. Mulgrave’s limited strengths and
awkward positionality to bear on a reading of physical arrangement in the stories. As Gaskell
did in “The Cranford Papers,” Oliphant uses structure as a figure for a discussion about form;
arrangement, layout, composition, and assembly, as subjects of narration, point to a
conscious awareness of relational value, and, characteristic of the market story, the denial of
transcendence. The opening paragraphs of “My Neighbour Nelly” juxtapose the two sisters
by highlighting their relation to one another, and the other three Dinglefield stories each
commence with attention to configuration. “My Neighbour Nelly” opens with an explicit
statement about value judgment: the two sisters are alike in that they are both neighbours of
the narrator, but different in that they garner unequal amounts of her love. In her very first
sentence, before telling us of either Nelly or Martha’s characteristics, Mrs. Mulgrave
rhetorically asks “what kind of hearts people have who can apportion their love equally” as if
affection exists in a quantity to be measured and controlled (210). She will, clearly, prefer
one sister over the other. Martha is “excellent,” “honest,” “friendly,” and “good,” she says,
“but[...](210). The conjunction alerts readers that Nelly, or Ellen, will be in some way above this. Given Martha’s qualities, one might expect that Nelly is superlatively honest, friendly, and so on. However, her higher value is only described as unrepresentable: “She was Ellen, that was enough” (210). The narrator does not “even think” of trying to identify her “special good qualities” (210). The contrast is sharp: Martha is lovely, but worthless, and Nelly is not defined, but highly prized. This utter absence of grounds for Nelly’s worth is perplexing given that Mrs Mulgrave clearly prefers her over Martha, and the two sisters seem to exist in inverse proportion to their respective valuations. As a foundational representation of value judgments this opening passage relinquishes any claim to accuracy or consistency in relation to recognizable criteria.

The relationship between the two sisters is paralleled by a relational arrangement between two geographical spaces in the story. Mrs. Mulgrave describes the village of Dinglefield Green in which she lives with the two sisters, and the spatial arrangement of the houses is a key feature of her description that offers a figure of simultaneous connection and separation: “The Green was the central point, a great triangular breadth of soft grass, more like a small common than a village green, with the prettiest houses round—houses enclosed in their own ground—houses at the very least embosomed in pretty gradients, peeping out from among the trees” (210). The things here described, the pretty houses, are part of a group, but each part has its own existence around the Green and operates with a degree of independence: each is “enclosed” and “embosomed.” The Green itself is the central feature and key synthesizer, but also a vacuous empty space as opposed to an inhabited dwelling. This image operates as a metaphor for Mrs. Mulgrave’s transmission of her neighbours’ stories, which are discrete yet yoked together, characteristic of the market story. The
inhabitants of the Green have their own lives, but they live very close together and observe each other across this open space, which is empty of physical objects or people and thus represents an absence of, and potential for, the assignation of value. Mrs. Mulgrave herself is one such open space, a character without a history who is never the protagonist of a Dinglefield story.

Such emptiness undermines the reliability of concrete valuations, and a few key passages work to qualify, though not entirely undermine, Mrs. Mulgrave’s privileging of Nelly as the superior sister. Mrs. Mulgrave wants to be unimpressed with Martha, but sometimes has to waver: “one did not know whether to be impatient with her serenity, or touched by it, and would not make up one’s mind whether it was stupidity or faith” (228). Even she can admit that Martha “was not faithless nor fickle, nor anything that was wicked”; in other words, when Mrs. Mulgrave tries to ascribe bad qualities to Martha with honesty, she cannot. Instead, Martha is “chiefly stupid, or rather, stolid” (230-31). Having said this, there are glimpses that make it very difficult to argue that Martha is equally worthy. When pressed about her affections she says things like this: “Of course the gentleman I am engaged to is the one I shall like best” (233). In “My Neighbour Nelly,” Oliphant’s arrangement does not go so far as to completely contradict narrative authority. At this point, however, it is enough to point out the further ‘gaps in the hedge’ of Mrs. Mulgrave’s perception, and note that these are not surrounded by sweet-smelling honeysuckle.

Similarly, “Lady Denzil” begins with attention to the arrangement of people in relation to rank. The lodge, Lady Denzil’s home with Sir Thomas, is “the centre of everything,” and Mrs. Mulgrave compares it to “Windsor castle” and herself to a “poor knight” who can only “cluster about” the stately dwelling (429). In the last arrangement Mrs.
Mulgrave was bodily proximate—her house was located right next to the Admiral’s—now she maintains her authority by being of a family that “had known the Denzils ages before” (429). A subplot running through the story compares Mrs. Mulgrave to another neighbour, Mrs. Wood, on whom Lady Denzil does not call, in order to heighten our narrator’s importance. Simultaneously, of course, this attention to rank emphasizes contingency: Mrs. Mulgrave is good enough, but if she happened to have born differently (“as if I was to blame for having known the Denzils in my youth” she complains) she might have been outside of the acceptable range of acquaintance for the great Lady (429). Difference is a matter of degree, and figuratively this difference invokes generic categories: the difference between a novel and a short story is primarily one of length.

The opening sequence of “The Stockbroker at Dinglewood” is different, contrasting temporal as opposed to spatial situations. Its first line, “Those who saw Dinglefield only after the improvements had been made” couples a sequence of events with evaluative judgments about renovations as improving (311, emphasis mine). Mrs. Mulgrave employs the language common in the town but insists on separating herself: “I call them improvements because everybody used the word; but I cannot say I thought the house improved” (311). In order to demonstrate how beautifully the house ran before, she paints an idyllic, bucolic picture of its former residents, Lady Sarah and Mr. Coventry. As with Lady Denzil, gentility is supposedly inherently valuable, and the new residents, Harry and Ada Gresham, are comparably suspect as the children of two fathers, one who “had made all his fortune as a stockbroker” and the other also “a mercantile man” (312). Mrs. Mulgrave is attuned to the shifting landscape of her village when she asserts that “one felt that it was bringing in a new
element to the Green”: the system is being changed and corresponding pieces may subsequently require rearrangement (312).

Indeed, rearrangement, even architectural, is often impermanent. The scale of change is emphasized through the renovations undertaken on the house: Mrs. Gresham adds “two wings to the old house, with one sumptuous room in each. Poor Lady Sarah’s drawing-room, which was good enough for her, these millionaires made into a billiard-room, and put them all en suite, making a passage thus between their two new wings” (313). Continuing the figurative reading of shapes and sizes, this scene suggests that bigger is not necessarily better. Mrs. Mulgrave shows her allegiance by retaining the comparison to before the house changed hands, and continuing to refer to “poor old Lady Sarah’s drive” and “old Lady Sarah’s boudoir” long after the Greshams take up residence (313, 324). In a story about changing fortunes this early attention to what came before the Greshams will help to keep in perspective what eventually comes after them, as Harry’s fortune is lost and the reign of the Greshams eventually “melt[s] away” from the collective memory of Dinglefield (340). Mrs. Mulgrave has noted that the renovations “took us all by surprise,” “had a bad effect upon the neighbourhood,” seemed “a great piece of presumption,” and were, in effect, “vulgar and stupid” (312-313). While claiming to accept the rights of the Greshams to their “improvements,” Mrs. Mulgrave actually asserts the opposite. Her extended comparison to the leisurely “summer afternoons, [with] Lady Sarah on her sofa, and Mr. Coventry with the newspapers and his great dog” serves to heighten this juxtaposition and refute the paralipptic contention that “this has nothing in the world to do with my story” (311, 312). Rather, the statement constitutes Mrs. Mulgrave’s claim to distance from her subject matter while the foregoing discussion actually indicates her affinity with Lady Sarah and the traditional mode
of life in Dinglefield. The rest of the story will be concerned with challenging Mrs. Mulgrave’s opinion as Oliphant asserts a more capacious view of personal worth.

The fourth Dinglefield story, “Mrs. Merridew’s Fortune,” returns to an image of spatial arrangement at its opening and exemplifies this capaciousness. Everyone in the neighbourhood is in the “habit” of “classing” two particular houses together, for two reasons: “that they stand together” and “that they are as unlike in every way as it is possible to conceive” (327). “Mrs. Musgrave [sic]”93 calls the adjacent houses “about the same size, with the same aspect, [and] the same green circle of garden,” but here the similarities end (327). The one house, which belongs to two childless ladies, is “perfect in all its arrangements”: it has “lawns like velvet,” “flowers in perfect bloom,” and “servants as perfect as the flowers” (327). In it “everything goes like machinery, with an infallible regularity” (327). In the Merridew yard the lawn is “not the least like velvet,” a “knot” of children can always be found “chattering” on the grass, and the eldest girl complains that the house is “untidy,” “shabby,” and “faded” (328-329). However, when it comes to assignations of value, Mrs. Mulgrave does not privilege the picturesque neat abode: its rhythms may be those of machinery, but, she says, it is machinery “oiled and deadened, which emits no creak nor groan” (327). And while the house next door may be messy, to an observer this is not a flaw: “if you passed it on a summer day … you would pause longer, and be more amused with a glance into the enclosure of the latter” (328). Here Mrs. Mulgrave posits value as a component of spectatorship, where what matters is how much

93 The fourth Dinglefield story, “Mrs. Merridew’s Fortune” appears twelve months after the third, and I attribute it to simple oversight that the narrator’s name has changed from Mrs. Mulgrave to Mrs. Musgrave. Colby notes that Oliphant often made such mistakes in her novels: they “are full of inconsistencies and errors, [and] her characters’ names sometimes change within the space of a few chapters” (123). While this is interesting to the textual history of the stories, in all substantive aspects it is clear that the narrator is still the same character, and the typographical change does not bear on my reading of perspective in the texts. Therefore, I will continue to refer to her as Mrs. Mulgrave.
pleasure the viewer derives from the sight before his or her eyes. The lawn which is enclosed and self-contained lacks life, and it is through interaction with external (contextual) objects and people that the second lawn gains worth.

Through her opening scenes of arrangement and juxtaposition Oliphant places Mrs. Mulgrave in a position to emphasize contrast and value. Usually this value is clearly allocated (with Lady Denzil, and Lady Sarah, and the lively Merridew children) at the beginning: one person, period, or space will be preferable to its counterpart. As a narrator Mrs. Mulgrave is more of a character-function than a being who is meaningfully-engaged with these scenes. She reports from a distance that mirrors the ironic distance between her voice and Oliphant’s. That these moments occur in the crucial opening scenes of each story establishes their importance; simultaneously they emphasize self-consciousness through a focus on relational structures, prompting the reader to be attentive to the voice that is telling the tale. And this voice will go on to establish and then undermine value judgements in an exemplary display of contingency.

Value

Mrs. Mulgrave’s ascriptions of personal value aim for permanence as well as singularity. However, Oliphant repeatedly challenges this model, and in the last story she links Mrs. Mulgrave’s growing pliability to a self-conscious statement about generic standards. These self-conscious comments draw attention to the process of composition—as narrative constructedness—and to the textual status of the Dinglefield stories. A similar moment occurs in “The Stockbroker at Dinglewood,” as the narrator begins a section, “I have often been impatient in reading books, to find the story go on from one party to another, from one ball to another, as if life had nothing more important in it” (323). Reminding readers that
they are being told a story, Oliphant has Mrs. Mulgrave follow this statement with an assurance of veracity: “But sometimes no doubt it does happen so” (323). The passage is meant to reinforce the verisimilitude of Mrs. Mulgrave’s transitional statement that the Greshams lived a life of pleasure and ease before their radical fall from grace. By using the comparative mechanisms of novels and other fictional stories, our narrator purposefully draws attention to fictions at the level of story-telling, and to Mrs. Mulgrave’s curious position.

“The Stockbroker at Dinglewood” goes on to set up a challenge to Mrs. Mulgrave’s sympathies that inverts the process of “Lady Denzil.” Our narrator is not inclined to look favourably on the young couple who disfigure the large house in Dinglefield with “improvements”: “They were … a little too bright, too costly, too luxurious” (314). The Greshams themselves lack “that delicate sense of other people’s pride,” and this offends Mrs. Mulgrave on more than one occasion as their overly generous behavior, while she can recognize it as kindly intended, makes her “grow red and hot and just a little angry” (314). Mrs. Mulgrave wants to be able to ascribe value according to a model of gentility, as she did with Lady Denzil, and the Greshams with their newly-minted fortunes will not fit the mould. But, as we will see below with Mrs. Merridew, part of what Oliphant explores throughout the Dinglefield stories (in addition to the limitations on perspective) is an appreciation of new and alternative formulations. Value is poured into new moulds.

Accordingly, when the Greshams suddenly lose their fortune, Mrs. Mulgrave must re-evaluate her consideration of them. She is “grieved and disgusted and sick at heart,” and recalls hearing similar accounts:
I went home … remembering all the wicked stories people tell of mercantile dishonesty, of false bankruptcies, and downright robberies, and the culprits who escape and live in wealth and comfort abroad. This was how it was to be in the case of Harry Gresham … Of course, I did not know all the particulars then; and I had got to be fond of these young people. I knew very well that Harry was not wicked, and that his little wife was both innocent and good. When one reads such stories in the papers, one says, ‘Wretches!’ and thinks no more of it. But these two were not wretches, and I was fond of them, and it made me sick at heart. (336)

In this passage Mrs. Mulgrave articulates and then dismantles her own pre-existing apparatus for valuation. The crucial factor, that which enables change, is proximity. Mrs. Mulgrave did not know these other wretches, but she has access to Harry and Ada on a personal level that allows her to see a different view of them. Whether they are “wretches” or “innocent and good” depends on whether one is standing in their extravagant home at the time of the crisis, or reading about it in a newspaper days later. Knowing “all the particulars” means being aware of complicating factors: there is good as well as bad in most people, and Mrs. Mulgrave, as a narrative filter for information, must allow for this complexity. As a figure for the reviewer, Mrs. Mulgrave highlights the fact that ‘goodness’ or ‘wretchedness’ depends on many criteria and multiple transmissions; her inability to make a definitive pronouncement one way or another indicates the multiple, shifting aspects of valuation.

In “Mrs. Merridew’s Fortune” a similar challenge to valuation is presented; what is intriguing about this moment is its metatextual interest in shapes and outlines of stories. Mrs. Merridew confirms the narrator’s suspicion that “she had something on her mind” with both
a statement and a rhetorical flourish: “The truth is, I wanted to speak to you” (330-31). She hopes that her friend can help, saying “you are always so kind; but it is a strange thing I am going to ask you this time” (331). We have seen, by this fourth Dinglefield story, three examples of Mrs. Mulgrave’s singular abilities to intervene in the lives of her friends in a helpful capacity. She has sent Martha away from Llewellyn, returned little Mary to Lady Denzil, and stayed with Ada when no one else would. Thus the statement serves more as a reminder of Mrs. Mulgrave’s extraordinary capacities than as a real warning that Mrs. Merridew’s request might exceed their reach. The overtaxed mother makes her request—“I want to go to town for a day on business of my own; and I want it to be supposed that it is business of yours”—and, in the next narrative turnover, Mrs. Mulgrave actually is shocked, saying, “The fact was, it did startle me for the moment” (331). The truth is, the fact was: Mrs. Mulgrave peppers her narrative with empty rhetorical assertions. She then reflects “like lightning,” emphasizing how “quick was the process” on whether or not Mrs. Merridew could have dishonourable motives, settling on the negative answer. ‘Truthfully,’ Mrs. Mulgrave is startled, for a moment, but then she ‘truthfully’ realizes the impossibility of that which was just asserted. This insistent searching for the truth draws attention to the act of reportage and its potential for veracity, marking the narrative’s self-consciousness. Moreover, Mrs. Mulgrave heightens her own self-reflexivity by addressing her readers about why she must assert how quickly she dismissed any potential doubt about her friend: “I say this that nobody may think my first feeling hard” (331). The statement is typographically bracketed, highlighting the situatedness and textual status of her narration. As a direct address about the act of narration, Oliphant draws attention to reportage as a product of careful articulation in the same breath as Mrs. Mulgrave insists upon its authenticity. This
self-conscious gesture has the inverse effect of suggesting a discrepancy between Mrs. Mulgrave’s narrative and ‘truth.’

Several more fissures in the surface of Mrs. Mulgrave’s supposedly authoritative narrative point directly to the story’s status as short fiction. Innocent misreading becomes deliberate deception when Mrs. Merridew alludes to some past inequality between herself and her husband, and Mrs. Mulgrave, who had “of course” heard of this before, “put on a look of great amazement, and pretended to be much astonished” (332). Mrs. Mulgrave is inviting readers to follow this scene simultaneously at two levels, the surface level of her polite conversation with Mrs. Merridew, and on the secondary, sublimated level of her private observations and commentary on that polite conversation. The two levels intersect in a moment of crucial self-reflexivity. After admitting to the reader that she is only pretending to be astonished, Mrs. Mulgrave is asked by her friend to be sympathetic, and our narrator assures her, “I do not judge” (332). Sequence is indicative here: coming after an act of admitted disingenuousness, this statement hardly looks trustworthy. Immediately following this she pauses to describe her friend; this narrative act, emerging from this textual sequence, cannot—will not—be free from judgment.

She must have been about forty, I think, a comely, simple woman, not in any way a heroine of romance; and yet she was as interesting to me as if she had been only half the age, and deep in some pretty crisis of romantic distress. I don’t object to the love-stories either: but middle age has its romance too.

(332-33)

After Mrs. Mulgrave’s assertion that she does not judge, as a comparative statement the passage cannot do anything other than that: it evaluates, codifies, and takes stock. Moreover,
Mrs. Mulgrave is choosing to value Mrs. Merridew as a subject of narrative for her alternative status. She is not like the young heroine of a romance; this story is not like a common novel. Perhaps, Oliphant suggests, alternative subjects—adventures in the middle of a life—are more appropriate to alternative narrative forms—a short story and a narrator who opposes the omniscient model.

Oliphant gives Mrs. Mulgrave a very significant vocabulary when describing her reaction to Mrs. Merridew’s story and the reasons for it:

I had to put on such looks of wonder and satisfied curiosity as I could; for the truth was, I had known the outlines of the story for years, just as every one knows the outlines of every one else’s story; especially such parts of it as people might like to be concealed. I cannot understand how anybody, at least in society, or on the verge of society, can for a moment hope to have any secrets. (333-34)

Even in those cases where she does not have an authoritative version of events from first-hand witnesses or participants, Mrs. Mulgrave has an impression, or understanding, of the stories belonging to all of her neighbours, so that there are no large gaps in her knowledge. Before she knew the truth about Lady Denzil she had repeatedly contended that the woman “had never had any troubles of her own” (430). When the Greshams move into the neighbourhood Mrs. Mulgrave is aware that Harry’s father “had made all his fortune as a stockbroker, and … not even the best kind of that” (312). Mrs. Mulgrave sets herself up, here, with a kind of pseudo-omniscient vision: she may not have a definitive version of events, but she always has enough information to make a picture of everyone.94 Potentially,

94Finally, the passage emphasizes the importance of position when Mrs. Mulgrave refers to “anybody … in society, or on the verge of society.” Someone on the verge of society is peripheral to it, just as Mrs. Mulgrave
though, ‘definitiveness’ does not even matter if a version is complete (if a review hangs together, its ‘accuracy’ is irrelevant).

This doubled position, of having simultaneously enough and not quite all of the relevant information, draws attention as much to the absence of knowledge as to its presence: these are “outlines,” but not detailed or complete accounts. And, offered by Mrs. Mulgrave, whose position we are often aware is peripheral and singular, these outlines are constant reminders of the impossibility of completeness. An outline is purposefully incomplete; it is the shape of something, a form without a substance. Like Trollope’s figure of the gentleman in the cupboard, Dickens’s newfangled uncollapsible bag, and Gaskell’s two-columned diary, the outline is an empty container. Thus, with less focus on materiality itself, Oliphant’s story echoes and reverberates the interests found in other market stories. And Mrs. Mulgrave, as a peripheral character-narrator, serves a similarly outline-ish function; she is tying the stories together but not with centrality or substance. Rather, the “Dinglefield Stories” do what we have seen the market story do elsewhere, but in a more attenuated manner: they hang about, lacking an inherent, substantial assertion about meaning and value, exploring edges and peripheries and making timid suggestions about alternative possibilities for literary forms.

What Mrs. Mulgrave really wants is to become crucial and indispensable, and in every story there is evidence of this occurrence. She is as close to her protagonists as a family member would be, the only one who knows the truth about Nelly and Llewellyn, the...
one whom Lady Denzil embraces first, and to whom Harry’s letters to Ada are addressed under cover. She moves herself from the periphery to the center of her stories. This reinforces the movement we saw beginning in “My Neighbour Nelly,” when her intervention in the action reorients the subjects of the story. Mrs. Mulgrave is a peripheral character in terms of hierarchy, proximity, and community: she is a part of the village but never of the family, being conveniently a childless widow. These stories are not hers at all: they are Nelly and Martha’s, Lady Denzil and Sir Thomas’s, Ada and Henry’s, and Mr. and Mrs. Merridew’s; yet, in each story she assumes, takes up, or otherwise comes to occupy, a lynchpin position. The tension between Mrs. Mulgrave’s self-awareness and her manipulation shows Oliphant dwelling on situated-ness, or standing place. And repeatedly, this exploration ends with a decentralised structure: a constellation of people and position lacking a core, context-created and context-dependent.

Arrangement compels scrutiny, scrutiny leads to a dismantling of Mrs. Mulgrave’s assignations of value, and Oliphant’s tendency to inflect them with acknowledgements of subjectivity and multiplicity. This, in turn, comes back to the issue of arrangement at a discursive level, and self-conscious attention to elucidation points to the impossibility of completeness, the pervasive presence of ‘outlines,’ and our own interpretive gestures towards making meaning. Mrs. Mulgrave is a peripheral narrator, and the Dinglefield stories persistently undermine her attempts to be, first, a self-championing participant in stories of others’ lives, and second, a representative or superior interpreter. Mrs. Mulgrave’s propinquity becomes suspicious, and Oliphant uses it to persistently undermine her narrative authority. But narrative authority need not be the aim; here it is a convenient figure for the reviewer, and any evaluative act. Mrs. Mulgrave wants to be able to say that one thing is
better than another, but, knowing her particular configuration in Oliphant’s narrative, we do not need to want this as well. We can recognize the shape of the market story in these four loosely-gathered, somewhat dissociative texts, and take them as a commentary on writing and genre. By employing the ‘alternative’ short story form and making the uncommon choice of a first-person narrator who is not a protagonist, Oliphant constructs a formal space through which to explore value without inscribing it. If the reviewer cannot see authoritatively, then neither can the writer at the point of creation. Oliphant writes without pressuring herself to achieve final verdicts about meaning and worth. She sends her stories out, into the *Cornhill* or another journal, it matters little where precisely, to be viewed through holes in hedges, from biased perspectives, across messy lawns, or, perhaps, with sympathetic eyes.
In 1965 Hippolyte Taine wrote in his *History of English Literature* that “Dickens does not perceive great things ... Enthusiasm seizes him in connection with everything, especially in connection with vulgar objects” (439). This passage encapsulates what is resonant and exciting about Dickens’s work, especially in texts like “Somebody’s Luggage,” though obviously Taine did not intend the compliment which I present. Enthusiasm seizes him: enthusiasm which is antithetical to the kind of disaffected posture of critical distance which this study has been arguing against; enthusiasm indicative of direct, particular engagement on a concrete level; enthusiasm which cannot be universalized or made measured, balanced, and *critical*, because it is seizing him afresh each time, over and over again, in a series of repeated instances. Similarly, Stephen Arata has recently written of the author of *New Grub Street* that “What distinguished Dickens from Trollope in Gissing’s view was the spontaneity of his imagination, which scoured all traces of mechanical labour from his texts” (37). The choice of words is interesting here: ‘scoured’ suggests a laborious undertaking, rather than another verb like ‘efface’ or ‘remove’ (reminding us of the little boy in *A House to Let*, scrubbing the floor for a game), ironically in order to elide the reality that there is work involved in writing. Criticism—and Gissing was working as an early critic in the introduction to *David Copperfield* to which Arata refers—repeatedly wants to distinguish

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95 An article leading the issue of *Household Words* no. 160, Saturday April 16, 1853. Whereas Wilkie Collins’s “The Unknown Public” has become a touchstone for studies of readership in the Victorian period, I am interested in and have focussed on the side of production. Therefore, “H.W.” functions as a parallel article, apposite to my interests. Moreover, it is notable the extent to which Trollope echoes Dickens’s language here when he talks about Mrs. Brumby’s deficiencies fifteen years later: “There was very much in her, but that was not in her” (182).
in this way, retrospectively finding differences in order to hierarchize according to models of valuation (Dickens was more *brilliant*, Gaskell more *skilled*): my project reunites these authors by drawing out threads of similarity and arguing against the Trollopian stigma.

This ongoing articulation of the market story has looked at symbols of materiality—luggage, tables, letters, hedges—and passages of valuation—gentlemen in cupboards, anxious linguistic collapses, desperate written pleas, and self-reflexive asides about outlines—and when we consider these two features together we see acts of valuation alongside artefacts that draw attention to multiplicity. These two features inform each other: that which is valued, value-*able*, is multiple and discrete, not singular. This is a more egalitarian model than the contemporary generic ladders discussed in the introduction. This model is also less definitive: there is not one answer, but perhaps several answers; value is located in and through context. In keeping with this model I wish to offer a somewhat loose, open-ended conclusion.

Carlyle has written that “no man works save under conditions” (*Heroes*, 94). In some ways this is the main precept of my entire discussion. It is also, though, necessarily modified in relation to Gaskell and Oliphant: no woman works save under conditions, the first of which will be her difference from the male universal. The condition of being always already outside of the centre, always already contextualized in order to be comprehensible, qualifies the wide appeal of Carlyle’s statement. Moreover, it draws attention to what is in some ways its downside—“no man works save under conditions” aims to attain universality, but this is too easy to apply to almost everyone and everything. What this project has done, and has shown Trollope, Dickens, Gaskell and Oliphant to have done, is localize and particularize those conditions. No man works save to fill his own periodical, no woman works save to
make enough money to keep feeding her children for another month, no woman writes another “Cranford” paper save to satisfy the sometimes benevolent, sometimes overbearing editor who is pressuring her for a further instalment. And when particularized, the recurring shape we have seen is of a container that can be filled: an uncollapsible bag, an outline of a story, a rectangular cupboard, and an apportioned diary. These shapes are all waiting vehicles, like periodicals and markets, and the repeated thrust is a compulsion to supply, and the material produced thereby is self-conscious, functional, and pragmatic. The conditions take the shape of a somewhat vacuous opportunity, a form without full substance, to be filled-in and fleshed-out.  

Returning to the tension between aesthetics and commercialism that opened this study, the aesthetic branch of the double discourse of value is sustained through the supposed possibility of disinterestedness. The supposition is that we can judge from a place of non-engagement, from a place that will remain consistent over time and regardless of conditions, so that “The same Homer who pleased at Athens two thousand years ago, is still admired at Paris and London” (Hume qtd. in Herrstein Smith 37). But we have seen, especially in Oliphant, the incessant restrictions and impingements upon standing place and, therefore, judgment. And what has emerged from this project is the extent to which Trollope, Dickens, Gaskell, and Oliphant were aware of this reality. Their shared paradigm, instead, is one of qualified, anxious, perverted, and de-centred judgment and valuation (figured through editing, exchange, consumption, and reportage). One of my conclusions is that these four

96 Simultaneously, this is one configuration: like the Christmas Numbers, other combinations or interpretations may and will be possible. No single, ultimate shape is desired, and it has been a part of my approach to resist singularity. Partly because this reflects my subject, but also partly because this is a more responsible type of criticism than that which tries to finally fix the text in its own image, as “What can be said of the work can never be confused with what the work is saying … the critic, employing a new language, brings out a difference within the work by demonstrating that it is other than it is” (Macheray 7). Similarly, Adina Rosmarin has cautioned that “the priority of the represented matter is not actual but apparent”—a triumph of the critic’s “suasive technique” as opposed to a triumph of the matter (16).
authors, working busily under periodical- and market-oriented conditions, were prompted to
an awareness of relational and relative generic value. And, that they were expressing these
smaller, more discrete moments of judgment through the short story, an otherwise
unconsidered, unvalued form at a moment (contemporaneous with Arnold’s pronouncements
about “the best that is known and thought in the world”) when critics were still struggling to
assign a position to the ‘novel’ rung of the generic ladder.  

I have shown the existence of generic pragmatism in the mid-Victorian decades; this
can be both situated in a genealogy of the short story and placed alongside a discussion of
materiality in the Victorian novel. Chronologically, the market story predates what has been
claimed as a generic innovation made by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle through Sherlock Holmes.
Holmes, like Trollope’s Editor, Dickens’s Christopher, Gaskell’s Mary Smith, and
Oliphant’s Mrs. Mulgrave, is a vacuous character who facilitates the stories of others:
“Holmes’s personality is so strong because he is supposed not to have one,” critics have
remarked; he is “purely and simply, his method and the cases he solves” (Pears viii, ix). In a
complementary fashion, Watson is “by far a more fleshed-out character,” though as narrator
he is yet more peripheral than Holmes to the stories (Pears ix). Indeed, this peripheral status
has been thought crucial, insofar as “Holmes works because he is an outsider who controls
nothing” (Pears xii). Watson is the narrator, but still he is neither the protagonist nor the
subject of the cases, and as protagonist Holmes is empty, unsubstantiated, and only yoking
together the stories of others.

Moreover, Conan Doyle’s success with the Holmes stories is often considered tied to
their form. The “popularity and fame of the detective ... [was] apparent soon after the first
story appeared in the Strand Magazine for July 1891” and the editors wrote “imploring”

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Doyle to extend the form (Green xi, xxiv). Conan Doyle himself thought he was breaking new ground with “two characters running through the stories” (Green xiv). Similarly, in his deviation from the serial formula:

it had occurred to him that the serial stories in magazines were a mistake because if the first number was missed the readers were debarred from the story, and he therefore thought of writing a serial without appearing to do so, with each instalment complete in itself and capable of being read on its own ‘while each retained a connecting link with the one before and the one that was to come by means of its leading characters.’ ‘In this respect,’ he said, ‘I was a revolutionist, and I think I may fairly lay claim to the credit of being the inaugurator of a system which has since been worked by others with no little success.’ (Green xiv)

Clearly, though, given the establishment of the forms of the market story here traced, with its employment of a consistent narrator and character function to hold together otherwise discrete tales into clusters, Doyle’s formula does not look quite so revolutionary, if at all. Holmes as a figure rises above the stories in a way that Mary Smith and Trollope’s editor do not. However, the structure of the narrating and peripheral character who recurs, and gathers and holds a group of tales together, is very familiar, being presented in exactly the same way in the frameworks of Dickens’s Christmas Numbers, in Trollope’s “Editor’s Tales,” Gaskell’s “Cranford Papers,” and Oliphant’s “Dinglefield Stories.” Thus the form of the market story anticipates, and should be considered in any account of, late-nineteenth century innovations in the short story form.
This discussion of materiality in the market story also supplements a growing body of Victorian scholarship. Elaine Freedgood and Daniel Hack, among others, have done foundational work on materiality and textual objects in Victorian novels. Freedgood identifies a major movement in twentieth-century criticism in which “Fictional objects become exchangeable figures used in the novel’s symbolic system to make a point about the mechanicalness, one-dimensionality, and deadness of industrialized people. Thus, fictional things are themselves commodified ... by criticism. It is not clear, after all, that being like an object is always a bad thing in Dickens or in Victorian fiction in general” (141). Similarly, Hack observes that when we pay attention to writing in the novels of Dickens, Thackeray, and others, we see explicit and substantial engagement with writing as a material process: “nineteenth-century writers are deeply interested in the cluster of issues” that we might call “writing’s multiple material conditions” (6). Thus this discussion of contextualizing value through the market story opens up an historical moment and adds another dimension to discussions of Victorian literature that have, until now, been primarily focussed on the dominant form of the novel.

Most importantly, these clusters of market stories make visible a certain optimism that can exist in a moment of generic change and development. And if this moment is preceded and enabled by market conditions, then Trollope, Dickens, Gaskell and Oliphant are offering a rejoinder to attitude that sees every commercial movement as anxiety-inducing, as reducing professional writing to the spectre of the cash-nexus. This study adds optimism to what is otherwise a mostly cynical critical discourse of commercialism, seeing novels behind glass as not solely a cause for concern.98 Market stories highlight a more open-minded, enthusiastic embracing of newer forms in a rapidly-developing print culture.

98 Cf. Miller, Novels Behind Glass.
Somebody’s writing may be smeary, but Christopher’s enthusiasm for the unexpected earnings it brings him is prominent. The ladies of Cranford never cease to find pleasure (perverse as it may be) in their highly specialized modes of consumption, and Mrs. Mulgrave can, in her best moments, appreciate the ways in which her perspective has been broadened through her friends’ adventures. Over and again, as well, these small celebratory moments are figured around smallness itself: Somebody’s short pieces of writing, Trollope’s Editor’s excitement over his own short tale written in a state of rapture, Gaskell’s fragments and small opportunities, and Mrs. Mulgrave’s slim outlines. There is optimism and capaciousness related to generic categories, and figured most poignantly through those “newfangled uncollapsible bags” that signal the shape of things to come (46).
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