The Nineteenth-Century Press and the Development of the Artist-Celebrity

by

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Abstract

The intent of this project is to explore how the developments in publishing and print technology during the early decades of the nineteenth-century affected the public perception and social role of the European artist. In regard to the latter, an investigation into the noticeable shift from artisan to celebrity is of particular importance.

In order to present as concise a study as possible specific incidents in the careers of Charles Dickens, Richard Wagner and Émile Zola are looked at in detail and placed in their technological and cultural context.

The results of the project illuminate artists' attempts to come to terms with growing and diverse audiences by using new modes of communication and promotional techniques. More broadly, the project shows how the interaction between, artist audience and media during this period substantively altered views on both the nature of fame and the artist as a public personality.

Keywords: Print Culture; Popular Press; Celebrity; Charles Dickens; Richard Wagner; Émile Zola.

Dedication

To Carolyn:

For her boundless patience; her unflagging support; and her unconditional honesty and love.

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Table of Contents

Approval ii

Abstract iii

Dedication iv

Acknowledgements v

Table of Contents vi

Fame and the Media 1

The Publisher and Public in the 1800s 14

"But the Fame" — The Young Charles Dickens 35

A Different Kind of Organism 53

Never a Day Without a Sentence 73

Celebrity's Inheritance 95

Works Cited 111

Chapter One:
Fame and the Media

Fame is the product of the interaction between three parties: an individual who creates an original object, idea or act; an audience who responds to the object, idea or act; and media who negotiate the nature of that response. Here the relationship, and the quality of fame that it produces, is considered within the context of the profound changes enabled by developments in European printing technology during the early nineteenth-century. Specifically considered are: incidents in the lives of three artists who worked for the popular press during the century; the newly literate working and middle-classes who were their audience; and the modernised, highly competitive publishing industry they were associated with.

The Nature of Celebrity

In his unfinished essay "Of Fame," published in 1625, Francis Bacon declared, "There is not, in all the politics a place less handled and more worthy to be handled, than this of fame." Sadly the questions Bacon posed: "What are false fames; and what are true fames; and how they may best be discerned; how fames may be sown and raised; how they may be spread and multiplied; and how they may be checked and laid dead,"[1] he left unanswered. Nevertheless there was prescience in his statement as, two hundred years later, artistic fame became a meaningful factor in the cultural life of Europe.

[1] Francis Bacon, *Essays, Civil and Moral* [book on-line](The Harvard Classics 1909–14 accessed 18 August 2005); available from http://www.bartleby.com /3/1/59html; internet, 1.

Intervening centuries have shaded the meaning of the term. For instance, Bacon's understanding of fame embodied reputation and honour but not celebrity. Celebrity, in contemporary usage, has as many definitions as there are scholars of the subject. Leo Braudy reads it as simply "Fame in one's own time";[2] for Chris Rojek "celebrity = impact on public consciousness,"[3] and Graeme Turner characterizes celebrity as "a genre of representation and discursive effect; it is a commodity traded by the promotions, publicity and media industries."[4] Whichever way one chooses to describe celebrity it seems important to distinguish it from fame's more respectable linguistic progeny, like reputation and renown.

The difference is partly a moral one. Based on one's actions, one acquires a good, or bad reputation and gains honour or dishonour as a result. In a modern context, however, someone may be celebrated but he or she cannot be similarly "de-celebrated;" they are only forgotten through lack of interest. In this sense the state of celebrity is value free. That does not mean that celebrities themselves are necessarily amoral or perceived to be so, only that they may be lauded or despised for their actions with little or no consequence to their celebrity status. Celebrity also differs from reputation in that it places emphasis on an artist's life rather than his work alone. In Bacon's time, the prevailing view of artistic achievement was as an example of God working through man, while the rest of his existence was a private concern. Celebrity, on the other hand, considers the entire individual, including details of his private life, to be a matter of general public interest.

The change of societal emphasis in understanding fame as celebrity, rather than reputation began to take place in early nineteenth-century Europe, during a period of

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[2] Leo Braudy. *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 426.

[3] Chris Rojeck. *Celebrity.* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), 10.

[4] Graeme Turner. *Understanding Celebrity.* (London: SAGE Publications, 2004), 9.

rapid growth for popular newspapers and periodicals. The consequences for relationships between artists and the public were substantial and reach well into our own time. Before discussing this, we must consider the roots of the connection between artist, audience and media. They begin in antiquity and even then fame was their consort.

Nietzsche's Satyrs

In his first published work, *The Birth of Tragedy* Friedrich Nietzsche hypothesises a pre-classical time when there was no separation between artist and spectator. During the rites of Dionysos, when "all was one grand chorus of dancing, singing satyrs, and of those who let themselves be represented by them,"[5] on these occasions:

> [The] gospel of universal harmony is sounded, each individual becomes not only reconciled to his fellow but actually at one with him...Man now expresses himself through song and dance as the member of a higher community; he has forgotten how to walk, how to speak, and is on the brink of taking wing as he dances.[6]

In this transcendent ecstatic state man can: "truly know something of the eternal essence of art.... He is at once subject and object, poet, actor, and audience";[7] unfortunately the experience was necessarily short-lived as participants readily succumbed to debauchery and exhaustion.

Greek society became more structured, and as their theatre evolved it simulated, rather than practised, the ecstasies of the original Dionysians: "the tragic chorus came to be an esthetic imitation of that natural phenomenon; which then necessitated a distinction between Dionysiac spectators and votaries actually spellbound by the god";[8] later still, the chorus took on the role of cheerleaders, jogging the audience's memory

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[5] Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals*. trans. Francis Golffing. (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1956), 54.

[6] Ibid., 23.

[7] Ibid., 42.

[8] Ibid., 53.

regarding what was now a vestigial past: "It then became the task of the dithyrambic chorus so to excite the mood of the listeners that when the tragic hero appeared they would behold not the awkwardly masked man but a figure born of their own rapt vision."[9] finally the tragic chorus, which had been the original manifestation of Greek theatre, became: "the quintessence of the audience...the 'ideal spectator.'"[10]

Nietzsche illustrates how formalising collective creative expression carries with it the seeds of division. The imposition of organisation requires, at one remove, imitating the act, rather than partaking in it, and explaining what is being imitated at a second. A third remove entails the obligation to merely watch and, perhaps, comment on the performance. These steps all separate the actor from the audience and mediate between them.

The Birth of Tragedy should probably be read as metaphor seasoned with history rather than vice versa. Nietzsche implies as much himself.[11] Nonetheless, empirical observation supports many conclusions that can be drawn from this book. Young children, for example, play inclusively in groups with natural ability no bar to participation. Rules and rituals are passed down through generations, so additional mediation is rarely required. As they age, individual talent — or what external parties, usually parents, acknowledge as talent — separates certain members from the original group and specialisation sets in. Children with less aptitude usually cease participating altogether but eventually, assuming they retain an interest in the activity, are likely to become spectators. Even in that capacity, however, the group identity continues to fracture as organization becomes ever more complex. In relation to shared public experiences, Cameron Carter comments:

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[9] Ibid., 58.

[10] Ibid., 47.

[11] Ibid., 46.

> It is astonishing how, merely by sitting instead of standing, the individual becomes so much less a participant and so much more an observer. Standing, we become as part of one organism — the self is exhilaratingly lost in the breathy throng.... But I can't be part of one organism when I'm in a...seat, because if my neighbour is G35 and I'm G36 then we're different aren't we, it is shown in the numbers and letters. We're separate entities and the illusion of fraternity is blown. So we don't lose ourselves in the experience. We find ourselves watching.[12]

In two important ways the process resembles Nietzsche's scenario. first of all it divides what was once an undifferentiated creative gathering into two distinct groups: actors and audience. Secondly, in both examples the resulting schism is filled by mediators, generated either from within the group — in the case of the chorus — or from outside it — with the parents of game-playing children. These factors are crucial when looking at the beginnings of mass media and its relationship to artistic fame.

Plato's Puppeteers

Depending on one's point of view, mediation, as it pertains to those who seek to interpret an artist's work or make it accessible, succeeds in either building a bridge or a wall between artist and audience. It is fair to say that Plato would opt for the latter. Within the famous Allegory of the Cave in *The Republic* lies a second, almost parenthetical allegory. The cave's prisoners, chained to the floor since childhood and unable to turn their heads to left or right, are encouraged to stare at shadows thrown onto the cave wall by firelight. The shadows are produced by "men passing along the wall carrying all sorts of vessels, and statues and figures of animals made of wood and stone and various materials...some of them are talking, others silent"; these "puppeteers" [13] are of course mediating between the prisoners and the fire's false enlightenment.

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[12] Cameron Carter. "Standing Still?" *When Saturday Comes*, supplement, (May 2005), 9.

[13] Plato. *The Republic, Book VII.* trans. Benjamin Jowett, (New York: Vintage, 1991), 253.

This parable is more evocative of modern media culture than is Nietzsche's essay. The procession of statues and wooden figures imply ownership and patronage of artwork rather than its production, while the talking puppeteers convey the notion of manipulation by a "chattering class," familiar to anyone with access to modern electronic or print media. Plato's position, one that would almost certainly be shared by Nietzsche, is that truth in art, as in other forms of knowledge, requires no midwife as "the power and capacity of learning exists in the soul already."[14]

An altruistic nineteenth-century publisher might reply that capacity is all very well but one cannot learn without access to information. Upon information is built knowledge and upon knowledge wisdom. Prior to this period, learning, other than by direct experience, was a limited and haphazard affair for all but a few. During this time, however, printing technology and the publishing industry underwent dramatic changes, which had an impact across all levels of European society. Books, newspapers and periodicals became available to a mass audience for the first time, opening the door to learning wider than ever before. The next chapter will explore these shifts with particular emphasis on the artists and publishers who worked within the industry and the public who consumed their product. From this inter-reaction the modern artist-celebrity emerges.

Celebrity and its Audience

The analogies in *The Birth of Tragedy* refer only to performance arts: music, singing, dancing, and theatre. Nevertheless, parallels exist in the plastic arts also. If, routinely, an artist and his work are physically present and visible in the community, both occupation and individual become integrated within it. They are part of its social fabric, as

[14] Ibid., 256.

accepted as the local butcher or undertaker. In *The Lives of the Artists* Giorgio Vasari describes how in thirteenth century florence a painting by Giovanni Cimabue:

> [So] astonished the people of the day, since they had seen nothing better until then, that they carried it with great rejoicing and with the sounding of trumpets from Cimabue's home to the church in solemn procession, and Cimabue himself was greatly rewarded and honoured...all the men and women of florence ran to see it in the biggest crowd of people in the world and with the greatest joy.[15]

Note that though Cimabue received honour and reward, it was the painting the florentines celebrated rather than the painter, whom they could see every day should they so desire. Once the artist and work become separated in the public mind, a scene such as Vasari describes could no longer take place. The evolution of media, especially reproduction media, produced precisely this effect. The development of writing, for instance, divorced the storyteller from his words. Once committed to parchment or paper they could be read by anyone, and, copied and recopied, would travel distances he could not. The invention of musical notation later accomplished a similar feat on behalf of composers. By the fifteenth century the invention of moveable type amplified the effect a thousand-fold. Gutenberg's printing press enabled visual artists and writers to have their work reproduced and distributed across the length and breadth of Europe within weeks.

By its nature creative work is often isolating but when the results of an artist's endeavours are not often seen or heard by his neighbours the effect is exacerbated. Neighbourhood churches gradually ceased to echo to the sound of the local composer's latest chorale and their walls were no longer the painter's galleries. The world the artist's work now inhabited was much larger, while his own had grown both smaller and lonelier in spite of his large, unseen, audience elsewhere. This audience was, in turn, intensely curious about the individual producing the work they admired so much. It was not enough, it seems, to know the person through his work. Having brought the artist's work

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[15] Giorgio Vasari. *The Lives of the Artists.* trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella. (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1991), 11.

to this new audience, publishers now set about satisfying its appetite for information about him.

This then was the cultural Petrie dish that bred celebrity, but its symptoms probably always existed in embryonic form. Ovid, in first century Rome, writes of the envy that association with the famous inspires:

> Instead of wealth I have my happy couplets,
> And many a girl has hopes of fame from me.
> There's one I know who broadcasts she's Corinna;
> What would she not have given to really be![16]

Until the late 1700s the requisite combination of exoticism and remoteness was found only in royalty or the occasional military hero. Before then, artists, even very successful ones, did not qualify in the popular consciousness as celebrities. Shakespeare's name, for example, appears only once in surviving news ballads of his time.[17] Royal weddings and similar ceremonial occasions, on the other hand, received considerable exposure in the public prints.

The celebrity pool grew deeper and wider as a result of the rapid increase in popular publishing after the turn of the nineteenth-century. Nietzsche's partition between artist and audience was established more concretely than ever before. Mitchell Stephens shrewdly observes that:

> The use of the printing press to publish news was a crucial step in the division of the population into two groups: the few whose lives are newsworthy and the multitude who are born, live out their lives and die without the news media paying them any mind.[18]

The gestation of the new relationship between artist and audience and the elevation of the former to celebrity status can be illustrated with a brief look at a man whose career and interaction with the public serves as an archetype for those who followed.

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[16] Ovid *Amores.* II.17. 27–30. *The Love Poems.* trans. A.D.Melville. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.)

[17] Mitchell Stephens. *A History of News: From the Drum to the Satellite.* (New York: Viking Press, 1988), 134.

[18] Ibid., 132.

"I awoke one morning and found myself famous"

Prior to the eighteenth-century an artist's primary audience was, typically, his patron. He would also, more than likely, value the opinion of his peers and, beginning in the Renaissance, measure himself against the standards of the classical past.[19] However he estimated his fame, the opinion of the general public, as it is now termed, was not a factor, because such a concept did not exist.

The template for nineteenth-century celebrity can, in important ways, be found in the person and career of Lord Byron. And, like all templates, it is fundamentally visual in origin. Beginning in the 1760s Europe saw a huge growth in the sale of inexpensive engravings and printed ceramics. Portraits of public figures, either in realistic or caricature form, found a widespread, popular audience — a "general public" in fact. From this period the graphic representation of an individual had a significant influence on the nature of their consequent fame. In effect portrayal became portal. A person's achievements were approached through and conditioned by the representation of their physical image.

Byron was perhaps the first artist of significance to benefit from this phenomenon. Thomas Phillips captured the young poet's dark wavy hair, slightly wan complexion, and louche good looks on canvas in 1814. In the following months cheap reproductions were snapped up in their thousands, mostly by young women who, for the first time, were making their collective presence felt on the cultural landscape. When this image was juxtaposed with the subjectively romantic nature of his poetry, Byron's readers could be forgiven their inability to separate the man from his work: "The lure of even his best works for his contemporaries depended to an enormous extent on reading him through the poems, the dashing and melancholic naïf wandering through the world."[20]

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[19] Braudy, 468.

[20] Ibid., 406.

Following the publication of the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* in March 1812 Byron, in his own words "'awoke one morning and found myself famous.'"[21] Denials that the work's melancholy protagonist was based on himself cut no ice with readers, who continued to interweave their identities in their imaginations. Byron was indeed extremely cogniscent of his own fame and that of others — he kept a collection of cuttings and prints of contemporary celebrities.[22] His choice of clothes, artfully tousled hair, his crippled foot, were real enough, but also contributed to a considered Byronic pose. Other mannerisms were more contrived: both his tendency to stand on the periphery of a social gathering and wait for people to find him, and the fact that no one ever saw him writing, suggest behaviour suitably edited for effect.[23]

Byron was undoubtedly aware of his public image and would go on radical diets when overindulgence began to affect his appearance, but by no means was his celebrity entirely self-created.[24] As Braudy notes, by the beginning of the nineteenth-century the quality of an artist's fame was, to a considerable degree, defined by his audience: "Byron...lived in a world in which the audience was beginning to expect some participation in creating the greatness of their idols as a mirror of their own." The poet's readers lived vicariously not only through his work but also through what they knew, or imagined they knew, of his life. Consequently every aspect of his existence, not merely that part of it which concerned his work, became of interest to them. To some extent this explains Byron's paradoxical relationship with his readers: on the one hand he would feed details of his personal affairs to the press and on the other become outraged when his life

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[21] Martin Garrett. *George Gordon, Lord Byron.* (London: The British Library, 2000), 37.

[22] Ibid., 36.

[23] Braudy, 478.

[24] Garrett, 36

became the subject of rumour. [25] As other celebrities would later find, it is extremely difficult to decide over which parts of your life to publicise and which to leave private.

Partly to escape the restrictions fame had inflicted on him, Byron left England and spent the rest of his life in Europe. The apex of his celebrity lasted for about six years, though he claimed it was only six weeks.[26] However, his death at thirty-six fighting for the Greeks in their war of liberation against the Turks, ensured his posthumous celebrity and created yet another template, this one for romantic young men who live fast, die young, and leave beautiful corpses.

To sum up, the onset of the nineteenth-century saw the following changes to the relationship between the artist and his audience. The following for the artist's work became larger and more diverse than it had been and he became more conscious of his own fame. His audience engaged with his work in an attempt to make a connection with the personality behind it. In doing so their collective knowledge and speculations contributed to the nature of his fame. finally, qualities extraneous to the artist's work, including his appearance and attitudes were partly responsible for his celebrity status.

Three case studies

The reasons why artists became part of celebrity culture at this time will be examined in the final chapter. The increase in audience, numerically, geographically, and across social classes, will be looked at in this regard, as will the extent and immediacy of public response to artists' work and the influence of new industries like advertising and marketing. finally the notion of public opinion and whether it played a part in conditioning the role of the artist in nineteenth-century Europe will be explored. The

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[25] Braudy, 407.

[26] Ibid., 406n.

intermediate chapters dealing with prominent nineteenth-century artists, Charles Dickens, Émile Zola and Richard Wagner, provide a context for this analysis.

None of the three men was as flamboyant as Lord Byron, or as definitive to the history of celebrity per se, but their careers are significant in the development of publishing as it relates to the evolution of celebrity culture in the nineteenth-century. By far the most significant characteristics that bind Dickens, Zola, and Wagner together are their connections with the mass media of their time. In their youth, journalism provided a vital source of income for all three men. Wagner despised the profession but both Dickens and Zola relished it throughout their lives. Only Dickens was employed as a reporter, a period he looked back on with great affection, but Zola unquestionably brought a reporter's research and observational skill to his writing, to which he added experience in the new professions of advertising and marketing. The work of both novelists was originally published as serial or part form fiction in newspapers and periodicals, and the pair were, from literary and commercial perspectives, among the most successful exponents of the form. At various periods in their respective careers all three men either published or edited at least one periodical, albeit briefly — in Zola's case — or as an *éminence grise*, in Wagner's. To a significant degree not only were their individual professional reputations forged within the pages of the popular papers but most importantly, the public perception of each of them, as an individual distinct from his work, was conditioned by such mediation.

finally, theirs was the first truly international audience. Each of them achieved critical and material success within his lifetime and did so as a prominent figure inside and outside the borders of his homeland. The terms "Dickensian," "Zolaesque" and "Wagnerian" continue to carry meaning to this day, indicative of reputations that transcend time as well as distance. Consequently the legacy of celebrity will be dealt with in the concluding chapter.

After their first blush of success, or notoriety, the names of Dickens, Zola and Wagner were never far from the headlines. The life of each of them is punctuated by incidents that exemplify their individual approaches towards both the popular press of their time and the public, occasions illustrating issues they and other artists had to deal with, as fame increasingly became a responsibility as well as an honour. Before these are explored, however, it is necessary to consider the world of mass media as it existed in Europe during the first years of the nineteenth-century.

Chapter Two:

The Publisher and Public in the 1800s

The previous chapter provides the social and philosophic context from which this study emerges. The following discussion takes an abrupt shift of focus, as the changes in nineteenth-century material culture that were vital to the emerging concept of celebrity and its relationship to the artist are considered.

Anonymity and Emile Zola

In summer 1893 Emile Zola was asked to address the English Institute of Journalists. He accepted the invitation warily. He was a poor public speaker and also somewhat suspicious of his hosts' motives — Henry Vizetelly, the author's British publisher, had been jailed and brought to the brink of financial ruin six years earlier for distributing *La Terre*. As it turned out the trip to England was a resounding success.[1] Zola's reputation was at its zenith and for a week he was fêted by the best and brightest in London society. On September 22 the author gave his talk at Lincoln's Inn Hall on the subject of journalistic anonymity. While acknowledging that in articles of artistic criticism he could not see how anonymity was possible, in political matters Zola felt differently:

> It is very certain that the British press owes to anonymity its power, its unquestionable authority...It gains in power what it loses in personality, for it has no object but to satisfy an opinion. It follows that, for such a newspaper to meet a social want, it must have behind it a devoted public, reading it alone, and perfectly contented so long as it sees reproduced in print every morning its own ideas...it is just this public which, in your country, has made the Press what it is — a public that has not been fragmented by revolutions...a public that has no feverish desire when it

[1] Frederick Brown. *Zola: A Life*. (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1995; Papermac an imprint of Macmillan Publishers, 1997), 575n.

> gets up in the morning to go through ten or a dozen newspapers, but of which every reader sticks to his own, which he reads from beginning to end...Under such conditions, anonymity is necessary.[2]

It is probably wise to make allowances for a guest's tactful comparison between the British press and — by implication — its French cousin. Nevertheless it is fair to speculate on whether Zola ever had second thoughts about his own opinion, especially given the public clamour that descended upon him five years later with his highly visible involvement in the Dreyfus affair.

When it came to social discourse Zola, like Dickens and Wagner, was not given to anonymity: to assert that all three were opinionated men is a substantial understatement. They were fortunate to live in the first era when opinions presented with craft and skill could be disseminated speedily and widely to a growing public eager for new ideas and entertainment. Consequently during their lifetimes the three artists gained recognition, influence and material success — but sometimes at the price of public vilification and suspicion, and private anxiety.

It is impossible to properly examine the careers of Dickens, Wagner or Zola without reference to the popular media of their time: their skills were honed by working within it and their reputations influenced by it. By design, accident, or intuition, they exploited opportunities the burgeoning communication industries of a young century presented them with. In the first few decades a renewed publishing industry grew rapidly in scale and authority, while advertising established itself as a new power in cultural intercourse. Both were right in step with many young artists' creative growth, enabling them to reach a size and class of audience their predecessors, a generation earlier, could not have conceived of. The relationship between these men and the media, however, was not homogeneous. Each had distinct experiences coloured by their personality, culture

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[2] Ibid., 665n.

and age. These factors will be considered in detail but first we must take look at the transformation of printing and publishing during the first half of the nineteenth-century.

Printing at the Dawn of the Century

Johannes Gutenberg would have felt quite at home in any European printing house of 1800. From the hand-pulled press to the individual pieces of lead type, everything would have been very familiar to him. He could have picked up a composing stick and become a productive member of the business immediately, because printing technologies had altered negligibly in 350 years. However the young century was about to see the introduction of a series of brand new industrially based processes that would reshape the printing trade, the media that depended on it, and, indirectly, the attitudes of the public who consumed their products.

Some of these methods would take time to establish themselves within the commercial publishing industry. Lithography, patented in 1796 and of immediate appeal to artists and illustrators for the creative freedom it provided in allowing them to draw directly on the printing stone, made possible the modern poster but did not integrate well with letterpress printing. Only a handful of influential but expensive French satirical periodicals were willing to take advantage of it.[3] Photomechanical reproduction was not possible either until the 1880s, so photography, though viable in 1840 as a medium in its own right, was not commonplace in newspapers and magazines until the end of the century. While these innovations took some time to find their place others were embraced with rapidity.

The manufacture of paper had remained basically unaltered since its invention was reported to the Emperor of China in AD105. It was an extremely slow process capable of

[3] Paul Jobling, and David Crowley. *Graphic Design. Reproduction & Representation Since 1800*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 12.

producing no more than a few thousand sheets at a time. As publisher Charles Knight testified before a committee of the British House of Commons in 1837:

> I could not have gone into the market with the certainty of purchasing 1,500 reams of paper for the month's consumption; and I should have been obliged to have kept two or three months' consumption to have insured a regular periodical supply.[4]

Knight was proselytising for the Fourdrinier cylindrical paper-making machine developed in 1803 by Gamble and Dorkin, and perfected by the mid–1830s. Each of these devices could manufacture six miles of paper a day in larger sizes than previously possible. Arguably, industrial paper-making on this scale had a greater influence on nineteenth-century publishing than any other technological innovation. Not only did the supply of printing paper increase exponentially, but its cost was drastically reduced as well. For book publishers, greater paper production meant larger editions and faster reprints, while periodical publishers could expand a print-run at short notice without scrambling to find the paper to print it on and neither had to tie up capital in warehousing paper stock on the off-chance it may be required. Chapman and Hall, for example, saw the sales of *The Pickwick Papers* go from four hundred copies for part four to forty thousand for the final episode fifteen months later.[5] Without the Fourdrinier process, acquiring the paper to meet such a dramatic escalation in demand would have been impossible.

This plethora of paper was all very well, but presses were still cast iron behemoths capable of producing, at best, 150 impressions an hour.[6] In 1810 Friedrich König added steam power to traditional machinery and the following year patented his revolutionary cylindrical printing press. In spite of its expense, König's press was an unstoppable force in the publishing industry, even the early models increased printing speed six-fold. *The Times* installed the first steam-powered double cylinder press in England in 1814 and the first in

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[4] Robert Patten. *Charles Dickens & His Publishers.* (London: Oxford University Press, 1978; reprint, Santa Cruz, University of California: The Dickens Project, 1991), 55.

[5] Peter Ackroyd. *Dickens.* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1990), 195.

[6] Patten, 56.

France was in operation by 1821. By 1830 the process had become both widespread and cost effective as four cylinder presses across Europe cranked out up to 4,000 copies an hour.[7]

Steam-powered presses and industrial paper manufacture were undoubtedly the most significant and widely accepted developments in printing technology to occur during the first three decades of the nineteenth-century. Other, less critical, but nonetheless important inventions followed. Stereotyping — the ability to take a cast of a typeset page — was perfected by 1840.[8] Printers no longer had to reset an entire publication should a reprint be required, saving time and thus decreasing costs. A year earlier, the first electric rotary press went into operation, speeding up print runs once again. finally, in 1841, the first mechanical type compositor was created, to add even more rapidity to the process. Collectively these new technologies were to radically alter not only how information was produced but, indirectly, how it was received and interpreted as well. They form the foundations of the first truly modern mass media, one where scale and speed carry high value and where, for the first time, fortune as well as fame could be dreamed of.

Publishing Reborn

Massive innovations in technical production inevitably transform both the internal modalities and content of an industry's output and such was the case in publishing during this period. The three decades following 1810 brought sweeping changes to an occupation that, while not as static as printing had been, could be generously described as languid in its operations.

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[7] Jobling, 13.

[8] Stereotype and cliché — its French language equivalent — are printing terms that date from this period. It is interesting that both words possess pejorative literary meanings. Perhaps this reflects the underlying tensions that existed between the new forms of print media and writers who felt uncomfortable with the consequent changes to traditional modes of publishing.

In the leisurely world of the eighteenth-century publishing a book was an ad hoc business, frequently carried out either by the printer of the work himself, a bookseller, the author's patron, an interested entrepreneur, or, not uncommonly, as a collaborative effort between several of these parties termed a printing conger. Editions were small, typically a few thousand copies for a novel or collection of poetry.[9] The retail price was high too: in England the cost of a newly published full three-volume work of fiction — a "triple-decker" — was informally fixed at one and a half guineas, a full week's wages for the skilled pressman that printed it.[10] Not surprisingly, sales were slow because the production speed was torpid. As a result an author usually sold his copyright to the publishers in order to provide immediate remuneration. Otherwise any payment he received would usually be in credit notes that could not be cashed for months, or even years.[11]

Between 1815 and the early 1820s economies of scale brought about by new printing technologies began to take effect. The average price of a book fell by half while print-runs increased as much as five-fold during the same period. Paris's 373 booksellers sold 3,357 new titles in 1815; by 1827 that number had grown to 8,272.[12] More books, cheaper books, newer books — publishing had moved beyond the purview of gentleman amateurs and almost instantly become a fully professional business. As Robert Patten writes: "the nineteenth-century ushered in the age of the specialist publisher, who initiated, financed, produced, advertised, wholesaled, and accounted for his works but who did not necessarily print, bind or retail them."[13] Such men, unconstrained by

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[9] John Feather. *A History of British Publishing.* (London: Routledge, 1995), 94.

[10] Paul Johnson. *The Birth of the Modern: World Society 1815 – 1830.* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), 950.

[11] Feather, 94.

[12] Johnson, 881.

tradition and eager to embrace innovation, saw publishing opportunities where their predecessors had not. They identified them not only in the fusty but relatively prestigious world of book publishing, but also in areas hitherto considered slightly disreputable.

Periodicals of sundry types had served the literate poor and middle-classes of England since the late seventeenth-century. Most were inexpensively produced; nevertheless personal purchase was relatively rare, as government tariffs put them beyond the means of most working families. In the early part of the nineteenth-century the public reading rooms that had begun to proliferate provided the principal means of access to them. The reading rooms carried respectable titles such as the *Quarterly Review* or *Blackwood's Magazine* but more sensational fare was available outside. These so-called "Penny Dreadfuls" were bought and resold, sometimes many times over, mainly by a newly literate generation of young readers. One of them was the teenage Dickens, whose favourites included the *Terrific Register*, which he credits with:

> making myself unspeakably miserable, and frightening my very wits out of my head, for the small charge of a penny weekly; which, considering that there was an illustration to every number, in which there was always a pool of blood, and at least one body, was cheap.[14]

Because books were unobtainable for most people, periodicals traditionally printed a substantial quantity of fiction, often poorly written or pirated. This changed as taxes were lifted, albeit incrementally:

> The widespread publication of original essays and short stories and the reprinting of standard literature and Gothic fiction in numbers were encouraged by 60 George III, c.9 (1819), which redefined a periodical in ways that made it possible for monthly magazines to begin publishing new material without paying stamp duty, and also exempted from duty all part issues of works originally published in book form.[15]

Full-length novels were too lengthy to reproduce in a single issue so were printed in serial or "part" form instead. This practice was not, in itself, new but in the past such stories had

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[13] Patten, 59.

[14] Ackroyd, 109.

[15] Patten, 50

been treated as mere filler, and whole sections, or even chapters, were cut when expedient. The new breed of publisher perceptively realised, however, that serialised fiction was a sure-fire way to build and hold an audience over multiple issues. They began to commission original works of fiction with serialisation in mind, creating in the process what was essentially a new literary form.

There were now substantial fortunes to be made for canny periodical publishers. In the late 1820s William Clowes opened a printing plant on the south bank of the Thames in London. Within it he installed twenty new steam presses and employed five hundred people to produce the *Penny Cyclopaedia* and the *Penny Magazine.* The former rapidly gleaned seventy-five thousand and the latter two hundred thousand subscribers. Other ambitious publishers quickly followed suit.[16]

Though serial fiction was a staple of the new periodicals it did not undermine traditional book sales, which continued to flourish:

> Serial issue could substantially lower the costs even of expensive, illustrated works.... Cheap series persuaded many middle-class households to buy the complete works of an author, even copies of otherwise uncommercial books.[17]

As Peter Ackroyd points out it was an era of "cheap but not necessarily 'low' literature" and by the 1840s original works of fiction were a regular feature of even the half-crown monthly magazines favoured by well-heeled readers.[18]

Daily news journals had been available in London since the early eighteenth-century and for a hundred years earlier than that in some German cities; however, few came close to meeting any modern definition of a newspaper. To begin with, their availability was severely limited, partly by reason of cost; taxes were deliberately employed by the British government to inflate subscription prices and keep information

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[16] Johnson, 949.

[17] Patten, 54.

[18] Ackroyd, 199.

out of the hands of the poor.[19] In addition, most pre-nineteenth-century newspapers emphasised commercial and economic news, which gained them an affluent, but limited, readership. Even after the introduction of the steam press a large daily, like *The Times* or *Morning Post*, sold no more than three to five thousand copies on a typical day.[20]

A different situation pertained in France. There imprisonment, rather than taxation, was used to limit the circulation of undesirable material. Prior to the revolution, gazettes and journals could only be published under royal privilege and were constrained to such an extent that no sanctioned daily newspaper existed before 1777.[21] To a great extent this explains why France experienced the impact of technological change in publishing a little later than England and also why it lacked a substantial periodical industry before the nineteenth-century. Instead there was a flourishing underground sale in illegal newssheets, which did a roaring trade in libellous rumour, scandal, gossip, and even, occasionally, a smattering of genuine news. Upon the collapse of the monarchy all publishing controls were removed. Consequently a Parisian who had four newspapers to choose from in 1788 was able to select from 355 two years later. Napoleon Bonaparte dealt swiftly with the potential annoyance of a fully emancipated press, however, and by 1799 our Parisian newspaper reader, once again, had only four titles available.[22] This cyclical pattern — a period of press freedom followed by one of repression — is consistently repeated in France and to a significant extent defines the nation's history. Jeremy D. Popkin writes: "Every great crisis in French national life has been accompanied

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[19] Mitchell Stephens. *A History of News: From the Drum to the Satellite.* (New York: Viking Press, 1988), 203.

[20] Johnson, 949.

[21] Stephens, 195.

[22] Ibid., 198.

by a 'press revolution' intended to transform this medium of communication into both a symbol of and a means for the construction of a regenerated society."[23]

Thus, volatility and a high degree of politicisation were hallmarks of French newspapers until 1836, when Emile de Girardin launched *La Presse*. Deliberately eschewing any show of political bias, *La Presse* was sold for half the price of established papers; advertising revenues made up the financial shortfall. Another innovation of Girardin's was to run original serialised fiction below the fold on the front page every day.[24] Without the financial commitment of an annual subscription, the reader of *La Presse* had to make a conscious daily choice to buy the paper, and a brand new episode of a story by a popular author turned out to be a powerful incentive.

Such stories, known as *romans-feuilleton*, became almost de rigueur in the French press until well into the twentieth-century. They enabled *La Presse* to become the first daily paper in the country with a broadly based, politically diverse audience. In short order *La Siècle* and other new competitors followed. Traditional newspapers were reluctantly forced to follow suit or fade away: "Those newspapers that resisted the serial novel saw a substantial decrease in their circulation. For instance, *La Gazette de France* boasted 5,500 subscriptions in 1837, but only 2,950 in 1846."[25] In comparison, by 1858 *La Presse* and *La Siècle* were selling 225,000 copies between them on an average day.

In England meanwhile several upstart publishers had, like Girardin, slashed prices, selling newspapers for a penny or twopence a copy, again about half the price of a traditional daily. The cheap papers — known colloquially as the "pauper" or penny press — gained their advantage by deliberately flouting the much despised stamp tax. They

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[23] Dean de la Motte, Dean, and Jeannene M. Przyblyski, eds., *Making the News: Modernity and the Mass Press in Nineteenth-Century France.* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press,1999), 16.

[24] Ibid., 48.

[25] Ibid., 164.

were illegal but immensely popular, particularly among working-class readers, for their melodramatic mix of human interest and crime stories. Under pressure from established publications, such as *The Times*, who had dutifully paid their taxes, the British government buckled and decreased the levy to a minimal level in 1836, so its avoidance was not worth the effort.[26] As a result the traditional and penny presses were allowed to compete for an audience on an even footing. It was an audience that was quickly finding these new publications indispensable.

A Medium for the Masses

Prior to the nineteenth-century printing and publishing tended to emphasise rather than rectify class differences. To disadvantages of birth and lack of economic power Gutenberg's invention added a categorical schism between those who had the means and ability to acquire knowledge and those who did not. Publishing increased information to the already learned while leaving everyone else in an even greater state of relative ignorance. According to Mitchell Stephens, by the early 1800s, this intellectual rift was more evident than ever: "On one side of the chasm that separated the classes in Britain a subsociety had developed — denied the right to vote, denied representation in Parliament, even denied the right to affordable newspapers."[27] Just as taxes and threats of prosecution were overtly employed by European governments to keep uncomfortable ideas away from the lower orders, those in power also utilized intellectual advantages to hinder the establishment of a genuinely popular press. *The Times*, according to Paul Johnson, continued to publish reports of sexual offences and murders in Latin until the 1820s.[28]

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[26] Stephens, 204.

[27] Ibid., 205.

[28] Johnson, 949.

As literacy increased such absurdities gradually disappeared, but as long as a Parisian building labourer, for instance, could only afford to purchase life's absolute necessities, as was the case until mid-century, reading for recreation and information remained the province of a few. An annual subscription to one of the new periodicals, *Le Magasin Pittoresque* say, was out of the question for him. In 1850 for the same amount of money he could buy: "150 eggs, 7.5 kilos of meat, 25 kilos of bread and almost 10 steres of firewood."[29] He might see a copy of *La Presse* at his local café or *cabinet de lecture.* Perhaps he was also lucky enough to receive back issues from an affluent acquaintance; he could then read episodes of the latest Dumas serial to his family in the evening. fifteen years later his situation was rosier. Salaries in construction had increased by twenty-five percent since 1840, he could now afford his own copy of one of the new *"petits"* daily newspapers that flooded the city's streets. If his son followed him into the building trade, by 1890, he and his family would have as much as seventy francs a year to spend on reading material if they desired.[30]

The Growth of Literacy

Escalations in disposable income increased the availability of books, magazines and newspapers, but class attitudes changed more slowly. Even the steep rise in literacy levels across Western Europe did little to help. The growth of popular publishing and public literacy were synchronous, as Robert Patten points out: "the relationship between cheap books and a wider reading public is undoubtedly reciprocal, there is no doubt that the availability of number books encouraged reading."[31] Nevertheless number books, or

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[29] Jobling, 20.

[30] Ibid., 22.

[31] Patten, 47.

serials, were still considered "low" by established newspapers and, by association, so were their readers.[32]

The aridity of education in Napoleonic France was followed by rapid developments, as most metropolitan areas moved quickly to establish primary schools. Between 1817 and 1820 less than a million of the nation's children attended school, but by mid-century that number had more than tripled.[33] In the mid-1820s 84 percent of men and 60 percent of women could read,[34] and the passing of the Guizot Law of 1833, which guaranteed all French males access to elementary education, swelled the numbers even further.[35] Though printers and journalists were at the forefront of 1830's July Revolution, from which the Guizot Laws and other democratic reforms stemmed, those who benefited most were much less politically engaged. This was a youthful segment of the population with little experience of, or interest in, the political subjects that were the staple of French newspapers.[36] They looked to books and magazines primarily for information and entertainment rather than analysis or opinion. This was precisely the audience Girardin had in mind when he created his newspaper. *La Presse*, and the papers in France and Britain that followed in its wake, did not perceive their readership as journals had traditionally done. Girardin treated them first and foremost as customers, who constituted a rapidly expanding group of consumers possessing desires and fears to be catered to and exploited.

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[32] de la Motte, 180.

[33] Ibid., 146.

[34] Johnson, 882.

[35] Brown, 102.

[36] de la Motte, 162.

The Reader as Consumer

As a profession, advertising grew symbiotically with newspapers. In their nascent form advertisements were merely printed commercial information in publications whose content already inclined toward trade related topics. In 1730 one of the earliest British daily papers, *The Daily Advertiser*, carried nothing else, but it was still funded by subscriptions and the advertisements it included were, by modern definition, unpaid announcements.[37] They covered a broad range of subjects, including serial stories in rival publications. Their copy précised, often luridly, what the reader could expect to find within the covers. florid in style they may have been, but printed advertisements from the first decades of the nineteenth-century were, for the most part, informational rather than persuasive in nature. As newspaper and periodical sales rose, so did their advertising content and a gradual change in approach could be detected.

La Presse was the first daily newspaper sustained by the sale of space within its pages. Its large circulation figures were used to solicit advertising and this income was used to keep the subscription price low, which, in consequence generated a large readership. It was a successful and extremely profitable cycle. From the perspective of commercial production it had the virtue of simplicity, but also the curse of easy emulation. Competition was swift in coming and intense on arrival. In order to maintain his economic edge Girardin realised he would have to supply his readers with material they actually wanted to read, not articles that he believed to be improving. This radical shift in emphasis away from the political or moral opinions of the publisher in favour of the desires of his readers profoundly altered the nature of commercial publishing: "Girardin...turned the daily into a commodity in terms of both its means of circulation and its content."[38] For the first time a newspaper's readers were recognised as consumers

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[37] Stephens, 181.

[38] de la Motte, 154.

who, in their numbers, were sold in turn to advertisers to cover operating costs and provide profits.

The rise and subsequent influence of advertising was by no means confined to France or to newspapers. During its run as a periodical *The Pickwick Papers* included as many as twenty-four pages of advertisements along with its thirty-two pages of text and illustration, a format already established by publishers of novels.[39] Advertisers liked their products in close proximity to success:

> By mid-century, therefore, astute financial management which exploited revenue from advertising, and perspicacious editorial policy which kept abreast of popular taste...were to be equally as strategic in a volatile buyers market.[40]

Advertising enabled low retail prices, which in turn generated huge sales and both, along with popular writing, drove the new publishing industry. Before long however the modern reader/consumer was subjected to novel marketing strategies designed by ambitious publishers to further increase sales. The most successful *roman-feuilleton* of the period was *Le Juif Errant* by Eugène Sue, which ran for years in Louis Désiré Véron's paper *Le Constitutionnel.* As Maria Adamowitz-Hariasz illustrates, the publisher was a master at using the story's popularity to financial advantage:

> Véron cleverly manipulated the novel's publication schedule, interrupting it for a few weeks at the height of a dramatic event in the narrative, an interruption that would, of course, coincide with the time for subscription renewal. This system obviously worked, as demonstrated by the example of one seven-week interruption between volumes 4 and 5...when the number of subscriptions rose by almost 4,500.[41]

Readers were certainly open to manipulation by devious publishers but had expectations of their own for the journals they spent their hard-earned money on. By no means passive, their influence on both publisher and artist was diffuse but nonetheless was to

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[39] Patten, 67.

[40] Jobling, 20.

[41] de la Motte, 173.

become considerable. In the 1820s and 1830s, however, most readers were attempting to come to terms with the mutations that popular print was undergoing.

From Street to Sofa: The Reading Environment

In pre-nineteenth-century Europe, printed information was only available to most people in public places. "Newsbook covers were tacked up on posts throughout the cities to interest potential buyers; news ballads could be heard in the streets; and it was common for inns...to be wallpapered with broadsides."[42] In England the 1790s and early 1800s were also the heyday of the print shop, retail establishments that carried reproductions of popular paintings and the work of satirical illustrators such as James Gillray, Thomas Rowlandson, and the young George Cruikshank. Few people could afford to buy these, but many had their noses pressed up against the shop windows.

The consumption of periodicals and newspapers became more structured and formalised along with their proliferation. Well-stocked reading rooms, often within the confines of working men's clubs, became widespread throughout Britain and the first lending libraries appeared. Daily newspapers were available for the more well-to-do in coffeehouses, respectable taverns and coaching inns. Similar institutions existed throughout most of Europe. In France *cabinets de lecture* — establishments that sold periodicals and also contained seating where the news of the day could be discussed — had been a feature of urban life since the revolution. They now became more common.[43] By 1840, Paris alone had 194 *cabinets de lecture* and if distribution through cafés and even theatres is taken into account it can be seen that public access to journals and newspapers was extensive. However they were typically read, as Jeremy D. Popkin notes, away from the home:

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[42] Stephens, 129.

[43] Jobling, 21.

> Newspaper reading was most often done outside the home and away from places of business, in specific public or semipublic locations, and primarily by men. Those who participated in newspaper reading thus had to make a deliberate effort to transport themselves to places where newspapers could be found. Reading the press was a ritual of public life, not an accidental occurrence or one relegated to odd moments of free time during the day.[44]

Be that as it may, the situation Popkin describes began to alter as the century progressed. Just as the reading of journals and papers migrated from the entirely public world of the street to the semi-private environment of the enclosed commercial establishment or private club, so it moved again into the privacy of the household. Once more, declining prices were a critical factor. As personal copies became affordable they were taken home, read at leisure, and shared with the family.

The shift from communal to private consumption of popular publications entailed changes in habit. Instead of being read over luncheon or at mid-afternoon — when businessmen would usually meet at the *cabinet de lecture* — newspapers began to be taken with breakfast or perused in more detail in the early evening before supper; publishers adjusted their printing schedules accordingly. Most women and even older children were exposed to newspapers on a regular basis for the first time; a wise publisher adapted his paper's contents to suit them. There were more subtle changes in readers' attitudes though, some of which were noticed at the time:

> "It is extraordinary," the painter Haydon noted in his diary (17 September 1827) "to what a pitch I long for the news of the day, knowing as I do the lies & the folly & the humbug of the daily surmises of the Editors, but so it is, and as I get older I find it increases....I make more noise and disturbance if the *Times* is not on time, than if my Butcher had not sent my children's dinner!"[45]

Newspaper reading rapidly became as much a part of daily domestic routine as mealtimes. Perhaps not entirely unrelated to the habit-forming quality of daily newspapers was a new sense of guilt-induced denial noticed by Robert Rintoul, the publisher of the *Spectator*:

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[44] de la Motte, 21.

[45] Johnson, 949.

> Men who cannot breakfast without [a newspaper], in the evening pretend to be hardly cognisant of such things. Men who in private life look to them almost for their sole stock of opinions are found in public sneering at their contents, thus despising that with which they are crammed to the very mouth.[46]

The new familiarity of newspapers and periodicals had ramifications for the writers, artists, and other personalities who appeared in their pages. The names of many appeared regularly, daily in some cases, and communicated to large numbers of people an intimacy of acquaintance that was as disproportionate as it was synthetic. As a consequence a well-known person's manners, social behaviour, and opinions took on a relevance to readers that was previously reserved for family members or close neighbours.

The first decades of the nineteenth-century brought considerable change to both print technology and commercial publishing. Drawn by less expensive and more varied periodicals a large, youthful, economically diverse readership emerged for whom the home became the reading environment of choice. This was the media landscape in which Dickens, Zola, and Wagner were active and these readers the audience who were to both embrace and challenge them. *Pace* Zola, it was not a following that especially privileged privacy or encouraged anonymity.

The Working Writer

New modes of publication required a singular sort of writer. Daily newspapers imposed rigid schedules on their contributors and mass-market periodicals were committed to filling pages in units of four or eight with each issue. Writing to prescribed length and to a deadline quickly became essential for ambitious wordsmiths.

So long as printers were responsible for publishing, a journal's contents likely consisted of either information brought over the shop's transom by interested parties, or the gleanings of public house gossip. Sometimes a woman known as a "she intelligencer" was paid a penny or two to collect stories and a conscientious publisher might seek out

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[46] Ibid., 951.

news from passing travellers but there were no full-time news-gatherers as such.[47] An increasingly sophisticated readership expected more, however, and by the eighteenth-century, British periodicals were paying for articles by skilled writers such as Joseph Addison and Daniel Defoe; unfortunately the same journals also carried endless screeds donated by wordy pedagogues. This was the heyday of the journalistic essay and the printed sermon, a time when didacticism and moralizing held sway. Preaching in print flourished until well into the nineteenth-century when it was eventually superseded by fact-based reportage.

The influence of enlightenment philosophy and subsequent development of scientific method was largely responsible for this transition. William Johnson relates that by 1851 the craving for information, rather than received ideas, was paramount in the public mind: "'The people of England at large have not so much taste for discussion as for information...They are more for facts, or what they suppose to be the facts, than the most luminous reasoning in the world upon those facts.'"[48] Canny publishers had realised this decades earlier. In the latter half of the eighteenth-century some London newspapers began to employ news-gatherers on a regular basis and in 1770 they gained a degree of credibility, if not respect, by being allowed to report on parliamentary debates.[49] It was 1819, however, when a correspondent of *The Times* wrote a first-hand account of the Peterloo massacre in Manchester — when English troops attacked demonstrating workers — before the role of the reporter came of age.[50] After that date periodical writing was seen as slightly less squalid. What is more, occasionally it could even be remunerative:

> The press was becoming respectable as well as growing increasingly powerful. All kinds of people wrote for it, often secretly.... Palmerston and

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[47] Stephens, 167.

[48] Ibid., 258.

[49] Ibid., 255.

[50] Ibid., 270.

> even Peel contributed anonymously to the progovernment newspaper, the *Courier*.... Journalism, indeed, was often now well paid. Robert Southey made a good living from occasional articles in the *Quarterly*, which paid him £100 a time, a prodigious sum for the age.[51]

Many authors remained unimpressed, however. In their view writing for money was degrading. The romantic notion that an artist should remain aloof from the dominant discourse of the day was widespread. The popular press, as the principal forum for such discourse, was frequently viewed with disdain, if not outright disgust, Charles Baudelaire's opinion was typical: "I cannot fathom how an unsoiled hand could touch a newspaper without recoiling in disgust."[52]

Serial novels were likewise attacked by critics as "the sewer of literature" and their publishers for silencing work by "real writers."[53] In fact many real writers would have been happy to publish in such iniquitous journals if their writing style could only have accommodated itself to episodic form. In 1836 Honoré de Balzac became the first author contracted by Girardin to produce a *roman-feuilleton* for *La Presse:*

> Balzac's *La Vielle fille* provoked numerous complaints....The audience...did not like to read Balzac in instalments, complaining not only about moral issues but also about such things as the narrative containing overly long descriptions and too many details.[54]

Humiliatingly Girardin dropped Balzac's second serial, *Les Paysans*, in mid-run and replaced it with a work by Alexandre Dumas. This new market was obviously no respecter of reputations. Readers' feedback was instant and circulation-conscious publishers pressured writers accordingly. The situation in Britain was not dissimilar. Dickens's success often leaves the erroneous impression that almost all nineteenth-century English novelists wrote in instalments. In fact, though serial fiction in magazines was

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[51] Johnson, 950

[52] de la Motte, 142

[53] Ibid., 175

[54] Ibid., 164

common, in spite of the financial advantages, among leading authors only Thackeray wrote part fiction like Dickens.[55]

Though it was not for everyone, commercial publishing — whether in the form of reportage, serialised fiction, or even illustration — offered plenty of opportunities for the century's creatively enterprising or financially desperate young artists to make a name for themselves.

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[55] Feather, 153.

Chapter Three:
"But the Fame — "
The Young Charles Dickens

The technological innovations of the century's second decade began to take effect in the wider world of publishing during the late 1820s and early 30s. Audiences in England were waiting to hear voices that told them tales in their own vernacular, in publications they could afford. The time was ready-made for the incandescent energy of Charles Dickens. Enthusiasm and vigour make their own rules and Dickens rode roughshod over publishing practices that were fading into obsolescence. As it had for Byron, fame came swiftly but he managed it skilfully, at least until his first visit to the United States. There he became one of the first artists to discover that celebrity came at the cost of privacy and it offered no immunity from criticism.

A Theatrical Presence

Writing was not Dickens's only passion. A year before submitting his first story to a publisher he requested an audition at Covent Garden.[1] Acting had fascinated Dickens since childhood and the budding thespian was indeed granted an interview. When the day arrived, however, he was forced to cancel due to a severe cold. According to Peter Ackroyd, "somehow he knew — or at least his body knew — that this was not the life for which he was intended."[2] This is of course conjecture at best. The only evidence Ackroyd offers is that, in spite of announcing his intention to do so, Dickens did not reapply to the

[1] Ackroyd, 138.

[2] Ibid., 140.

theatre the following season. A year is a long time in a young man's life, especially one as energetic and restless as Dickens, and to the world's benefit, by then he had found a more absorbing creative outlet. He was a man driven by the desire for success more than the challenge of a specific craft and a chance virus may well have prevented literature from losing one of its most powerful voices.

The need to perform remained fundamental to the flamboyant Dickens, as shown by the regular amateur theatricals he organised and, in later life, by the enormously popular touring recitals of his work. It was not sufficient merely to be known as the creator of *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby*; he had to be *seen* as their creator too. Sometimes, particularly during the first heady months of fame, he would be criticised for it. At the premier of his operetta *The Village Coquettes*, with the audience screaming for "Boz" at the final curtain, Dickens appeared briefly on stage. It was not customary for authors to take curtain calls, and critics were affronted by what they considered the attempt to exploit his celebrity:

> The *News* thought Dickens "extremely ill-advised to come forward to receive the congratulations of a packed house." Even Jerdan's well-disposed *Literary Gazette* commented unfavourably on the innovation: "When will this ridiculous nonsense end?"[3]

As a youth Dickens's taste for the dramatic, even the melodramatic, was apparent in his choice of reading matter: "He makes particular mention of...a twopenny weekly, *The Portfolio*, which professed...to combine instruction with amusement but which was essentially a compendium of horror stories, fables, executions, disasters."[4] Also evident from a young age was a determination to profit from his work. For the price of a piece of pencil the young Boz would write stories on scrap paper, pin them together in a book-like

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[3] Edgar Johnson. *Charles Dickens, His Tragedy and His Triumph*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 208.

[4] Ackroyd, 91.

manner and rent — rather than sell them outright — to his schoolmates.[5] Even then, it seems, Dickens saw the advantages of retaining ownership of his work.

Dickens was in fact a prodigious amalgam of writing talent, business acumen and theatrical ebullience. With a few exceptions, his closest friends were not novelists; they came mainly from journalism or, once again, the theatre; fields where output is transient and reputations can be equally so. They were men who realised their worldly success depended heavily on public recognition. To flourish professionally a name written large and often in the popular consciousness was essential. John Forster, soon to be his closest confidante and advisor, read the necessary qualities in Dickens's face on first meeting:

> This was the quickness, keenness, and practical power, the eager, restless energetic outlook on each several feature, that seemed to tell so little of a student or writer of books, and so much of a man of action and business in the world. Light and motion flashed from every part of it.[6]

Others too found the writer's unquenchable energy and indomitable willpower irresistible. They were qualities that served him well throughout his life but never better than when he was a young man.

Early Writing

Dickens wrote at blinding speed. He learned shorthand while a fifteen-year-old lawyer's clerk and it would serve him well in his next position, transcribing parliamentary debates. A couple of years later, as a reporter for the *Morning Chronicle*, the skill also helped him record speeches at provincial political meetings. As his carriage hurtled back to London in an attempt to scoop his competitor from *The Times*, he would scribble his copy by lamplight. Meanwhile, on the restive, often nocturnal, rambles following his

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[5] Ibid., 110–11.

[6] John Forster. *The Life of Charles Dickens, Volume One.* Everyman's Library. London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1927, 65

workdays Dickens gathered material for the stories that would become *Sketches by Boz*, his first book.

Appearing initially in several periodicals over three years, the pithy, sharply observed characterisations of London life became immensely popular. At publisher John Macrone's instigation the first series of the sketches, with illustrations by George Cruikshank, were released in book form the day after Dickens's twenty-fourth birthday. His relationship with Macrone and Cruikshank during the production of *Sketches by Boz* set a pattern for collaborations that persisted throughout Dicken's career.

Affable at the outset, Dickens's collegial camaraderie could swiftly turn hostile if things did not go his way: "Notable [was] his refusal to believe that he [was] ever mistaken or ever in the wrong; throughout his life he always needed to be *right*, and any attempt to suggest that he was not wholly without blemish was met at once with irritable aggression."[7] His irascibility, combined with his insistence in involving himself in every step of production, tested the composure of even the most patient colleagues. Dickens's controlling impulses are evident in his communications with Macrone:

> Of course I shall see the first proofs [of Cruikshank's illustrations] when the Printer has pulled them: I am not a little anxious to see him fairly at work. Let me know when you propose sending the first advertizement to the Chronicle. I will get a paragraph inserted calling attention to it.[8]

Macrone, Dickens's peer in age and experience, could perhaps be expected to take such pestering in his stride. During the second volume of the *Sketches* however, it was Cruikshank who took the full brunt of the author's wrath by mentioning that he had expected to see more of the manuscript before it went to press: "in order that I might have the privilege of suggesting any little alterations to suit the Pencil."[9] Macrone, perhaps

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[7] Ackroyd, 279.

[8] Madeline House, and Graham Storey, eds. *The Letters of Charles Dickens, Volume One 1820 – 1839*, The Pilgrim Edition. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1965), 112

[9] Ibid., 183n.

anticipating Dickens's reaction, kept Cruikshank's letter to himself for a week. The response, after it was finally forwarded, was uncompromising:

> I have long believed Cruikshank to be mad; and his letter therefore surprises me not a jot. If you have any further communication with him, you will greatly oblige me by saying *from me* that I am very much amused at the notion of his altering my Manuscript, and that had it fallen into his hands I should have preserved his emendations as 'curiosities of Literature.' Most decidedly am I of the opinion that he may just go to the Devil; and so far as I have any interest in the book, I positively object to his touching it.[10]

It is important to emphasise that while Macrone and Dickens were not quite novices they were a pair of tyros compared with Cruikshank. Dickens's senior by twenty years, he was also, arguably, the foremost illustrator in England. The two younger men were extremely fortunate to obtain his services as his name alone added considerable credibility to the project. Moreover, in the publishing culture of the day, illustrations often took primacy over text. Pictures, it was felt, sold more periodicals than words did. Looked at in this light Cruikshank's rather tentative comment does not seem unreasonable.

None of this was of any consequence to Dickens. His tendency to ride roughshod over publishing conventions in order to maintain control over his work would eventually overturn those same conventions. In time his single-mindedness would redound to the benefit of all writers, both financially and in terms of social prominence. *Sketches by Boz* was a small step in this direction but his next work would be a huge leap.

The Year of *Pickwick*

On the morning of 10 February 1836 William Hall knocked on the door of Dickens's Chambers at 13 Furnival's Inn. He arrived armed with a proposal. Hall, along with William Chapman, was a partner in a book-selling and publishing company and the two men wondered if Dickens would be interested in composing the text for a monthly

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[10] Ibid., 183.

series "of cockney sporting-plates of a superior sort."[11] The concept came from Robert Seymour, a well-known caricaturist and illustrator, whom Chapman and Hall had previously worked with.

Dickens was by no means the publishers' first choice for the commission but most established professional writers saw such an assignment as menial hackwork: " While comic plates with letterpress were eminently commercial in the 1830s, credit and cash most often went to the illustrator, not the author, who usually took his direction from plates already designed."[12] Dickens had no such qualms. Despite working on two plays, writing regularly for the *Morning Post*, producing the second series of *Sketches by Boz* for Macrone, and sundry other endeavours, he accepted Hall's proposition with alacrity. Though his friends considered the projected periodical ' " a low, cheap form of publication, by which I should ruin all my rising hopes" ';[13] at this point in his career Dickens turned away no writing that offered the prospect of payment. He also wanted to get married, and the regular £14 a month offered by Chapman and Hall would enable him to do this.

Like many twenty-four year-olds Dickens tended to hear what he wanted to hear and ignore that which was inconvenient: "Caught up in his own visions of future glory, Dickens did not hear very clearly Hall's references to Robert Seymour, who, in priority and fame, was the senior partner in the proposed venture."[14] The young writer's selective deafness did not extend to his intellect, however, and he immediately began to see drawbacks to the proposed scenario. Seymour's suggestion, that the periodical should be based on the adventures on the adventures of a group of country sportsmen called the Nimrod Club, held no appeal for Dickens. He knew little and cared less about hunting

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[11] Forster, 58.

[12] Patten, 62.

[13] Ackroyd, 186.

[14] Patten, 63.

and fishing, and would always be essentially an observer of urban, not rural, life. What is more, as he later related to John Forster:

> [The] idea was not novel and had already been much used; that it would be infinitely better for the plates to arise naturally out of the text; and that I would like to take my own way...and was afraid I should ultimately do so in any case, whatever course I might prescribe to myself at starting.[15]

Dickens had already decided that: "instead of *his* illustrating Seymour, Seymour should illustrate *him.*"[16] Somewhat surprisingly Hall agreed.

Chapman and Hall had been booksellers for six years but the publishing side of the business was a relatively new endeavour. Hall, supposedly the partner with the business acumen, may have been dazzled by Dickens infectious enthusiasm. Certainly the publishers were aware of the lack of originality in Seymour's outline, but allowing the young writer the kind of freedom he demanded represented a considerable act of faith on their part. As for Dickens, not for the last time he made more out of an opportunity than initially presented itself. He instantly took advantage of his improved circumstances by moving into a larger apartment and made plans for his wedding.

The production of *Pickwick Papers* — Dickens dispensed with the Nimrod Club immediately — is a tale marked by ambition, perspicacity, serendipity and tragedy. Peevish and depressive by nature, the demoted Robert Seymour was unhappy with the way his project had been wrested from him, but there was little he could do about it. Deeply insecure in spite of professional success, he felt disadvantaged by his working-class background and lacked the confidence to confront Chapman and Hall. What is more, like Cruikshank, he was soon subjected to regular suggestions from Dickens as to how his illustrations may be improved. Things came to head during the second instalment. At Chapman and Hall's instigation Dickens invited Seymour to a meeting with himself and the publishers to discuss an illustration all three thought inadequate:

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[15] Forster, 59.

[16] Edgar Johnson, 86.

> I think it extremely good, but still, it is not quite my idea; and as I feel so very solicitous to have it as complete as possible, I shall feel personally obliged, if you will make another drawing....I have asked Chapman and Hall, to take a glass of grog with me on Sunday Evening...when I hope you will be able to look in.[17]

The encounter was intended to clear the air as much as discuss the merits of a single drawing. It was brief and there is no record of exactly what was discussed but all parties, supposedly, parted on amicable terms.[18] All except the unhappy Seymour it would seem. After struggling with his *Pickwick* engravings for two more days he went into his garden shed and shot himself in the head. The inarticulate illustrator never stood a chance negotiating with Dickens, who could impose his will on far stronger personalities. As Edgar Johnson puts it: "Dickens had not been needlessly cruel; his genius had merely annihilated the weaker man."[19]

Following Seymour's death the remaining principals held an emergency meeting. The periodical was not doing well, the first two issues received lukewarm reviews and sold a mere four hundred copies each, and now they were without an illustrator. In the circumstances Chapman and Hall might have been excused for cutting their loses and moving on to other projects. According to Robert L. Patten "It is to their eternal credit and fame that, inspired by Dickens's runaway enthusiasm they decided to continue." Perhaps unsurprisingly Dickens came away from the session with an "improved agreement" that would pay him an additional £7 per month. Instead of a twenty-four-page publication with four full-page illustrations per issue, in future *Pickwick* would have thirty-two pages and only two illustrations. In a textbook example of opportunity forged out of crisis, Dickens's desire and Chapman and Hall's desperation came together to

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[17] House, *The Letters of Charles Dickens, Volume One*, 146.

[18] Edgar Johnson, 99.

[19] Ibid., 100.

create a new medium: "At a single stroke something permanent and novel-like...was created out of something ephemeral and episodic."[20] Two issues later sales began to soar.

The introduction of Sam Weller in the fourth issue of *Pickwick Papers* is often cited as the main reason for its phenomenal success, but from a non-literary perspective several other factors were at least as important. firstly, Chapman and Hall had aggressively promoted *Pickwick* from the outset and these efforts would have taken some time to bear fruit. In spite of his supposed dislike of "puffery" Dickens himself prepared advertisements for *The Times, Athenaeum,* and *Morning Chronicle.*[21] Moreover, the story's unique format meant each episode was reviewed by other publications every month, an ongoing and unpurchased form of publicity that conventionally produced fiction could never obtain. The *Literary Gazette* also printed regular extracts from the serial, especially after Sam Weller was introduced. Along with more money, under the new agreement, Chapman and Hall also allowed Dickens to select his own illustrator. His choice, Hablot Knight Browne, a younger man than himself, was perfectly accommodating when it came to rendering the author's characters. Also in issue four the *Pickwick Advertiser* made its first appearance. From this time until the periodical's conclusion businesses would attempt to capitalize on its characters' popularity in every way they could, spreading name recognition far and wide: "There were Pickwick chintzes, Pickwick cigars, Pickwick hats, Pickwick canes with tassels, Pickwick coats; and there were Weller corduroys and Boz cabs."[22] finally, around the time of the fourth episode, Dickens was identified as "Boz": "The identity of 'Boz' was apparently first disclosed in an advertisement of *Sketches,* 2nd edn (*Athenaeum,* 30 July 36.)"[23] There seems little reason why Macrone would want the world to know who Boz was and, given that Dickens usually wrote advertisements for his

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[20] Patten, 65.

[21] Ibid., 64.

[22] Edgar Johnson, 110.

[23] House, *The Letters of Charles Dickens, Volume One,* 1–137n.

own work, the source of the revelation seems obvious. It was time for Dickens to remove the mask.

Pickwick's triumph was unprecedented. By the end of its run 40,000 copies were being simultaneously distributed the length and breadth of Britain, and within a year it would traverse the globe. No previous publication could have experienced a success of such immediacy and on such a scale. On a purely practical level it altered the internal structure of publishing: "the kind of economic potency that *Pickwick* developed and the relationship in that novel of process to end, necessitated the reworking of publisher-author arrangements."[24] No longer would authors be so willing to sell copyrights outright; in future, with their publishers, they would be partners in potential profits. *Pickwick* also gave legitimacy to periodical writing and power to its authors, as both financial reward and creative control shifted away from illustrators.

Pickwick made Dickens the stereotypical overnight sensation. In the autumn of 1836 he accepted an offer of £500 a year from Richard Bentley to edit and contribute to a new monthly publication. "This leap to £500 and the extremely flexible conditions show Dickens's prestige had risen skyward in the amazing six months since William Hall had gone to Furnival's Inn looking for a hack writer."[25] His reputation stretched far beyond his profession though. Even while masquerading as Boz he was already the subject of public gossip. When his sister-in-law died suddenly and he was forced to postpone an instalment of *Pickwick*, rumours ran rife: Was Boz murdered? Driven mad? Thrown into debtor's prison? Or shipped to the United States? "Such reports were in fact to become a perpetual irritant to Dickens — he was always the subject of rumour and gossip, with madness and imprisonment for debt tending to be the two favourite scandals attached to

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[24] Patten, 71.

[25] Edgar Johnson, 106.

his increasingly eminent name."[26] While it was true that he would no longer be free from public scrutiny, in 1836 such attentions were usually the source of amusement rather than annoyance to him. It would be another six years before the negative consequences of his fame became really apparent.

1842: The USA

The post-*Pickwick* period was fruitful. Between 1836 and 1841 Dickens fathered four children and a similar number of novels. His financial fortunes were on the rise too, as was his reputation as an evangelist for social reform. By this time the number of Britons unaware of Dickens existence must have been few indeed and he undoubtedly knew that, yet his energy and ambition remained unassuaged.

Like other energetic and successful Victorians Dickens considered himself very much a self-realized man. It was consequently natural that he should be drawn to a nation whose inhabitants, by reputation, possessed corresponding qualities of self-assurance and similar egalitarian beliefs. The American writer Washington Irving is credited with finally convincing Dickens to make the journey to the United States in 1842: "Irving told him that '... if I went, it would be such a triumph from one end of the States to the other, as was never known in any Nation.' "[27] The comment does not suggest that discreet, anonymous research was high on Dickens's list of priorities.

Even before the party disembarked in Boston on January 21, however there were signs the expedition may turn out to be less than completely pleasurable. A group of men carrying newspapers clambered on board the steamer. Dickens initially took them for newsboys but in fact they were journalists, all eager to shake the eminent Englishman by the hand: "And if you could but know how I hated one man in very dirty gaiters, and with

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[26] Ackroyd, 233.

[27] Ibid, 334.

very protruding upper teeth, who said to all comers after him, 'So you've been introduced to our friend Dickens — eh?' "[28] Within the comment and Dickens's irritated reaction to it, reside the seeds of much that would go awry during his six-month stay.

It was not the newspaperman's appearance that irked the dandified author so much as his assumed air of familiarity. Dickens was used to being recognised when out in public in Britain. There, however, people kept their distance. As he was soon to discover Americans were much less decorous. In the United States it seemed everyone claimed attention on his own terms with little regard for Dickens's personal privacy. In addition and for different reasons, the English author's interaction with the American press was about to become at least as unpleasant as his initial encounter with one of its members.

Dickens arrived in North America with an agenda. He would use every opportunity he could to lobby for an international agreement on copyright between the United States and Great Britain. His work — and that of other British writers — was widely distributed throughout the country but they received precious little payment in return. Never one to waste time, Dickens tackled the issue head-on during his first speaking engagements in Boston and Hartford:

> ...I never will, while I remain in America, omit an opportunity of referring to a topic in which I and all others of my class on both sides of the water are equally interested—...International Copyright...I do not see, I confess...why fame, besides playing that delightful *reveille* for which she is so justly celebrated, should not blow out of her trumpet a few notes of a different kind.[29]

From the *Hartford Daily Times* the response was swift: " It happens that we want no advice upon this subject, and it will be better for Mr Dickens, if he refrains from introducing the matter hereafter." Popular newspapers like the *New World* had reprinted Dickens's work without compunction and were among the chief beneficiaries of the

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[28] Madeline House, Graham Storey and Kathleen Tillotson eds. *The Letters of Charles Dickens, Volume Three 1842 - 1843*, The Pilgrim Edition. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1974), 33.

[29] Ibid., 59n.

copyright treaty vacuum: "The time, place and occasion taken into consideration — to us [his remarks] seem to have been made in the worst taste possible." The editorial went on to claim that its circulation of twenty thousand copies were "the secret of his wide spread fame."[30] The implication was that this should be reward enough.

Dickens was furious: "I have never in my life been so shocked and disgusted, or made so sick and sore at heart, as I have by the treatment I have received here (in America I mean), in reference to the International Copyright question."[31] He refused to be silenced and in fact had plenty of support within the country among the public and better quality newspapers. However, as an Englishman playing away from home he was at a disadvantage. " 'You must drop [it] Charlie,' the Boston *Morning Post* said, 'or you will be dished; it smells of the shop-rank.' "[32] Indeed speculation grew within the pages of the anti-Dickens press that his motives for visiting the United States were purely mercenary. He also began to receive abusive anonymous letters. The battle continued for the duration of his stay, but it was one Dickens would eventually lose. Britain and the United States would not sign a copyright agreement until twenty-one years after his death.

Meanwhile, as the war of words continued, the author and his wife were, as Irving predicted, overwhelmed with invitations and lionized lavishly wherever they went. At first the attention was flattering:

> I can give you no conception of my welcome here. There never was a King or Emperor upon the Earth, so cheered, and followed by crowds, and entertained in Public at splendid balls and dinners, and waited on by public bodies and deputations of all kinds.[33]

The pressure on his time was such that within a few days of his arrival in Boston Dickens hired a secretary to organise his appointments. Two hours were set aside every afternoon

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[30] Ibid., 60n.

[31] Ibid., 76.

[32] Ackroyd, 353.

[33] House, *The Letters of Charles Dickens, Volume Three*, 43

to receive the throng of people that wanted to meet him. Even these arrangements proved insufficient however:

> Ladies pressed into the studio to stare at him until Dickens bolted for the door, only to be mobbed there and forced to retreat and lock himself within. When hunger obliged him to emerge for lunch they were still besieging the doorway, and surged about him instantly again, clinging to him while they furtively snipped bits of fur from his coat.[34]

The climax of Dickensmania occurred on February 14 with the Boz Ball at New York's Park Theatre. Three thousand people were in attendance and an estimated five thousand turned away. The auditorium, decorated with an incongruous combination of vignettes depicting Dickens characters interspersed by State seals, was presided over by a huge gold American eagle. Between dances, *tableaux vivants* showing scenes from his novels were presented on stage. The following day the *New York Herald* commemorated the event by publishing a special edition: *The Extra Boz Herald*, which recaptured the splendour in every lavish detail.[35]

The Ball was as exhausting as it was adulatory. In fact the same could be said of the entire tour. Even for one as gregarious as Dickens the relentless attention was proving intolerable. After a month in America he wrote home to Forster:

> I can do nothing that I want to do, go nowhere where I want to go, and see nothing that I want to see. If I turn into the street, I am followed by a multitude. If I stay at home, the house becomes, with callers, like a fair...I go to a party in the evening, and am so inclosed and hemmed about by people...that I am exhausted for want of air. I dine out, and I have to talk about everything, to everybody. I go to church for quiet, and there is a violent rush to the neighbourhood of the pew I sit in, and the clergyman preaches *at* me. I take my seat in a railroad car, and the conductor won't leave me alone. I get out at a station, and I can't drink a glass of water, without having a hundred people looking down my throat when I open my mouth to swallow.[36]

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[34] Edgar Johnson, 202.

[35] House, *The Letters of Charles Dickens, Volume Three*, 71n.

[36] Ibid. 87.

After venting his frustrations to his friend Dickens refused any further public entertainments for the remainder of the trip. Nevertheless he could not escape the consequences of his own celebrity. His name was used in advertisements, copies of his bust were on sale at Tiffany and — according to rumour — his barber sold locks of his hair to female admirers. Dickens's generosity with his time continued to be taken advantage of. When a small group of Philadelphians asked for a meeting, he agreed. They then placed a notice in the local newspaper stating that the author would " 'shake hands with his friends' for an hour on Tuesday."[37] At the appointed time over six hundred people packed the street outside his hotel and he was forced to have his arm pumped for over two hours.

An incident at the end of his American adventure typified Dickens irritation with his hosts. The boat that was taking him out of the country moored overnight in Cleveland:

> At 6 in the morning a party of gentlemen planted themselves opposite our little State room...and stared in at the door and windows while I was washing, and Kate lay in bed. I was so incensed at this, that I straightway went to bed, and when the mayor came, refused to see him.[38]

One wonders whether, perhaps, one of the voyeurs had dirty gaiters and protruding teeth.

A Fanatical Readership

"But the fame —, "[39] a nonplussed David Copperfield responds as Steerforth disclaims any interest in a conventional career. Fame — in the sense of enhanced reputation — and the power that accrues from it was important to Dickens. Optimistic,

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[37] Edgar Johnson, 219.

[38] House, *The Letters of Charles Dickens, Volume Three,* 219.

[39] Charles Dickens. *The Personal History of David Copperfield.* (London: Blackie & Son, undated), 272.

confident, and assertive, his unparalleled storytelling skills wedded to an unprejudiced view of popular media contributed directly to his early success. At least as significant however was Dickens's relationship with his readers. As Peter Ackroyd says: "He seems to have needed that link with his audience...Both as an editor and as a novelist, he always knew precisely the demands and expectations of the public and at no stage in his career did he deliberately or knowingly thwart them."[40] The empathic umbilicus that connected Dickens to his public forged an intimate bond with them. In return he took full advantage of the versatility that part fiction offered to tailor his work to their tastes. For the second hardback edition of *Sketches by Boz*, for instance, he removed the slang that the original sketches contained and "toned down any passage or reference which might smack of indelicacy."[41] The new version was more expensive than its predecessors and the author wanted to be sure it was palatable to upper-middle-class readers, a social category Dickens himself had recently entered. Later, when sales of *Martin Chuzzlewit* flagged, he shifted the story to America in an attempt to woo readers with a more exotic locale.

An awareness of his audience's taste and sensibilities always underpinned Dickens's writing, but following the runaway success of *Pickwick* he was unable to predict with certainty the effect that same audience would have on himself. John Forster, who probably knew the author better than anyone, perceptively wrote: "What the sudden popularity of his writings implied was known to others some time before it was known to himself."[42] Forster was mainly referring to the business commitments Dickens had made, particularly with Macrone and Bentley, but his comment could equally well apply to the public's sometimes unexpected reactions.

Dickens's rapport with his British public and position within the nation's publishing establishment counted for little in America. There he was treated as a transient

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[40] Ackroyd, 215.

[41] Ibid., 275.

[42] Forster, 67.

novelty: a celebrated visitor to be courted or flaunted as the occasion demanded. He was also a guest who, many thought, should graciously accept his kudos and refrain from controversy. In England Dickens's forthrightness was usually met with deference. There, as one contemporary put it, a "curiously reverent attitude" towards him pertained.[43] In a land of forthright people, he would not obtain similar complaisance. In the United States Dickens encountered the underside of fame for the first time and it brought him up short. An intolerant and coercive popular press used public opinion, which had always been *his* ally up until this time, against him, or so he thought.

However much Dickens hated criticism — and he always took it badly — he was hardly the first artist to be subjected to scorn from the media. More unusual were the effects his celebrity had on the public. In 1839 an engraved edition of his portrait was issued. The demand was so great that the plate deteriorated and became unprintable within days.[44] Portraits of writers and other artists had been popular before but now there was an accelerated avidity, almost a need for instant gratification, evident on the part of many of Dickens's readers. Aside from the hysteria recorded during his American tour odd behaviour began to surface when certain people came in contact with the writer:

> So strong was Dickens's imaginative hold upon his readers...that people began to behave in a "Dickensian" fashion when they were in his presence; in other words they unconsciously exaggerated their own mannerisms and behaviour in order to conform to the types which he had already created.[45]

In rare cases this type of identification certainly stretched into irrationality and derangement: "When the son of a certain Basil Hill lay dying, Hill exclaimed 'Oh, here's a point for Dickens."[46] A brush with the great writer could become the most significant event in the life of a few sad individuals. Ackroyd, relates the story of a Philadelphia

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[43] Ackroyd, 295.

[44] Patten,101.

[45] Ackroyd, 260.

[46] Ibid.

prisoner who, because Dickens mentioned him in *American Notes*, was used to frequent visitors and pleaded that he should remain in jail after the completion of his sentence as he would miss the attention.[47]

Dickens himself could hardly fail to be affected by such aberrant behaviour. At some point he acquired the habit of referring to himself in the third person. Known as illeism, this is not an uncommon trait and often associated with a narcissistic personality. If, however, Freud's definition of a narcissist as one "who inclines to be self-sufficient, [and] will seek his main satisfactions in his internal mental processes";[48] is accepted, then it is questionable whether it applies to Dickens. Self-sufficient he most certainly was but his extrovert nature surely negates the second indicator. Instead of narcissism perhaps the proclivity reflects Dickens's need to create a separation between his public and private persona. It provided him with a way to maintain a much-needed psychological distance from the more extreme behaviour of his followers, some of whom could accurately be termed fanatics, or fans.

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[47] Ibid., 258.

[48] Sigmund Freud. *Civilization and Its Discontents*. trans. and ed. James Strachey. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961), 35.

Chapter Four:

A Different Kind of Organism

Following the defeat of Napoleon Bonaparte a tide of democratic reform swept across Europe. It crested during the late 1840s in a series of republican uprisings throughout the continent. Through his inflammatory writings in the press Richard Wagner, then 36 and relatively unknown as a composer, found himself in the vanguard of the ill-fated Dresden rebellion. Ignominy and exile followed but his status as an artistic outlaw created fertile ground that nurtured his future celebrity. This reached its zenith towards the end of Wagner's life with the creation of the Bayreuth Festival, perhaps the first large event where the public persona of the artist supersedes his actual work.

The Reluctant Journalist

It was nightfall. With his face concealed to avoid recognition by the coachman, Richard Wagner was fleeing Saxony. If caught he would almost certainly be sentenced to death like his associates.[1] It was May 10 1849. Wagner's flight climaxed a year of fervent political activism, culminating with his involvement in the Dresden rebellion earlier the same week. Though his voluminous writings continue to intrigue, infuriate and perplex, this period particularly was punctuated with outbursts in the press that, now as then, serve to muddy the composer's intentions.

Wagner had begun writing for the press in Paris eight years earlier. Though, then and later, he always depreciated it as "hack work,"[2] he needed the money. Between July

[1] Martin Gregor-Dellin. *Richard Wagner.* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), 178.

1840 and April 1842 he wrote twenty-five articles for four different publications. Of these Maurice Schlesinger's *Gazette Musicale* was the most significant. It introduced his name to an international public for the first time and, according to Robert Jacobs and Geoffrey Shelton, was considered "a journal of considerable standing."[3] While acknowledging that personalities such as George Sand discovered him via the pages of the magazine, Wagner never valued the exposure it brought him. Indeed it is questionable as to whether he ever gave real consideration to publishing as a medium at all. After an unusually successful public performance of his *Columbus* overture, the composer seemed slightly bemused at the sympathetic reaction his work received:

> On the night of the performance (4th February 1841) the audience, which was largely composed of subscribers to the *Gazette Musicale*, and to whom, therefore, my literary successes were not unknown, seemed rather favourably disposed towards me.[4]

Ironically all his life Wagner was first, if not foremost, a writer, so the audience's reaction ought to have come as no surprise. He had written regularly since childhood and continued to do so until his death. While there were interruptions to his musical composition, sometimes of several years, he never stopped writing. Later he would come to believe that writing was an essential part of becoming German. Unlike the French, Italians or Greeks who had a ready-made literature to play with, Germans needed to create their own. In his view this obviously did not include commercial work. As much as he disliked them, Wagner's published articles of this period — modelled on the satirical writing of his Paris acquaintance Heinrich Heine — are succinct and witty. Biographer Ernest Newman believed:

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[2] Richard Wagner. *My Life.* (London: Constable, 1973), 216.

[3] Robert Jacobs and Geoffrey Shelton. *Wagner Writes from Paris.* (New York: John Day & Co., 1973), 13.

[4] Wagner, *My Life*, 236.

> He never wrote better than at this period of his life: his pen has a speed and variety of rhythm that it lost in later years when the burden of thought in him was too great for his literary faculty to carry in comfort.[5]

A more professionally pragmatic individual would have learned from his Parisian experiences and applied them in Saxony seven years later. But Wagner was not that individual and the circumstances in Dresden were quite different.

The Naïve Revolutionary

At 35 years of age the material success that eluded Wagner in Paris now seemed secure. As *Kapellmeister* to the King of Saxony he was a respected member of the Dresden establishment with, one would have thought, an investment in maintaining the social status quo. However these were no ordinary times. It was 1848 and like many Germans Wagner was caught up in the democratic movements then sweeping through Europe. He was appalled when the titular heads of the German states, including the King of Saxony, reneged on their willingness to negotiate reforms. As frequently became the case in the following weeks, his first instinct was to reach for his pen.

Newspapers in German-speaking Europe were enjoying a previously unknown and, as it turned out, short-lived moment of political freedom: "Under the strict censorship which prevailed until 1848 there was little critical comment in German papers."[6] That spring Vienna experienced a series of republican-inspired revolts. Wagner lent his support by penning a fourteen-stanza poem: "Greeting from Saxony to the Viennese." It praised the citizens of the city for having "drawn the sword" and railed against overfed property-owners.[7] The poem was published on June 1 in *Allegemeine Österreichische Zeitung*, a new paper that was part of the "journalistic saturnalia" that had

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[5] Jacobs, 13.

[6] Anthony Smith. *The Newspaper: An International History.* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1979), 118.

[7] Gregor-Dellin, 148.

emerged in the Austrian capital over the previous months.[8] As Martin Gregor-Dellin points out: "Before March...the public expression of such sentiments would have cost [Wagner] his job, if not his freedom."[9] King Friedrich August's recalcitrance in instituting democratic change led to increased discussions of republicanism among Dresden's political radicals. Wagner's contribution to the debate was an article entitled "How Do Republican Endeavours Relate to Monarchy?" Naïvely, Wagner advocates sweeping away all class distinctions and aristocratic privileges overnight. In essence he attempts to have his reforms and eat them too, as the King was required to voluntarily set this change in motion by renouncing the throne and becoming the first Citizen of the new republic. first made public on June 14 in a speech to Saxony's largest republican organization, the article was published a few days later in *Dresdner Anzeiger* and pleased no one. It was greeted with hoots of derision by republicans, howls of anger from aristocrats, and silent resentment at the royal court. Though it was published anonymously Dresdeners had no doubt who was responsible. To most it appeared that Wagner was flaunting his revolutionary ardour while simultaneously attempting to maintain favour with the King, a balancing act that lacked not only a net but also a rope.

> Having brought down this storm on his head...Wagner stayed home and suffered...On June 18, [he] tried to fend off disaster by writing [the royal court] a letter of self justification in which he stated that his aim had been to dissuade the progressive party from violent excesses by dint of reasoned, moderate argument...Pleading an attack of gastric trouble, Wagner prefaced his letter by requesting two weeks' leave of absence.[10]

Not for the last time the composer had seriously misread the consequences of his words. Years later critic Paul Lindau noted that: "The Muses have denied Wagner the blessed gift

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[8] Smith, 117.

[9] Gregor-Dellin, 148.

[10] Ibid., 150.

of eloquence. Whenever he opens his mouth some mishap occurs."[11] Richard Fricke, the composer's assistant director at Bayreuth, enlarged on the problem:

> He speaks rather like someone talking to himself for his own benefit, then blusters in such a way that one can only roughly piece together what he means. He bursts out laughing, turns irritable, then laughs again, sarcastically railing against whatever happens to annoy him...Wagner speaks quietly, indistinctly, gesticulates a great deal with his hands and arms; the final words of a sentence convey approximately what he wants, and one has to pay attention like mad.[12]

As he was in speech so, to a considerable degree, Wagner was in text. His writing is frequently passionate, but just as often impulsive and frustratingly vague. Newspaper journalism requires more rhetorical precision, objectivity and consistency than he was reliably able to bring to it, leaving readers to draw their own conclusions regarding the seriousness of the author's ideas.

In late summer 1848 August Röckel, Wagner's friend and assistant conductor at the royal orchestra, was fired from his post due to his political activities. On August 26 he began publishing *Volksblätter*, a weekly newspaper with strong republican sympathies. Over the coming months Wagner would — once again anonymously — write several articles for the paper. Those known, or strongly suspected, to have been penned by him include: "Germany and Its Princes, Man and Existing Society," and, most importantly, "Revolution." Each illustrates a growing involvement in political thought and a similar propensity toward action on Wagner's part. The following autumn and winter was a fervent and productive period for the composer. He visited Vienna to establish solidarity with the city's revolutionary republican leadership — and also, coincidently, to look for a better job. The music drama *Lohengrin* had been completed before the trip and on his return he threw himself into writing the first draft of what would become *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Aside from these artistic endeavours, however, Wagner's association with

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[11] Ibid., 435.

[12] Ibid., 424.

Röckel was drawing him further into radical political circles. At a meeting in early March 1849 he was introduced to Mikhail Bakunin.

From this distance in time theirs seems an unusual, even outlandish, relationship. During their frequent walks the spidery little composer and the Falstaffian anarcho-socialist side-by-side in animated conversation must have presented a striking picture. Both had been in Paris at the same time so Wagner knew something of 'Mr Schwarz' by reputation — the Russian was travelling under an alias to evade the authorities. For his part Bakunin may have heard of Wagner from his friend George Sand. He had spent the previous year travelling across Europe doing his best to fan the flames of incipient revolution wherever he lighted. Wagner was entranced. He found the big man: "remarkable...the purest humanitarian idealism was combined with a savagery utterly inimical to all culture, and thus my relationship with him fluctuated between instinctive horror and irresistible attraction."[13] Together with Röckel the fast friends were at the intellectual core of a revolt that was now only weeks away.

The April 8 edition of *Volksblätter* carried Wagner's article, "Revolution." An impassioned tirade suggesting violent political change was both inevitable and imminent, "Revolution" distils the emotional and intellectual turbulence swirling within and around Wagner during those months. In its apocalyptic imagery the ideas of Bakunin are married with the aspirations Wagner had for *Der Ring des Nibelungen:*

> the sublime Goddess of Revolution comes thundering in on the wings of the storm, lightening flashing around her august head, a sword in her right hand, torch in her left, her eye so dark, so vengeful, so cold; and yet what a glow of the purest love, what abundant happiness it radiates upon him who dares to look straight and unswerving into this sombre eye![14]

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[13] Wagner, *My Life*, 388.

[14] Alan David Aberbach. *Class Notes LS 819.* Simon Fraser University, (Vancouver, BC; 2003), 1.

To everyone in Dresden, except Wagner, the article was redolent with the odour of burning bridges, as the author, in an orgy of overwrought prose, submerges himself completely into the role of romantic revolutionary.

> I will destroy the existing order of things which divides mankind into hostile nations, into strong and weak, into those with rights and those without, into rich and poor, for this order simply makes wretches of us all.[15]

Claiming common cause with democrats is one thing but organising and fomenting an uprising is quite another. However much Wagner may later have tried to play down his involvement in the Dresden rebellion — "Revolution," for instance gets no mention in his autobiography — there is little doubt that his commitment was considerable. As Martin Gregor-Dellin puts it: "Wagner had become a tocsin and mouthpiece of revolution."[16]

It is curious that someone whose political activity had been negligible since he was in his teens should, in the space of a few months, throw himself wholeheartedly into subversive revolutionary activity. Wagner felt no particular kinship with the common man and his biographers are hard pressed to lay any acts of social altruism at his feet. His respect for the theoretical *'Volk,'* was boundless but the all too real *'Pöbel'* he considered rabble and proselytising in their smoky taverns was detestable. In later years Wagner asserted that his revolutionary motives were, in fact, aesthetic rather than political:

> He had not, so he claimed, become a revolutionary to implement a specific ideological viewpoint, nor to espouse a narrowly parochial political cause. On the contrary, his radicalism was designed to secure artistic and social ends.[17]

Despite his protestations to the contrary it is certain that Wagner was close to the centre of the uprising, in deed as well as word. He was visible on the streets throughout the revolt, exhorting and encouraging the population to resist the military occupation by

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[15] Ibid., 3.

[16] Gregor-Dellin, 166.

[17] Alan David Aberbach. *The Ideas of Richard Wagner, Revised Edition.* (Lanham, Maryland: 1988), 103

Prussian troops. A local brass-founder later testified that on May 3 Wagner ordered a considerable quantity of grenades and the following day requested that they be filled with explosives. It is reasonable to suppose that Röckel, Bakunin, and other leaders of the rebellion would not have shared Wagner's later contention that hand grenades and rocks were being hurled in the cause of good taste.

Wagner's political ardour flared intensely but briefly. A week after the Dresden rebellion he explained to his wife that: "True revolutionaries had to destroy first in order to build a better future — this could only be carried out by 'the scum of the common people.' "[18] From exile in Switzerland, the revisionism began in earnest the following month. To his friend Edward Devrient he wrote:

> As long as I was able to follow the Dresden rising it had my full and absolute sympathy, which I frankly proclaimed, admittedly not through any act — but in my opinions expressed to many individuals — never, though, to the masses (as a speaker for example!)[19]

This instant re-evaluation of his revolutionary activities is extraordinary and perhaps better understood if we consider the composer's instincts rather than his ideas. In his biography Barry Millington notes that: "[Wagner's] personality [would not] allow him to occupy a back seat: he always had to be a leader, always at the hub of things."[20] Alan Aberbach concurs: "The possibility of opportunism, always a factor when dealing with Wagner, needs to be taken into consideration."[21] Wagner's nose for situating himself at the centre of the drama — whatever it may be — likely had as much to do with his involvement in the uprising of 1849 as any genuine commitment to social revolution. Until Prussian troops arrived there was little actual violence: rousing speeches and inflammatory newspaper articles — both of which he had enthusiasm for — were the

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[18] Barry Millington. *Wagner.* (Princeton New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), 39.

[19] Aberbach, *Class Notes,* 6.

[20] Millington, 38.

[21] Aberbach, *The Ideas of Richard Wagner, Revised,* 20.

order of the day. When people were being thrown out of windows and blood began to flow Wagner's zest for insurrection ebbed rapidly.

In writing about the Dresden uprising German historian Golo Mann observes:

> Neither revolution nor counter-revolution is attractive. What attracts in the [former] is idealism and honest unselfish hope, what offends is dilettantism, melodramatic posturing, quarrels among leaders and the abruptness of change.[22]

Many would argue that Wagner cogently exemplifies Mann's dilettante or poseur. On the other hand that would imply a cynicism on the composer's part for which there is little evidence. At his trial Bakunin claimed: "I immediately recognised Wagner as an impractical dreamer,"[23] and that may be the most genuine assessment. It was Wagner after all who, immediately after the rebellion's failure, seriously considered returning to Dresden to resume his duties with the royal orchestra.[24] Yet, though the aftermath of the revolution would dog him for the rest of his life it also spread the name of Richard Wagner across Europe. As he approached his fortieth year the public knew the man who would become the century's most famous composer better as either a journalist or political agitator. In these capacities his name was liable to make headlines and sell papers. Shortly after arriving in Zurich he wrote *Art and Revolution*, a pamphlet that attempted to put his political ideas into an aesthetic context: "On August 4, he sent the manuscript to Otto Wigand, a radical Leipzig publisher who correctly perceived that the author's notoriety might prove a commercial asset."[25] As the revolutionary wilted so the celebrity blossomed.

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[22] Golo Mann. *The History of Germany Since 1789*. (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 190.

[23] Aberbach, *Class Notes*, 8.

[24] Gregor-Dellin, 177.

[25] Ibid., 190.

The Press

In spite of any actual or potential forum they provided, Wagner was not prepared to indulge the scrutiny and speculation of the periodicals to which his increasing fame exposed him. He maintained an antipathy toward the popular press throughout his life, believing that journalists represented: "nothing, as a rule, but a literary failure or a bankrupt mercantile career,"[26] and that their effect on the public was corrosive:

> It certainly is not as paradoxical as it might appear, to aver that with the invention of the art of printing, and quite certainly with the rise of journalism, mankind has gradually lost much of its capacity for healthy judgment: ...whole generations — including most emphatically our own, as any close observer must recognise—have been so degraded through the abuses practised on the healthy human power of judgment by the manipulators of the modern daily Press in particular, and consequently through the lethargy into which that power of judgment has fallen, in keeping with man's habitual bent to easygoingness, that, in flat contradiction of the lies they let themselves be told, men shew themselves more incapable each day of sympathy with truly great ideas.[27]

This argument is interesting, hearkening back as it does to Socrates, who maintained the primacy of the spoken over the written word for much the same reason as Wagner. It also anticipates oft-repeated modern arguments that mass media function mainly as a social narcotic. Most importantly, the statement reveals the composer's disinclination to accept the notion of the press as a neutral or passive entity operating merely as a conduit for the ideas of others. To him it has its own agenda that works against the general welfare of humanity. As far as Wagner is concerned if the press has any valid function at all it is solely to root out undiscovered genius and proclaim it to the world at large.

The composer's negative views of journalists ballooned into acrimony when it came to his personal dealings with them. This perception extended to professional critics whom he considered "envious"[28] and refused to indulge with free tickets to his concerts.

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[26] Richard Wagner. *The Prose Works of Richard Wagner, Volume IV.* trans. William Ashton Ellis, (New York: Broude Brothers, 1966), 21.

[27] Ibid., 24.

Unsurprisingly they usually reciprocated with bad reviews, perhaps most famously in London in 1855 and Paris in 1861. In fact, with the exception of *Rienzi*, all Wagner's early major compositions were initially poorly received. The situation only began to change with the premiere performance of *Lohengrin* at Weimar in 1850. Even then it could be argued that the success was due largely to Franz Liszt's appearance as conductor. At the time Liszt enjoyed the kind of celebrity stature his friend would later emulate. In any case Wagner remained unmoved by the generous reviews, considering them "dull-witted."[29]

Critics were a minor irritant however. Most of the time he was able to ignore being "called a maniac, an idiot, and a raving lunatic as well as a tin-can musician."[30] When he was unable to turn a deaf ear to the journalistic barbs, Wagner would return fire:

> So the word goes forth 'We've got the power; 400,000 subscribers stand at our back, and look towards us: what shall we be mauling next?' Soon comes the whole army of writers and reviewers to assistance: all are 'liberal' and hate the uncommon, particularly what goes its own way without worry about them...And the public looks on, always from behind, having at least the satisfaction of mischief.[31]

Though Wagner ranted against the press, he thrived on attention. If the Dresden uprising had been an extreme example of his need to be at the centre of things, then his proclivity towards melodramatic excess only guaranteed the news-sheets' interest: ' "I am a different kind of organism, my nerves are hypersensitive, I must have beauty, splendour and light! The world owes me what I need!" '[32] *Daily Telegraph* correspondent Joseph Bennett, writing from the first Bayreuth Festival, commented about *Wahnfried*, the composer's house:

> There is, however, about Wagner's state a pretentious, theatrical air such as a man of taste must regret to see. A house decorated with gaudy frescoes

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[28] Wagner, *My Life*, 302.

[29] Ibid., 561.

[30] Millington, 78.

[31] Wagner, Prose Works Volume VI, 59.

[32] Millington, 72.

> and mottoes, bearing a fantastic name, and surmounted, as now, by three tall poles, from the top of which stream three large flags — such a place I can associate with genius only by a severe wrench. But Wagner was never chargeable with failing to exhibit his light in all sorts of ways and places. He strives to keep himself before the world, and if he attracts passing attention by decorating his house, he is, at least consistent.[33]

With his arrival in Bavaria press relations reached new depths of bitterness. King Ludwig II's patronage and close friendship earned Wagner the enmity of royal advisors. They, in turn, used their influence with a local Munich newspaper *Der Volksbote*, which enthusiastically campaigned to turn the public against the "ex-revolutionary turned sybarite" on the grounds that he was unduly influencing the young king.[34] As a consequence Wagner was officially expelled from the country, to the newspaper's glee:

> The news that Richard Wagner has been ordered to leave Bavaria ran through the city the day before yesterday like wildfire, which is enough in itself to show the extent and depth of the agitation that the man has aroused by his behaviour. Expressions of the liveliest satisfaction have been voiced everywhere.[35]

Der Volksbote's crowing was short-lived. Though resident in Switzerland, Wagner remained close to the Bavarian king and a continuing source of resentment to many members of the Munich establishment. In early June 1866 the paper implied an adulterous relationship between the composer and his future wife Cosima von Bülow. While true, if the liaison became public Wagner would very likely have lost the confidence of the King and his position. In response he and Cosima persuaded Ludwig to write a letter in support of Cosima's husband. The King complied; in it he promised "an investigation into 'these criminal libels' with the intention of ensuring 'that the culprits are brought to justice with merciless severity.' "[36] The German press had been reigned in

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[33] Robert Hartford. *Bayreuth: The Early Years.* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 89.

[34] Millington, 78.

[35] Aberbach, *The Ideas of Richard Wagner, Revised*, 98.

[36] Millington, 80.

after the exuberance of 1848 and was not powerful enough to publicly contradict a reigning monarch. They kept silent and as a result the editor of *Der Volksbote* was fined by the Bavarian court.

The media is a thick-skinned beast and in spite, or perhaps because, of the fractiousness it continued to find the composer's notoriety made good copy. Ironically, in spite his personal detestation of popular newspapers, Wagner was eventually able to surmount and even benefit from the negative publicity. Martin Gregor-Dellin comments on the consequences of the riotous 1861 performances of *Tannhäuser* in Paris:

> Wagner was one of the first composers to benefit, as well as suffer, from public uproar. Indeed, he may well have been the very first to find his growing reputation unimpaired by adverse criticism. For the first time, a sizable section of the German music-loving public ranged itself pointedly behind him. At Dresden, where his official status was still that of a rebel on the run, theatre goers gave him a spontaneous ovation in absentia.[37]

A reputation based on criteria other than, or in addition to, the social or critical acceptability of the artist's work is characteristic of the emerging idea of celebrity. For Wagner it would reach its apogee at Bayreuth.

Bayreuth and Beyond

As early as 1850 Wagner had fantasised about creating his own theatre in a "beautiful meadow near the city."[38] Two years later he expanded on the idea to Franz Liszt:

> I can only imagine my audience as being composed of friends who have assembled in some place for the sole purpose of becoming familiar with my works — preferably, in some beautiful retreat far from the smoke and industrial odours of city civilization.[39]

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[37] Gregor-Dellin, 148.

[38] Hartford, 19.

[39] Ibid.

It was a further quarter of a century before his reverie became a reality. The first Bayreuth Festival was both a breathtaking piece of self-aggrandisement — between performances audiences were expected to do little but contemplate and discuss the works they had witnessed — and a milestone in the history of the dramatic arts. The week-long event offered audiences the first complete cycle of *Der Ring des Nibelungen,* performed in a new theatre custom-built for the event. As a concept the festival presaged a myriad of modern imitators; from Newport to Glyndebourne to Woodstock to Glastonbury, they too present music over several days in a rural setting and so have roots in that small Bavarian town. Other festivals differ from Bayreuth, however, in that rarely are they devoted to the work of one artist. In August 1876, during the first festival, though he was rarely visible, Wagner's presence was the charismatic kernel of the entire week. Joseph Bennett commented that:

> the theatre was one day bespotted with handbills [which] desired all and sundry to note that for five marks of the realm the honour of a supper with the great man could be obtained. I paid five marks and enjoyed the distinction, which was certainly cheap at the price...Wagner, posing on the top of the steps, with his body-guard around him, delivered a speech. He is no orator. His manner lacks grace, and his words do not flow freely. Yet there is something about him that would dispose one to listen, even if his claim upon attention were unknown.[40]

With an audience composed mainly of fans, rather than the "friends" Wagner had imagined in his letter to Liszt, the festival represented an early manifestation of a celebrity culture familiar to modern audiences at a large film festival. Also in attendance was a unique assemblage of international artists, composers, and critics. Composer Edvard Grieg, for example, was writing from Bayreuth for the Norwegian paper *Bergensposten:*

> There are large numbers of musicians, writers and artists of all types, from all parts of the world, all mingling together and it is impossible to avoid them, wherever one goes. All the great names of Europe and even America have gathered here...I am constantly meeting famous people. In the flat next to me there lives a composer of operas, across the corridor a famous singer, below me a celebrated music director and above me a well known critic.[41]

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[40] Ibid., 90.

Grieg found it exhausting. For Mark Twain, another of the Festival's early visitors, the atmosphere and audience was somewhat eerie:

> In this remote village there are no sights to see, there is no newspaper to intrude the worries of the distant world, there is nothing going on, it is always Sunday...This audience reminds me of nothing I have ever seen and nothing I have read about except the city in the Arabian tale where all the inhabitants have been turned to brass and the traveller finds them after centuries mute, motionless, and still retaining the attitudes they last knew in life.[42]

George Bernard Shaw, who attended several of the festivals, also questioned the motives of the Bayreuth audience:

> Bayreuth is supported at present partly because there is about the journey thither a certain romance of pilgrimage which may be summarily dismissed as the effect of the bad middle-class habit of cheap self-culture by novel reading.[43]

Shaw's comment is pertinent, as the festival's success would have been impossible in 1850 when Wagner conceived the idea. Steamships and railways were required to bring the famous and not so famous swiftly to bucolic Bavaria and remove them just as efficiently. By luck rather than prescience, the composer's instincts anticipated advances in transportation technologies and communication technologies with unerring acuity.

By the time of his death Wagner's personal celebrity transcended music, political activities and writing. Within the newly affluent, aspirational middle-classes his fame was far greater than the sum of its parts: to them he embodied a vision of the artist as rebellious romantic genius. That the composer's own history provided ample content for this fantasy abetted the perception. Many in the festival audiences that Shaw and Twain comment on were in attendance to pay homage to the Master as much as to listen to his

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[41] Ibid., 41.

[42] Ibid., 154.

[43] Ibid., 145.

work. This attitude led to the type of compulsive hero-worship expressed by the young Alma Mahler-Werfel, the future wife of Gustav Mahler:

> Afterwards I inebriated myself with favourite passages from 'Götterdämmerung.' In those few notes ["Auf, auf ihm entgegen"] — what unbridled passion. When I see that passage, I could shout for joy. Wagner you Dionysus, you god of eternal ecstasy. You are so, so great![44]

Such florid obeisance would have suited Wagner perfectly. Genius, a concept central to Romanticism of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was highly valued by Wagner. Though never quite egotistical enough to give himself the title, at least in public; from a young age he, nevertheless, appears to have believed he was one: "I gradually became conscious of a certain power of transporting or bewildering my more indolent companions."[45] With this knowledge his torment at the hands of the press and other philistines was made bearable. Such martyrdom was merely a penance required of those kissed by the gods:

> Why do artists, in whom the divine fire burns, quit their private sanctuaries and run breathless through the city's streets eagerly looking for bored dull-witted people upon whom to force the offering of ineffable joy?[46]

While easy to ridicule such self-indulgence it would be a mistake to dismiss it out of hand. Beyond hubris, such statements offer insights into Wagner's attitude towards his work, his audience, and the press.

Because romantic truth is received rather than discovered, a genius is untouched by any inconsistencies or contradictions, either in his work or his life. Explanations related to them are therefore unnecessary and much of the time impossible. The significance of such revealed knowledge was always highly valued by Wagner. It also made him a fascinating moving target, easy enough for the media to either criticize or lionize, but

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[44] Alma Mahler-Werfel. *Diaries 1898-1902.* trans. by Antony Beaumont. (London: Faber & Faber, 1998), 311.

[45] Wagner, *My Life*, 93.

[46] Wagner, *Prose Works* Volume VI, 103.

frustratingly hard to pin down. It is worth noting parenthetically that the unquestioning acceptance of the concept of genius is potentially dangerous. Beyond exaggeration or the morality of telling untruths, such personal exceptionalism can, in some circumstances, lead to the kind of demagoguery Germany was to experience so tragically half a century a century later.

In spite of his antagonistic attitude toward the press, once established at Bayreuth, Wagner decided to publish his own newspaper. This would seem to be a prime example of his contradictory nature. However, for all his overt dislike of news media he must, on some level, have acknowledged their power, as he never ceased to promulgate his own opinions in a similar fashion. Alan Aberbach notes that in the late 1870s he: "[Encouraged] a friend to establish the *Suddeutsche Presse* as a paper for the dissemination of political ideas and 'for advocating my views on art.' "[47] During the last years of Wagner's life, the monthly journal *Bayreuther Blätter* was created directly under his auspices, specifically to proclaim and espouse his own views. It published until 1938, lasting far longer than many of the publications he battled with in his lifetime. The publication's early issues contain some of Wagner's most controversial articles, including the so-called "regeneration writings." Essays such as "Modern," "Shall we Hope?" and "Heroism and Christianity" meld his musings on art, religion, ethnicity and nationalism. Disturbing and confusing, sometimes to the point of incoherence they have, nevertheless, become an intrinsic part of the Wagner legacy.

Many romantic artists quite deliberately seek to become inseparable from their creations. It follows, then, that a work-centred life is also likely to become a self-centred life. According to Alan Aberbach:

> Wagner importuned his friends not to make an artificial distinction between himself as man and as artist. Interest only in his artistic output

[47] Alan David Aberbach. *The Ideas of Richard Wagner, Second Edition.* (Lanham, Maryland: 2003), 91.

> would be a serious error and as ludicrous as trying to make a distinction between the soul and the body.[48]

Contrasted with early nineteenth-century romantics who moved in a small, if influential, social circle Wagner's egotism was bound to create large ripples. However extravagant or controversial the behaviour of Shelley and Byron may have been, comparatively few people were going to know about it. They lacked the general scrutiny the late century media turned on Wagner and his contemporaries. Relatively few people at the time were aware of Lord Byron's sexual relationship with his sister, for instance but many people knew — and cared very much — that Wagner was an anti-Semite.

He was not in the least troubled by this. Adversarial by nature — as a boy he entertained himself by provoking quarrels with friends — he was unafraid of any fire he might draw from elsewhere, especially the press. In fact, his refusal to be either cowed or flattered by their attentions probably won the admiration of many who were suspicious of the media's increasing influence. Wagner's actions in the *Der Volksbote* affair also indicate a ruthlessness that anticipates modern public relations techniques. He was no butterfly to be broken on a wheel.

Towards the end of his life Wagner was cushioned by a coterie of advisors and sycophants that would have done credit to any twentieth-century entertainer. Barry Millington writes: "Already in Wagner's lifetime his tendency to behave as a monarch surrounded by a court was a subject for acerbic comment."[49] Though none of the courtiers had titles like press agent or personal manager, in broad terms many of their functions were similar: to insulate the composer from both press and public and promote his opinions. "Spinning" the message and controlling the Wagnerian agenda were very much a part of latter day *Wahnfried.* Few individual artists can also have exercised such broad control over as large a geographical area and population as Wagner did at Bayreuth. The

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[48] Aberbach, The Ideas of Richard Wagner, Revised, 30.

[49] Millington, 114.

entire town evolved into a kind of mixed media Wagnerian event, or art-piece, as the Festival came to dominate the local culture and economy.

Absolute monarchs rarely have successors that match their capabilities and Wagner was no exception. His ideas and opinions, fluid and mutable in life, became in death as frozen as the characters in Mark Twain's Arabian story. His legacy was, it is true, guarded with unimaginative vehemence by Cosima and the *Wahnfried* acolytes. However it is also true that Wagner never understood important fundamentals regarding journalism and the press. His ignorance conditioned his posthumous reputation to a significant degree. Newspapers combine immediacy of communication with permanence. Immediacy requires of writers that their opinions be both carefully considered and coherently expressed before being committed to the press. When the paper hits the street it is too late for second thoughts. Permanence implies that, once set in type, your words may well haunt you for the rest of your life.

Wagner experienced both these phenomena during the Dresden uprising. After death his reputation experienced yet another. *Bayreuther Blätter* was created as a mouthpiece for Wagner's views. It continued to publish for so long after his demise that the periodical extended his ideas and opinions, in a diminished fashion, beyond his, and their, natural lifetimes. Though it might be reprinted many times after the author has died, a book is tied to the time it was published. A periodical, as the name suggests, comes out at regular intervals; consequently there is an expectation of contemporary relevance on the part of its readers. Hans von Wolzogen edited and produced *Bayreuther Blätter* for the entire sixty years of its existence, but Wagner was only alive for the first five. Every month for the following fifty-five years von Wolzogen regurgitated or reinterpreted ideas espoused by the aging composer. Such repetition has surely coloured the nature of his fame. There is no way to know how Wagner's opinions would have changed had he, literally, become the immortal many of his acolytes believe him to be.

But one thing we know with certainty is that they would have changed, because they always did.

Chapter five:

Never a Day Without a Sentence

Publishing in the second half of the nineteenth-century was a sophisticated industry. Under its increasingly capacious umbrella new professions, designed specifically to promote artists and their work and capitalize on the consequent celebrity, were born. Émile Zola worked in such a capacity for four years before beginning his career as a journalist and novelist. The experience served him well for the rest of his life, particularly when deciding to bring the weight of his own fame to bear in the cause of Alfred Dreyfus.

An Opportunity

Zola nervously climbed the stairs to his employer's office. It was a Monday lunchtime in the spring of 1862, he was twenty-one years old, and had been packaging books at Hachette and Company for just a few weeks. It was his first regular job in over a year and a half. During the previous difficult months he had, literally, starved in a garret with only a bed-sheet to wear indoors. "Sometimes he had to content himself with bread alone dipped in oil. At still other times, in desperation, he would catch a sparrow on the roof outside his window and roast it on the end of a curtain rod."[1] On the previous Saturday Zola slipped into Louis Hachette's office and left behind a copy of his poetic trilogy, *La Comédie amoureuse.* Now he was answering the summons he had been hoping for.[2]

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[1] Philip Walker, *Zola.* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 23.

[2] Ibid., 47.

Like Chapman and Hall and Émile de Giradin, Louis Hachette was among the generation of publishers to capitalise on the early century's technological advances. Founded in 1826 his company grew steadily to become the largest publishing house in France. In the wake of Guizot's educational reforms of 1830, Hachette had foreseen an increased need for school textbooks and teaching manuals. His company used its early success as a springboard to publishing encyclopaedias, almanacs, journals and other non-fiction works. A staunch believer in the social value of publishing, Hachette was also a shrewd entrepreneur. He later realised the sales opportunities that France's new railway system represented and obtained exclusive retailing rights to all the country's stations, filling kiosks with inexpensive fiction from the company's own presses. Hachette and Company's business edge lay in its ability to move quickly and decisively when required. To that end the company used the latest transportation systems, accounting procedures and marketing strategies. Staff also worked shorter hours than were typical in the industry to ensure fewer mistakes due to fatigue.[3] When Zola went to work for Hachette's he was one of 139 employees in a collection of buildings covering an entire block in the centre of Paris.

Louis Hachette gestured to a chair and quickly but tactfully informed Zola that the company would not be publishing his poem.[4] If the budding poet felt any disappointment, however, it must have been speedily dissipated. We do not know what qualities Louis Hachette perceived in Zola during that interview but his salary was doubled to 200 francs a month shortly thereafter. He left the room too with an invitation to submit a short story to a children's magazine the company published, which also, as it turned out, was to be rejected as "too revolutionary."[5] More significantly, mere days after the meeting Zola found himself relieved of his book parcelling duties and elevated to the

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[3] Brown, 103.

[4] Walker, 48.

[5] Ibid., 49.

company's publicity department. The following year he would become Hachette's advertising manager.

Do you feel you are a power?

Zola moved to Paris in his late teens with his widowed mother who was pursuing an ultimately futile quest to claim a rightful pension. The city was where he, in common with most ambitious young Frenchmen, wanted to be and knew he ought to be. Yet he was unsettled. He had been a good student in Aix-en-Provence, but his schoolwork deteriorated in Paris. Poor, lonely and restless, he longed for the warmth of the south and long country walks with his close friends, Paul Cézanne and Jean Baptistin Baille. His spirits took a further turn for the worse after he failed the national baccalaureate, twice. This was a catastrophe. Though a writer by inclination his aim had been a career in the professions — a lawyer, or perhaps an engineer like his father. Now these doors were slammed shut. Crestfallen, Zola obtained a job as a customs clerk on the Paris docks but could tolerate it for only a few weeks. To Cézanne he wrote: "I can't stand being only a passive instrument. I loathe this brutish toil that society imposes on us."[6] He determined that his only course of action was to throw himself into writing. The months of bohemianism followed.

Talent and zeal Zola possessed in abundance, but both qualities were either unformed or ill focussed. He had no idea, for example, how to get his work published. Gradually depression changed to despair and the reams of romantic verse dried up. His health began to suffer and he fell ill, on occasion coughing up blood. For probably the only time in his life Zola began to doubt his abilities. He had to make money. "Some job I can perform with my left hand just to cover living expenses, a job in no way calling upon the intellect, muck work for its own sake — that's my personal hell, my daily

[6] Ibid., 22.

tribulation...any job will do";[7] he wrote desperately to Baille. As it turned out Louis Hachette provided much more than "any job."

It is unlikely that Zola understood the singularity of the opportunity he had been presented with. In 1862 few publishing houses had the resources and commitment to underwrite the cost of running their own promotional departments. Most deemed single line announcements of new titles in selected publications sufficient. Beyond that authors were responsible for their own publicity, writing "puffs," or currying the favours of reviewers as best they could. Zola would learn quickly and go on to use the promotional skills he acquired at Hachette for the rest of his life. As Anita Brookner points out, it was "there his career (as a publicist, one might say) got under way."[8] Moreover he was no mere factotum but highly ingenious in the field of literary promotion, employing techniques of his own devising with great success.

His first task was writing copy for the *Bulletin du libraire et de l'amateur de livres*, a monthly brochure mailed directly to Hachette's regular clients. Under Zola's editorship the *Bulletin* was transformed from a mere listing of upcoming titles, to a comprehensive précis of each book's content. As his confidence returned the young man felt emboldened to present his own ideas. He sent Louis Hachette a suggestion for a new series of publications that would feature the work of young, unpublished writers. Hachette rejected the idea, possibly feeling that there was more than a hint of self-interest on Zola's part. However, he was extremely impressed by the way the proposal was organised, for example: "Zola had had the astuteness to present his suggestion as a financially profitable venture for the firm."[9] It was partly on the basis of this failed proposition that he received his promotion to manager.

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[7] Brown, 76.

[8] Anita Brookner. *Romanticism and Its Discontents.* (London: Viking, 2000), 147.

[9] Walker, 48.

In his new capacity Zola was charged particularly with cultivating contacts in the newspaper industry. To this point in his life he had not been an avid reader of daily papers. He saw *Le Siècle* on a reasonably frequent basis but little else. 1863 was a significant year for the French popular press, however, as in that year the first one *sou* daily newspaper, *Le Petit Journal*, was launched. Containing no political reportage, the paper was filled with crime, human-interest stories, and popular *romans-feuilletons*. Its circulation rapidly reached 250,000 copies per day, almost five times that of its closest competitor and quickly spawned a host of imitators. The promotional possibilities were prodigious. In his dealings with the press Zola quickly learned to become a master of the *quid pro quo*. For example he would ask newspapers to publish free advertisements for Hachette's titles, while in return they received books for their own promotional purposes. His request to Géry-Legrand of *La Revue de Paris* is typical: "We would like our ads printed (gratis) in exchange for complimentary copies of our books...it's an arrangement we've worked out with all the major Parisian journals and I trust you will find it acceptable."[10] During this period Zola established a network of connections that would prove invaluable after he left Hachette and important even before his departure.

The desire to write was reinvigorated as his spirits rose. Returning from his daily labours on behalf of other writers Zola picked up his pen and worked, often into the early hours of the morning. There would be no more poetry, however: "He...saw that he could make his reputation faster with the rude tool of prose than with verse."[11] By the end of 1862 he had begun his first novel and was producing short stories at a considerable rate. A year or so later there were enough to publish a small book. It was time to utilize the considerable marketing skills he had acquired to his own benefit.

Zola had learned it was mistake for an unpublished author to approach major houses. Any missteps were better made quietly, rather than in full view of the Parisian

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[10] Brown, 105.

[11] Walker, 52.

publishing world. To test audience response he submitted a few stories to Belgian and French provincial magazines. He then contracted with a small but ambitious company, Hetzel and Lacroix, to handle a book. Acting on his own behalf, Zola negotiated a royalty of twenty-five *centimes* per copy, rather than the standard fifteen ordinarily offered to unknown writers. He then threw himself headlong into promotion.

> Weeks before the publication date, he planned in minute detail his campaign to launch the book. He used his position at Hachette's to get the book noticed in over a hundred newspapers. Benefiting from what he had learned as publicity director, he sent friendly editors blurbs he had composed himself and offered to 'have a friend' write reviews which lazy critics could publish over their own names.[12]

Zola would always be an excellent salesman of his own work. Creative in approach and relentless, even coercive in his lobbying, he was well suited to the buccaneering and ethically ambiguous nature of mid-century publishing. In spite of his best efforts however, the book, *Les Contes à Ninon*, quickly vanished from the public consciousness, as Philip Walker wryly notes: "Reviewers, half sincerely, half out of self-interest, found in the author a disciple of Musset, Heine and Murger, and agreed that the book was charming. Then no one mentioned it again."[13]

Literature was the muse the young author courted, but, ever the pragmatist, he realised her shortcomings. Books took a long time to produce and — at least in the short term — offered little financial security. Journalism, on the other hand, could provide regular income and, just as importantly, keep his name in front of the public. Zola wrote desperately to fellow Aixois writer Antony Valabrègue: "Right now there are two things I need most urgently: money and publicity."[14] To that end he propositioned every newspaper editor he could think of and was soon producing as many words for newsprint

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[12] Ibid., 55.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Brown, 152.

as on manuscript, a practice that would continue for almost twenty years. To Valabrègue he explained:

> You understand that I am not writing all this prose out of love for the public...Money is mainly what got me into all this, but I also regard journalism as a very powerful lever and do not in the least mind having to produce myself on an appointed day before a considerable number of readers.[15]

As Zola intended, journalism provided regular by-lines and in a few months his income had doubled. Success it seemed was but a short step away. "Do you feel you are a power?" he asked writer Jules Vallès rhetorically. "Speaking for myself, I feel that I am one."[16] Only two years earlier he had been wrapping parcels in Hachette's basement.

Hubris aside, Zola was well aware his achievements could quickly vanish. Fear of losing his readership always acted as a counterweight to arrogance. Later in life he would write: "Today we must produce and continue producing...if the writer stops, the public forgets him."[17] In any case at twenty-five years of age he still had much to prove. Though he had made inroads into the worlds of journalism and short fiction he had not yet published a novel. That, however, was about to be rectified.

La Confession de Claude was published almost exactly a year after *Les Contes à Ninon.* As part of his ferocious publicity campaign on behalf of the book Zola trumpeted that: "The author bares himself therein with a strange talent that combines exquisite delicacy and mad audacity. Some will applaud and others will jeer, but this drama fraught with anguish and terror will leave no one indifferent." Indifference was the response Zola feared most. His Hachette's experience taught him that even negative attention was better than apathy; indeed it could be much more valuable than token praise. "It is understood that I prefer a sincere slating to routine compliments...Have no fear, hit and

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[15] Ibid., 114.

[16] Walker, 51.

[17] Émile Zola. *The Experimental Novel and Other Essays.* trans. Belle M. Sherman. (New York: Haskell House, 1964), 197.

hit hard," he cajoled a potential reviewer.[18] While no literary masochist, Zola, like Wagner, was certainly more active than most of his contemporaries in the pursuit of controversy. He recognised, as had many French publishers since the 1830s, that infamy and public opprobrium sold books. As early as 1832, Honoré Daumier's publisher, Charles Philipon bragged that: "his publications had endured twenty seizures ... six arrests, three prison sentences, and fines [and] that he had gained subscribers from members of the juries that had heard his cases."[19]

Though the critical reaction to *La Confession de Claude* was not quite as vituperative as he might have hoped, outside the literary community it raised a few influential eyebrows. The Ministry of Justice considered the book indecent and dispatched a police agent to Hachette's. Zola's office was searched and his employers questioned. Louis Hachette had died the previous year and the company's partners, unnerved by the attentions of officialdom, suggested that perhaps it was time for the young man to commit himself to writing on a full-time basis. Zola agreed, and on January 31 1866, his education in promotion and publicity complete, he parted company with Hachette's.

The fittest for Survival

The loss of half his regular income caused Zola some short-term difficulties, but the attendant notoriety was, in his opinion, adequate compensation. "Today I am known, people fear me and insult me...Today I am ranked among those writers whose works cause trepidation. That took some doing," he crowed to Valabrègue.[20] Journalism would soon more than match Hachette's stipend. Zola had been writing regular gossip column for *Le Petit Journal* and other articles during his last months at Hachette's. Now he began

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[18] Brown, 122.

[19] de la Motte, 49.

[20] Brown, 124.

to successfully pressure up-market journals such as *Le figaro* and *L'Evénement* to accept his work.[21] Wherever Zola was published he made full use of the strategems acquired at Hachette's to further himself and champion his own ideas. "[Zola] did his utmost in his journalistic articles to advance his perpetual campaign to capture the public and impose his own personality and ideas, using shock and every other attention-getting device."[22] These devices included staging manufactured quarrels with his book publisher, Albert Lacroix,[23] and cunningly denying non-existent rumours that certain characters in his novels were based on real individuals.[24] Stunts like these led many critics, both during and after his lifetime, to accuse Zola of egotism or opportunism, yet there was plainly more than mere self-aggrandizement at work.[25]

Emile Zola firmly believed that talent without success was talent made irrelevant. In the essay "A Roman Prize in Literature" he wrote:

> Talent should be strong; if it is not strong it is not talent; and it is essential that this truth should be made manifest for talent's own sake...You can pity the poor devils whom literary ambition kills in their garrets; but it is silly to regret their talent. It is a crime to support the pride of men of no ability.[26]

This unshakeable opinion was extended even to those who were his closest friends: "I had grown-up almost in the same cradle as my friend, my brother Paul Cézanne, whose genius is only now being recognized as that of a great painter who has failed."[27] Though the preceding passage was first published in *Le figaro* in 1896, it is clear that Zola's estimation

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[21] Brookner, 147.

[22] Walker, 71.

[23] Brown, 186.

[24] Ibid., 151.

[25] Naomi Bliven. "Two Shy Writers," *The New Yorker*, (30 January 1978), 104.

[26] Zola, *The Experimental Novel*, 353.

[27] Paul Cézanne. *Letters*. ed. John Rewald, trans. Marguerite Kay. (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1976), 246n.

of his oldest confidante had not altered for decades. In August 1861 he commented to Baille, the third member of their triumvirate: "Paul may have the genius of a great painter, [but] he'll never have the genius to become one."[28] Cézanne was a failure in Zola's eyes because he lacked the aptitude to make himself a success, the ability to force the world to notice his talent. He, on the other hand, a small shy man with a speech impediment and terror of public speaking, acquired the methodologies of journalism, advertising and publicity to support his own genius. They were weapons he used to survive and were inseparable from his natural gifts: "The weak ones in literature deserve no pity...so much the worse for him if he is over thrown by the first shock [of failure] and if a whole generation passes over his body."[29]

The French edition of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* was published in 1862. Zola became aware of the book the same year, while establishing himself at Hachette's, when, after months of privation, survival must have been at the forefront of his mind.[30] The work of Hippolyte Taine, very much in vogue at the time, was also a big influence on the young writer who was impressed with the possibility of introducing "the exactitude of science, with all the liberty of the personal and living artist, into a declassification of intellectual life, so as to make it as faithful as possible a replica of what happens in the physical sphere."[31] Scientific practice was also instrumental in creating "journalistic method," the type of fact based, objective and analytical reportage that would become widespread as the century progressed.[32] Altogether science, or more accurately, scientism, was of crucial importance both to Zola's work — he would later comment, concerning his

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[28] Ibid., 92.

[29] Zola, *The Experimental Novel*, 203.

[30] Walker, 57.

[31] Brookner, 143.

[32] Tom Koch. *The News as Myth, Fact and Context in Journalism.* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990),18

fiction, that "Scientific truth was my touchstone for every scene," — and to his personal philosophy.[33] In addition to inculcating him with a rationale for his literary survivalist instincts, it is probable that Darwin's work also played a large part in framing Zola's perception of his audience. In his essays and letters, for example, his readers are frequently pejoratively objectified as "the gaping crowd."[34] "Let it be understood that nothing is less literary than a crowd. A crowd is a malleable organism with which a powerful hand does what it pleases," he wrote.[35] Viewed this way, the audience becomes an externalised undifferentiated being, a beast possessed of a dull collective mind, to be pursued, corralled and massaged into submission. It is a metaphor Zola himself employed: "I need the crowd, I make overtures to it however I can, I try by every means to tame it."[36] Philip Walker shrewdly observes that: "[Zola] regarded the public as his prey and he was now stalking and attacking it like a famished young lion."[37]

A Bourgeois Artist

Zola's view of his readers is paradoxical, as, in attitude and taste, he was very much one of their number. Like most members of France's new *petit bourgeoisie* he particularly valued hard work, organization, and self-discipline. In 1868 he outlined the twenty novels that would make his reputation. They took eight months to plan, twenty-five years to complete and it would be more than a decade before they provided him with anything

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[33] Brown, 162.

[34] Zola, *The Experimental Novel*, 369.

[35] Brown, 400.

[36] Ibid,152.

[37] Walker, 62.

resembling a steady income.[38] In the meantime, however, it was a rare day when Zola's name did not appear in a periodical somewhere. For example, he wrote 110 articles for *L'Evénement* alone between February and November of 1866.[39] During the fifteen months leading to May 1872 there were 260 pieces — each of 1,200 words or more — for *La Cloche.*[40] Zola took very seriously the words carved on his desk: "Never a Day Without a Sentence." In reality on most days he wrote good deal more than that.

Through his defence of the Impressionists Zola's name is frequently linked with the *avant-garde* but, as Anita Brookner notes, this represents something of a distortion. His support was "undertaken large as an act of friendship [toward Cézanne]. Zola believed, as he said, in the present and the future but beyond this fact he was better acquainted with painters than with painting."[41] There is no doubt that he possessed a truculent affinity for underdogs, and felt as though he had been in their situation and so had his family: "I will always be on the side of the vanquished. There is open conflict between indomitable temperaments and the crowd. I am for temperaments, and I attack the crowd."[42] Attack them he might, but he also shared many of their aspirations. As an established figure in the courts of public discourse, which the popular press had become, Zola was able to advocate on behalf of society's outsiders like the lawyer he had once hoped to be. The French middle-classes accepted Zola as a mediator between themselves and the growing forces of social and cultural radicalism. They recognised his kinship was more significant than his criticisms. Because he wrote in "their" newspapers which appeared in their living rooms everyday, he was tolerated like an intelligent but difficult relative: "[Zola] was

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[38] Brookner, 143.

[39] Brown, 128.

[40] Ibid., 234.

[41] Brookner, 148.

[42] Brown, 136.

accepted, in the 1880s as the archetypal middlebrow, popular with the average reader, and basically a member of the public for whom he wrote."[43]

The peak of his success came with the publication of *Nana* at the beginning of the decade. By this time Zola's promotional capabilities were honed to a knife-edge and, in the service of his tale of the rise and fall of a Parisian prostitute, he wielded them like a surgeon. Even before the serialization of the story began in *Le Voltaire*, the single word title was "plastered over every wall in Paris."[44] Its appearance unleashed a storm of criticism from all sides: "These accusations came not only from the conservative Right, offended by Zola's detailed descriptions of sexual excess, but also from the republican Left, offended by Zola's portrayal of a working-class that was too degraded to be heroic."[45] During the week prior to the book's release an ostensibly panic-stricken Georges Charpentier, its publisher, hurtled around Paris bookstores spreading dire warnings that the press run was about to be seized by the authorities.[46] Whether his fears were genuine or another promotional ruse is unknown. In any case the cloth-bound edition of *Nana* appeared felicitously on February 14 1880 as planned. By the end of the day all 55,000 copies had been sold. At year's end the novel was into its ninetieth edition.[47] It seemed that everyone despised *Nana* except the general public.

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[43] Brookner, 145.

[44] Brown, 451.

[45] Marie-Pierre Le Hir and Dana Strand eds., *French Cultural Studies: Criticism at the Crossroads*. (New York: SUNY Press, 2000), 31.

[46] Brown, 434.

[47] Walker, 147.

The Trial of the Century

The *fin de siècle* found Zola wealthy and internationally famous. He lived with his wife in a large country house cluttered with "pretentious bric-a-brac" and *objets d'art.*[48] The couple also maintained a house in Paris, while his mistress and their two small children occupied a third at Verneuil. For recreation there were fashionably modern hobbies like cycling and photography. Under such circumstances it's unsurprising that his life took on an air of complacency. He continued fictional work but cut back on journalism and the little he did produce sometimes appeared lazy or even ethically questionable. For example he would write reviews of plays he had not seen, based on notes and comments provided by Henry Céard, one of his acolytes.[49] It appeared Zola was slipping slowly into self-satisfied middle age. Events however were about to prove otherwise.

The web of prejudice, deceit and conspiracy responsible for the conviction and imprisonment of army captain Alfred Dreyfus had enmeshed the upper echelons of the French military for three years before Zola became involved. The Dreyfus Affair is regarded by some, perhaps hyperbolically, as: "the first truly international 'media event.'"[50] It is true that there were over four hundred reporters present at Dreyfus's second court martial in Rennes. A special temporary telegraph office was opened and, according to the *New York Sun* correspondent: "The Bourse du Commerce was transformed into a vast editorial room. One hundred and fifty writing tables...comfortable chairs, pens, ink and paper, and courteous attendants were all at the disposal of French and foreign writers during the five weeks."[51] From this account it is clear that the social

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[48] Brown, 482.

[49] Ibid., 409.

[50] Emile Zola, *Notes from Exile.* eds. Dorothy E. Speirs and Yannick Portebois, trans. Dorothy E. Speirs. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 19.

stature of newspapers and newspaper reporters had risen considerably since the beginning of the century.

The onset of the affair, five years earlier, was less well attended, but even then the attentions of the press were close at hand. At this time Paris had 139 daily newspapers and the French provinces a further 334, a journal existed representing every shade of political opinion.[52] When the news was leaked to Eduard Drumont's virulently anti-Semitic *La Libre Parole* that a Jewish officer from Alsace had been arrested for passing classified documents to the German government, it came as no surprise when the story was turned into a *cause célèbre*. Voices that might have been raised in Dreyfus's defence, however, had no reason then to doubt the findings of the court martial that dispatched the unfortunate captain to Devil's Island. The field was open for *La Libre Parole* and other ultra-nationalist papers to draw unchallenged connections between Dreyfus's ethnicity and his supposed treasonous behaviour in making their case for French "racial purity" in the armed forces. In spite of the ongoing vilification in the press, Alfred Dreyfus's family never wavered in their belief in his innocence and struggled to accumulate evidence that would secure his acquittal. It was an exhausting and debilitating task. Mathieu, Alfred's brother, lobbied politician after politician to no effect until, with admirable clear-sightedness, a sympathetic prison warden who had grown friendly the captain, advised him that: "Your brother's cause must be defended before public opinion."[53]

Zola had followed Dreyfus's court martial and filed it away as the possible basis for a future story. Besides feeling pity for the man, however, like most of France, he believed Dreyfus must be guilty, and after the sentencing his interest moved on.[54] The young Zola had maintained that he would: "never completely abandon journalism, which is the best

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[51] Brown, 769.

[52] Smith, 116.

[53] Brown, 719.

[54] Walker, 224.

available means of getting a message across."[55] During middle age, however, it was evident that both the profession and his attitude towards it had altered. Experience made him a shrewd analyst of the popular press and he was more than aware of its deficiencies. In 1889, for example, "Zola declared that freedom of the press was a mixed blessing inasmuch as journalists used it to sensationalize the banal and inflate the trivial...There were better plots between book covers than those fabricated every day in *Le figaro* or *La Lanterne.*"[56] While ignoring his own past propensity for sensationalism, it also must be said Zola could afford to be less profligate with his pen. His name now frequently appeared in print without any effort on his part. When his dog went missing *Le figaro* carried the story on its front page.[57] By this time he was unquestionably the best-known living writer in France. To a correspondent whose letter had failed to arrive he replied, with perhaps a hint of conceit: "I'm surprised...All you have to do is write 'Émile Zola, France' on an envelope, and the letter will get to me."[58] It would take an injustice as blatant and cruel as that visited upon Alfred Dreyfus to provoke Zola into picking up his pen on another's behalf, and when he did it was the storyteller in him that stirred as much as the advocate.

Auguste Scheurer-Kestner, vice-president of the French senate, recollected Zola's reaction when first presented with the details of the Dreyfus case:

> Our factual accounts became poetry for Zola"It's gripping!" he'd say from time to time. One felt that his little body was clambering up the curtains the better to hear and see. And he exclaimed: "It's thrilling! It's horrible! It's a frightful drama! But it's also a drama on the grand scale!"[59]

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[55] Brown, 148.

[56] Ibid., 591.

[57] Zola, *Notes from Exile*, 4.

[58] Ibid., 3.

[59] Brown, 726.

By this time the name of the real army spy, Major Ferdinand Esterhazy, was known in certain quarters and Dreyfus had defenders, both inside and outside the government. However their calls for justice were drowned in an ocean of disbelief. Zola was approached for his ability to reach mass audiences and mobilize public opinion to the cause. "I do not know what I shall do about it, but no human drama has ever filled me with more emotion," he wrote to Scheurer-Kestner following their meeting.[60] What he did was write three articles in three weeks for *Le figaro*. By hoisting the Dreyfusard flag, Zola risked both his reputation and some of his closest friendships. On the heels of the third piece *Le figaro* — with whom he had a professional relationship for over thirty years — refused to publish more of his work. Thanks largely to the efforts of a couple of dozen xenophobic newspapers, support for Dreyfus was equated with being anti-French and *Le figaro* was afraid of alienating its conservative readers. Nevertheless Zola's public commitment had reignited his journalistic passion.

On the second day of 1898 the guilty Major Esterhazy, already exonerated of any wrongdoing by the army, demanded a formal court-martial to clear his name and defend his honour. He was acquitted. Dreyfus's supporters were stunned. No more legal avenues remained open to them. Zola retired to his study and began to write: "A day passed. Another day. He kept on writing, sustained not only by his passion for truth and hatred of injustice but also by his thirst for glory."[61] He emerged on January 12 and took a cab to the office of Georges Clemenceau at *L'Aurore*, a Left wing Dreyfusard newspaper that had been in existence for only three months. Clemenceau, a well-known journalist and politician, who would later become Prime Minister of France, provided the paper with the credibility its lack of longevity could not. Zola read the results of his labours out loud to the newsroom staff. He had written an open letter to Félix Faure the President of France. Besides detailing the iniquities of the case against Dreyfus, Zola implicated specific

[60] Walker, 225.

[61] Ibid., 227.

individuals in the French army and government. He accused them of lying, hiding the truth, or ignoring it, and the War Office of deliberately carrying out a deceptive campaign of public propaganda to cover its mistakes. When he finished the room burst into applause.[62] With a headline chosen by Clemenceau, "J'accuse...!" appeared the following morning.

> On January 13, 1898, several hundred news criers recruited for the day by *L'Aurore* fanned out over Paris to hawk a special edition of the paper. Three hundred thousand copies had been printed, with the front page entirely taken up by *J'accuse*; few went unsold.[63]

Over the following days and weeks the article would be reprinted again and again, across France, Europe, and the rest of the world.

The calculated intention of "J'accuse...!" was to present those named in the letter with a clear choice. Either they could remain silent and let the public draw their own conclusions or take legal action. As expected, Zola was charged with libel. The article's other consequences were equally predictable but much more dangerous. The Dreyfus family's biographer, Michael Burns, astutely observes that: "[by] rallying to Dreyfus, Zola could not help but mobilize — and divide — public opinion."[64] The publication of "J'accuse...!" polarized France almost overnight. For the first time the Dreyfusards had a celebrated champion, but in response their opponents became more violent. Zola had rocks thrown through his window and excrement mailed to his home even before January 13.[65] Now anti-Semitic rage spilled onto France's streets:

> Students and unspecified "demonstrators" in Versailles, Reims, Lille, Nantes, Caen, and other cities and towns attacked Jewish shops and

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[62] Ibid.

[63] Brown, 734.

[64] Michael Burns. *Dreyfus: A Family Affair.* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991; HarperPerennial, 1992), 229.

[65] Walker, 227.

> synagogues while shouting "Kikes to the water!" "Death to the Jews!" "Down with Dreyfus!" "Down with Zola!"[66]

Zola was burnt in effigy in several cities and *La Libre Parole* led calls for the sacking of his home.[67]

The trial began on February 7. "He sees the Dreyfus Affair as an immense and colossal opportunity for self-advertisement. He could not in fact care less for Dreyfus; what interests him is himself, Zola," spat *La Dépêche.*[68] Yet was the "glory" — to use Philip Walker's word — really worth the anguish? The daily gauntlet of invective and threats of physical abuse from the crowd clustered round the entrance to the court were likely inconsequential in comparison to his fear of actually testifying. In spite of his fame Zola avoided public appearances whenever possible. The thought of speaking in front of an audience brought on stage fright that, at times, verged on panic.[69] It seems unlikely that a craving for even more fame would, by itself, lead him to voluntarily place himself in the eye of one of the most closely watched events of the century.

The Dreyfusards intended to present proof that would lead to the acquittal of the unhappy officer. But, as at the Esterhazy court martial, the evidence was deemed inadmissible. Zola was found guilty and sentenced to twelve months in jail plus 3,000 francs fine. He appealed without success. In spite of the setback there were reasons for optimism. Though Dreyfus's defenders were heavily outnumbered by his enemies, they now included some of the most influential personalities of the day: Marcel Proust, Mallarmé, Monet, Chekhov, André Gide, Anatole France, and Mark Twain all lent their support. A method of prolonging the public discourse needed to be found. Zola's lawyer, Fernand Labori, came up with a solution: "there was only one way now of keeping his

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[66] Burns, 231.

[67] Walker, 229.

[68] Brown, 712.

[69] Ibid., 398.

case operative thereby making sure that the Dreyfus Affair would remain alive; he would have to avoid punishment by going into exile."[70]

On the evening of July 18, carrying only a newspaper to conceal his nightshirt and toilet bag, Zola boarded a train to London. He wrote from his carriage: "And to think that I had to leave like this, all alone, without a friend by my side, without anyone to whom I could talk about the horrible rancour which was choking me."[71] Zola hated travel almost as much as public speaking. He spoke only French, disliked English food and, for the eleven months of his exile, was required to move frequently and live under a variety of assumed names to avoid British and French reporters. Much of the time he was lonely and depressed: "Is this possible? Is it really me hiding here? So this is where forty years of work have lead me, with a whole wretched country behind me, shouting me down and threatening me."[72] He was not exaggerating. The anti-Dreyfusard majority at home greeted his departure with howls of outrage. Accused of cowardice, he was also, because of his Italian ancestry damned in the press as a mongrel half-breed.[73] There were financial repercussions too, as the sale of his books plummeted along with his popularity. Yet though Zola's travails were all too real another side of him savoured the experience. With something akin to amazement he wrote: "But nonetheless what an extraordinary adventure, at my age, after a life lead entirely as a writer, a plodding homebound writer."[74]

It is superficial to claim that Zola's career was driven solely by either altruism on the one hand or a lust for fame on the other. These desires are not mutually exclusive and

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[70] Walker, 232.

[71] Zola, *Notes from Exile*, 27.

[72] Ibid., 43.

[73] Walker, 231.

[74] Zola, *Notes from Exile*, 44.

in any case, such claims merely raise more questions. There can be little argument, for example, that Zola courted fame throughout his life, but to what end? It is clear that he thought about his popularity in terms of celebrity, rather than reputation. When, in the wake of *Nana's* success his friend Paul Alexis proposed writing a biography, Zola responded promptly:

> Do it...I would suggest something shaped along the following lines: a brief description of Médan [the village where Zola lived], a brief historical account of how he came to buy the little house and build the big one, the daily life of your hero as you've observed it, and, in conclusion, the man behind the legendary character ascribed to him...The time is ripe for [a biography,] and the occasion will not last.[75]

Like Dickens, Zola refers to himself here in the third person but in a much more self-conscious manner. It is evident that he considered his celebrity a process, rather than an end in itself, which suggests an importance transcending mere vanity or egoism. The purpose however — beyond maximizing the immediate potential of *Nana's* success — may only have been revealed to him thirty years later.

The Dreyfus Affair both fulfilled and justified Zola's desire to be a public personality. In Frederick Brown's opinion: "There can be no doubt that he saw ["J'accuse...!"] as his opportunity to play an historic role."[76] Other writers had battled on Dreyfus's behalf but none possessed Zola's talent, promotional skill and credibility, and none had the degree of celebrity that guaranteed an audience. But more than that, the events also offered him the chance to play a part in an epic drama. The Dreyfus Affair had, in fact, all the characteristics of a novel by Émile Zola, it. As soon as Scheurer-Kestner presented him with the details of the case he may well have apprehended a unique opportunity. Not only could he influence events, he could also, in a sense, become a character in one of his own stories. The blurring of fact and fiction is especially

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[75] Brown, 465.

[76] Brown, 734n.

noticeable in his notes from London. For instance, there is obvious excitement in changing cabs and doubling-back on journeys to avoid being noticed:

> Mr Sherlock Holmes would presently be after us, and so it was just as well to play the game according to the orthodox rules of romance. After all, was it not in something akin to a romance that I was living?[77]

So it was that a small man with a huge literary talent became a hero in story that was not completely of his own making. All that was required now was a suitable ending.

In France the case against Alfred Dreyfus ultimately collapsed under the combined weight of forged documents, the suicide of a key prosecution witness, and Esterhazy's flight into exile. Brought back from Devil's Island, the captain was given a second court martial and eventually, if reluctantly, acquitted of all charges. Zola, too, returned to his homeland. As Anita Brookner says, the affair soon "turned the author into a folk hero, whose lustre remains undimmed." The tale might have ended there but some Frenchmen would never forgive. On September 30 1902 Zola died in his bed from carbon monoxide poisoning due to a blocked fireplace. Most of his family suspected foul play but nothing could be proved. In 1927 however, an anti-Dreyfusard stove-fitter confessed that he and his work-mates had stopped-up the chimney deliberately.[78] The confession was later verified independently. A tragic conclusion but perhaps one that Zola the storyteller would have approved of.

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[77] Zola, *Notes from Exile*, 8.

[78] Brookner, 159.

Chapter Six:
Celebrity's Inheritance

Dickens, Wagner and Zola were relentlessly strong-willed individuals, each of whom engaged with the media and their audience according to the dictates of their own character. In order to understand the ground they shared it's necessary to disentangle the cultural relationship that then existed between artists, audiences and the media. To do that it is we must identify the ideas and influences that were the bricks and mortar of nineteenth-century celebrity building. In conclusion it is important to consider whether such celebrity has any permanence or whether, in the final analysis, it is as ephemeral as its owners' mortality.

Artist and Audience

Technology enables rather than motivates. The dramatic changes undergone by the publishing industry in the early nineteenth-century did not occur as they did simply because new machinery had been invented. Certainly words and images were transmitted with greater speed and accessibility but they carried ideas and attitudes regarding the individual and his relationship to the world that were already firmly embedded in European culture. The most dominant emerged from the nurseries of Romanticism and the Enlightenment.

Of the two Romanticism, as exemplified by Byron and his contemporaries, was more recent and fashionable. It favoured individuality, subjectivity and lived experience over detachment and detailed analysis. Tenets like originality, and non-commerciality

became axiomatic as new notions of self-hood came into play. It was now that terms such as "self-expression" and "self-enhancement" fell into general use and the word "ego" was used to denote self-consciousness for the first time.[1] On its side Enlightenment thinking bred a form of Cartesian scientism that emphasized materiality, oppositional duality, and objective analysis. These ideas also privilege the self, though not in isolation, and self-improvement is valued over self-indulgence. Social reforms in areas such as education were incubated in Enlightment influenced ideologies and provided the altruistic impetus for modern businessmen like Louis Hachette.

Artists and audiences absorbed these influences in different ways. An ambitious nineteenth-century writer or composer faced the intimidating prospect of finding devotees within faceless, numberless masses. The division of these masses into the "people," who embodied nobility and generosity of spirit, and a "public," representing crass superficiality and dull wittedness was widespread. Though they used different terms we have seen how Wagner and Zola — unalike in so many ways — defined their relationship with their audiences in similar dualistic fashions. On the face of it this seems arbitrary and elitist but it also suggests that artists were not entirely sure who was listening or why. The issue never arose under the fading patronage system, but now an artist needed, somehow, to manufacture a following from within a multitude of millions. Broadly speaking there were two ways to accomplish this. You could, like Dickens and Zola, enter the world of the multitude, attempt to record their lives, and be physically present — in print form — in their homes. Alternatively, along with Byron, Keats, Wordsworth and, in a more complicated way Wagner, you could ostentatiously position yourself outside the throng and wait for those who were interested to join you.

A similar schism in artistic attitudes was evident when it came to money. Running through the century was a strong belief in economic democracy that many artists shared

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[1] Braudy, 397.

with artisans and tradesmen. Zola was passionate on the subject: "do you know what has made us worthy and respected today? It is money [but young artists] cannot understand the justice and honesty of money."[2] This was at odds with the attitude embodied by Wagner who, rhetorically at any rate, saw money and art as mutually incompatible:

> This is Art, as it now fills the entire civilised world! Its true essence is industry; its ethical aim, the gathering of gold...[she] preferred to sell her soul and body to a far worse mistress [than Christian hypocrisy] — Commerce.[3]

Wealth, in this view, carried a stain of worldly success that was to be avoided at all costs:

> Success could easily be confused with visibility...the early nineteenth-century developed, perpetuated, and cherished the concept of the neglected genius...Neglect confirmed originality and genius by demonstrating that true art was unappreciated by the new commercial audience.[4]

Viewed objectively this form of neglect was at best pretentious, at worst hypocritical. Wagner, for example, was certainly not averse to the benefits of money or publicity provided he was situated at some distance from the source of both. King Ludwig's patronage of the composer was, even by nineteenth-century standards, archaic in nature, but it is hard to imagine how Wagner would have created what he did in the way he did it without it. To someone like Zola, who considered himself a modern artist, such a relationship was akin to servitude and totally unacceptable: "Contempt is preferable to patronage...It is well known that arts and letters gain nothing by being patronized and coddled. It only serves to keep mediocrities alive."[5] Though at times he despaired of "the crowd," Zola attempted to understand his audience as accurately as possible, whereas Wagner showed blithe indifference toward the bodies inhabiting the seats at Bayreuth.

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[2] Zola,*The Experimental Novel*, 193.

[3] Aberbach, *Revised Edition*, 17.

[4] Braudy, 425.

[5] Zola,*The Experimental Novel*, 352.

The viewers, listeners and readers were not, of course, the homogeneous lumpen-proletariat that artists' attitudes sometimes suggested. Greater mobility and financial wherewithal gave Europeans more material choice in their lives than previous generations had possessed. Whether it was a new worldview or career that appealed, ideas and opportunities presented themselves. The lives of artists, along with those of self-made businessmen, populist politicians and others, represented new models that pointed away from the mechanical exhaustion of modern existence:

> [In] the European evolution from the early nineteenth-century dandy to the avant-garde artist at the end of the century, the audience is not the "people," but (in Stendhal's phrase) the "happy few," for whom the poet or artist becomes a socially alienated saint.[6]

Karl Marx, working in Cologne at the time Wagner was in Dresden, identified the concept of social alienation.[7] He described it as the frustration and despair caused by the disconnection between labour and product in a rapidly industrializing world. As work became segmented and tasks repetitive, the individual's place and function in society was no longer clearly defined. It was easy to think of oneself as merely a tool, valued neither for imagination nor skills but only for brawn and stamina. In these circumstances, a curiosity about those who appeared to be hewing a path through life that was completely of their own devising was natural. It is ironic then that many artists voluntarily donned the mantle of social alienation too, though their lives, by Marx's definition, represented its complete opposite. Consciously or not, by giving voice and expression to the concept they succeeded in attracting an audience whose lives rubbed up against its reality much more closely than their own.

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were also time when, as Chris Rojek concisely puts it: "Ordinary individuals began to measure themselves against

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[6] Braudy, 476.

[7] Ibid., 477.

achieved celebrities."[8] By no means all these celebrities were either artistic or even praiseworthy; highwaymen, pickpockets, prostitutes were also celebrated in word, image and song: "Their originality was not in the creation of a work or an achievement so much as in the creation of a self for others to see, admire, and be astounded by."[9] There was widespread but superficial fascination with such eccentric outsiders, and artists, especially those with particularly baroque affectations in dress or behaviour, fell all too easily into that eclectic category. Beyond its value as a subject for front parlour gossip though, a growing number of people responded profoundly to the socially non-conformist position that many artists seemed to represent.

These artists' attitudes of alienation and flamboyance were woven into the acceptance of something that was increasingly referred to as an artistic sensibility. It permitted — or even expected — a degree of behavioural license from artists that most people did not possess. The lives of Byron, Wagner and their ilk allowed many industrial and office workers an escape by proxy from the social conventions and humdrum routine of everyday existence. While it might bring attention and even financial reward, this type of public response could easily become a burden for the artist. It tended to obscure his actual work for example; it was easy for the poem or the painting to become a conversational afterthought. Also originality, an article of faith to many artists, proved frustratingly easy to imitate; one young poet with long hair and an open-necked shirt was interesting, a dozen or more quickly became routine: "As the middle-class society of the nineteenth-century became more pervasive, the search for a position beyond its limits became more imperative to every would-be artist."[10]

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[8] Rojek, 105.

[9] Braudy, 423.

[10] Ibid., 482.

Naturally not everyone played this game. Though well known for his dandyism, there is no record that Dickens defined himself as an artist at all, and he had little interest in aesthetic posturing. In Zola's case, a genuine discomfort with appearing in public led him to manipulate his career from behind the scenes. When it was accomplished with uncontrived aplomb, however, an artist's public persona frequently predisposed individual members of the public to accept his work more readily. As blundering as Richard Wagner's revolutionary activities turned out to be, they unknowingly helped him build a sympathetic audience in embryo from among those who had yet to hear a note of his music.

To sum up: as the patronage system declined, artists were required to establish connections with a new and highly multifarious audience. These connections could be achieved either by reflecting the audience's world in the artist's work and life; or by the artist's becoming, in attitude and appearance, a means of denying the alienation of the individual audience member's life. In either case authenticity and originality were critical to acceptance.

Audience and Media

A publisher of the early century lacked the means to carry out anything resembling modern market research; this left instinct, imagination and imitation as his main tools. His readers, while certainly opinionated, were unknown in terms of age, occupation, and even gender. For reasons of both sense and sensibility this was the age of the anonymous article and the pseudonymous letter. In order that their opinions should be taken seriously women, for example, would often publish under a male name. Conversely it was not unknown for men to take on a female identity when submitting to

women's publications.[11] Besides their exponential growth as a proportion of the population, the only safe assumption regarding readers was that, increasingly, labour rather than leisure took precedence in their lives.

Most English most eighteenth-century magazines seemed to envisage a moneyed rural readership that regarded and commented on the world's events from a distance — literally "spectated," as the title of one of the period's most influential journals implied. Dickens's revision of the original concept for *Pickwick* demonstrated that, by the following century, hunting anecdotes were giving way to tales of middle and working-class city life. Health advice replaced beauty tips, and puzzles and "brain teasers" became popular page fillers. Stimulation and information, not merely passive entertainment, were expected by an urban readership whose minds were never far from their careers —"career" was yet another word in the process of appropriating its modern meaning.[12] As the century progressed publishers struggled to keep up with an audience whose taste for both relevance and novelty was growing.

The nineteenth-century reader was also learning to become a consumer. Advertising proved to be not only a financial godsend for publishers but also a source of information on desirable new products for readers. At first this seemed a satisfactory and profitable arrangement for all concerned, but an increasing number of strings slowly became visible. By following Émile de Girardin's example of financing production-costs by the sale of advertisements, publishers were, essentially, selling the same space twice, once to the advertiser and again to the reader. On occasion the concerns of one set of customers was bound to be at odds with the other. A delicate balancing act on the part of the publisher was required, with concessions to the interests of one party or the other

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[11] Ros Ballaster, Margaret Beetham, Elizabeth Frazer and Sandra Hebron. *Women's Worlds: Ideology, Feminity and the Woman's Magazine*, Women in Society. (London: MacMillan Education, 1991), 55.

[12] Braudy, 391.

almost inevitable. Prior to the 1830s periodicals usually presented a highly individual, even eccentric, perspective on events:

> Newspapers and magazines...adopted a distinctive tone that was personally accented so as to convey independence. Because the mass-media were situated in a competitive market, the personal quality of newspapers and magazines developed through infighting and status wars. Public culture, in as much as it was expressed in the mass-media, became a culture of attitudes struck, opinions exchanged and stands taken.[13]

It was this "personal quality" as Rojek puts it that was especially under threat in the post-Girardin era. Advertisers wanted sympathetic locations to display their wares, so were more likely to favour the conventional journal over the controversial and the moderate title over its volatile competitor. The danger for overly compliant publishers lay in increasingly bland publications and, for the industry as a whole, eventual homogeneity.

In order to better serve their two masters canny publishers evolved techniques to satisfy both. One of the most successful was to frequently and conspicuously drape themselves in the raiment of public opinion. This notion had serious philosophical grounding in the work of Edmund Burke and John Locke and had been gaining popular currency since the two major revolutions of the previous century. By mid-century much of the popular press had shrewdly assumed the role of the idea's curator. Whether or not any newspaper was really able to give voice to the knowledge of the millions, it suited their purposes to claim they could. Appropriately Alberto Mingardi reminds us of the dangers that lurk in Plato's cave:

> What comes to mind is, obviously, a very different characterization of public opinion, such as in the myth of the cave...where the shadows on the cave's wall are what Plato deems to be "doxa," mere opinion vis-à-vis "episteme," real knowledge.[14]

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[13] Rojek, 105.

[14] Alberto Mingardi. *Public Opinion and the Promotion of Liberty* [article on-line] (The Mises Institute, posted 30 March 2005 accessed 30 May 2006); available from: www.phxnews.com/fullstory.php?article=19822),1.

At this time, in fact, Plato's puppeteers are revealed in the guise of the modern media. They are no longer merely inanimate pens, brushes or musical instruments; nor are they mediators, as Nietzsche described the Greek chorus. Rather they are active determiners exerting a powerful influence on audience and artist alike.

As self-appointed disseminators of public opinion the new press barons used it to bolster their standing with both their audiences. Readers and potential readers could be confident that tens of thousands of their fellow subscribers validated the newspaper's editorial opinions. Advertisers, on the other hand, would rest easily knowing the same numbers of people were exposed to their products. Circulation, rather than "quality" — in Rojek's sense — and little else formed the evidentiary data that justified the Press's claims to represent public opinion. Many people, especially artists, felt the concept was a fraud. Unsurprisingly Wagner was among their number:

> What manner of thing this "public opinion" is, should be best known to those who have its name forever in their mouths and erect the regard for it into a positive article of religion. Its self-styled organ in our times is the "Press": were she candid, she would call herself its generatrix but she prefers to hide her moral and intellectual foibles...her utter want of independence and truthful judgement, behind the lofty mission of her subservience to this sole representative of human dignity, this Public Opinion.[15]

Though it is easy to dismiss them, along with the composer's florid phrasing, such sentiments were heartfelt and understandable. To a significant extent the media were beginning to pre-empt — or at least interfere with — the artist's connection to his audience. Print producers were no longer largely passive agents, as Chapman and Hall had been in their dealings with Dickens. Publishers and their editorial staff increasingly determined what was produced, what length and format it should be and when it was required. In the past a journal like the *Lady's Magazine* could flourish for decades, despite

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[15] Wagner, *The Prose Works, Volume IV*, 19.

the fact that its contributors completed less than half the serials they started.[16] There was no place for such haphazard charm in the publishing world of the 1860s. Far too much was at stake.

The new media grew swiftly and as they did so reflected the predominantly practical issues that dominated their readers' lives. Larger circulations attracted advertisers leading, in turn, to greater conformity among major publications. Meanwhile claims by the press to represent public opinion began to intrude on the relationship being forged between artists and their new audience.

Media and Artist

In 1826 *The Representative*, a daily newspaper promoted by Benjamin Disraeli, collapsed after six months. Its publisher, John Murray — who also ran the well-established *Quarterly Review* — was left worse off to the tune of £26,000.[17] Twenty years later Charles Dickens and his business partners needed four times that amount to underwrite the launch of the *Daily News*, and a further £100,000 to ensure its survival over the following decade. Publishing was no longer an occupation dilettantes could dip into casually, nor was it merely a lucrative sideline for local printers; it was a very serious and extremely expensive business. By mid-century a large British daily, such as *The Times*, had hundreds of employees:

> A newspaper needed a dozen parliamentary reporters, six court reporters, a string of correspondents in European capitals and a small squad of leader-writers, plus provincial reporters and 'penny-a-liners' by the dozen. Sixty men were required to print a daily paper.[18]

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[16] Ballaster, 69.

[17] Smith, 122.

[18] Ibid., 144.

The size and financial turnover of the publishing industry created opportunities, and the expanding talent base of artists and artisans was ready to grasp them. Zola, for one, applauded this long and loud:

> The newspapers, more than anything else, have opened out an immense field...Young writers, when they first start out, can in this way find immediate work which pays them well. Critics, celebrated novelists, without counting the regular newspaper men, some of whom occupy an important position, earn considerable sums in journalistic work.[19]

Though financially advantageous, publishing's benefits were balanced by constraints on artists that Zola either failed to recognize or did not acknowledge. The impact of cultural intermediaries — both inside and outside a publisher's doors — including editors, critics, publicists and marketing personnel, was evident long before the end of the century. The process of publishing was mutating and its new form began to shape a writer's work before he had even picked up his pen. Besides writing to length and meeting deadlines, contributors had to work with an editor whose function had extended beyond merely organising articles and liaising with the printer. He was, more than likely, guardian of the publication's house style and also encouraged conformity to emerging journalistic modes of expression. Marketing considerations impinged on writers' autonomy, too. For instance, serial authors might be asked to delay the climax to a particularly gripping sequence so that it could be run during a subscription drive.[20] None of the individuals involved in these processes was the intended audience for the artist's work, yet they all, to some degree, conditioned the relationship.

This development was, of course, inevitable. Equally inevitable was the fact that almost no one recognised it as it was happening. It is relatively easy to identify that massive change is taking place but very difficult to identify what its consequences will be, even when they look you in the eye. For example, not only was publishing itself an

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[19] Zola, *The Experimental Novel*, 181.

[20] de la Motte, 173.

extremely competitive enterprise but a newspaper's layout guaranteed that every article within its pages was also in competition for placement. Editors also intuited that, their time at a premium, audiences were becoming less tolerant of descriptive wordiness. As a result, newspaper articles became shorter and their content privileged personalities over ideas; in a few hundred words, readers would more quickly be able to understand and build a rapport with a person than an idea. Zola, who, as we have seen freely admitted he was more familiar with painters than with painting, was able to take advantage of his facility with this type of writing in his defence of the Impressionists. There were, however, many artists and writers who, like Balzac, were either unable or unwilling to conform to the new realities of publishing. It is probably also true that as many adopted the approach for pecuniary reasons, to the detriment of their craft.

For artists the greatest danger in treating with the press lay in confusing it with their real audience. Whether or not they worked for it directly, they needed to be aware that though the media were powerful brokers of their work and reputation, they were not the people they were writing for. As an insider Zola realized this, so he willingly left Hachette's to avoid any possibility of conflict over divided loyalties. He was aware that when it came to getting an audience's attention, brickbats and bouquets were of equal value to the publisher; but as a writer, getting one's head turned by either was dangerous. From the opposite end of the century, Joel Braudy quotes the critic and essayist William Hazlitt, who came to the same conclusion. It is likely he would have been less comfortable with Zola's self-promotional activities, however:

> Virtually any presentation of self to the public beyond that in a book (or perhaps in a series of formal lectures) moved Hazlitt to scorn, because its focus on the present implied its capitulation to either fashion or established power.[21]

[21] Braudy, 438.

In the media-saturated world of the later century such diffidence was probably unrealistic, if not impossible. Nevertheless Hazlitt's warning remains valid: whether courted or not fame carries consequences.

Celebrity and wealth, purchased at the price of autonomy, were Faustian temptations for artists faced with financial insecurity and lack of recognition. On the other hand, successful publications were, by mid-century, expensive to start and operate. Understandably, from their point of view, publishers were increasingly likely to intervene in their contributors' creative processes in order to protect their investment. It is easy to how, in these circumstances, artists might begin to see their publishers as a surrogate audience.

The Legacies of Fame

"No great man ever thought himself so" warned Hazlitt in his 1822 essay: "Whether genius is conscious of its powers."[22] His words, according to Braudy, were directed at Byron, Coleridge and, particularly, the painter Salvator Rosa, but they might equally well have been applied to Dickens, Wagner, and Zola. Only fourteen years separate Hazlitt's statement from *Pickwick's* publication but they represent a philosophical chasm. Dickens and Hazlitt were both great admirers of Sir Walter Scott, for example, but drew entirely different lessons from his life. Hazlitt found nobility in Scott's deliberate anonymity. To Dickens, on the other hand, the novelist's poverty in spite of his popularity was a spur to maintaining full control of all aspects of his own career, something that could not always be accomplished quietly or invisibly.

Instinctively Dickens and those who came after him, realized that, however success was defined, the chances of gaining it were made greater by engaging the media rather than avoiding them. It was not necessary to work within the press, or prostrate oneself before it. One could even rail against it, as Wagner did. Increasingly, however,

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[22] Braudy, 435

what one could not do was ignore it. It would probably find you anyway, and if it did not your own voice would be drowned in the hubbub it created on the behalf of others.

Consciously or not, artists and media were both midwives to the modern celebrity making process, though they often had quite different motives. Friction would frequently occur over events in an artist's life that the press believed interesting but he did not, or vice versa. Wagner's battles with the media, for example, were over the nature of his celebrity, rather than whether he was fame-worthy. Understandably he would far rather have been known as the composer of music-dramas, than as the adulterous revolutionary who manipulated a gullible young king. The press, on the other hand, frequently found the incidents in his life more dramatic than his music. In the end Wagner emerged bloodied but triumphant, an achievement that would almost certainly never have happened had he remained mute, as Hazlitt would surely have recommended.

Though the content and quality of an artist's fame is, in a sense, determined dialectically between himself and the media, a celebrity is not a celebrity merely because either of them claim it is so. The arbiter is always the audience. They decide who ascends to the pantheon, if not how or why. The audience's view of the artist is also quite different from that of either the press or the individual concerned. In part this is a consequence of a phenomenon that Chris Rojek, quoting social psychologist George Herbert Mead, refers to as: "the split between the *I* (the 'veridical' self) and the *Me* (the self as seen by others)." The latter is the celebrity-self that is craved by the audience but remains largely unknown to its possessor. According to Rojek, maintaining a separation between the two selves may be crucial to an individual's mental health. He identifies the invasion of the veridical self by the celebrity-self as the cause of serious identity problems for many public personalities.[23] If he is correct, the idea could explain Dickens's and Zola's illeism as a method of managing and sustaining the division between the twin selves.

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[23] Rojek, 11

Today we are aware that a celebrity's audience, abetted by the media, is capable of consuming his private life to the point where the veridical self no longer seems to exist at all. According to Braudy, the image of the audience as a kind of replicating parasite was nurtured in the early nineteenth-century:

> [The] generation slightly after that of Byron...was the first real generation of *fans*...who came first to imitate, then to supersede. A large audience had begun to appear that sought to imitate the style of ostentation with little care for actual accomplishment. The aspirant to such intangible but fashionable status could take on the look of some admired public figure and thereby assume some of that figure's aura of publicity as well.[24]

This phenomenon points to another distinguishing characteristic of celebrity. Its inception always occurs "now," in the moment. Fame can occur posthumously, as it did for William Blake or Emily Dickinson; and the effects of celebrity can extend beyond a lifetime, as in the cases of the three artists under discussion, but it cannot spontaneously spring into being after death. For emulation purposes a living person is required. Moreover, that individual cannot easily be manufactured — either by the media or the artists themselves — and is unlikely to be anticipated by the audience. Celebrities succeed, often unintentionally, by providing it with something it wants before it realises its lack.

In conclusion, given that celebrity is a quality distinct from an artist's work, yet also one that survives his lifetime, its legacy in the case of the three men under discussion is undeniable. Dickens's began his writing career as Boz but shrewdly shrugged off its eighteenth-century pseudonymity to, very publicly, become the best-known English author of his day. As a result his inheritance shaped the expectations modern audiences have of what an author should be like. His public readings, for instance, presage events like the promotional book-tour, where every writer is assumed to be as articulate and extrovert a performer as he was. Professionally Dickens's involvement in all levels of publishing also offered the public a model of the author as a successful businessman,

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[24] Braudy, 481

rather than a poorly paid hack, or love-struck romantic. Zola, too, was first and foremost the consummate modern professional. In spite of the accusations of self-promotion and attention seeking which critics threw at him, it must be emphasised that, the publicity he generated was always in the service of his work, not himself. It was not until late in his career that he was prepared to use his — by then undeniable — celebrity in support of a cause. His willingness to do so encouraged other artists to do the same. Zola may not have instigated the contemporary notion of the public intellectual but he undoubtedly gave impetus to the idea and helped validate the acquisition of celebrity status on the part of artists as a force for social good.

first and foremost however Dickens and Zola were creatures of print culture. Though the influence of their writing and personalities has travelled far and deep, their celebrity is largely tied to publishing and letters. The same cannot be said of Wagner, whose life and work are, as he wanted, inextricably interwoven. The appearances of his celebrated phantom are frequent and eccentric. As already noted, it hovers over events as divergent as music festivals and the Nuremberg rallies of the Third Reich. Its spirit resides in modern multi-media art events, Andy Warhol's factory owes more than a little to Wagner's Bayreuth. It inhabits arenas around the world when a heavy metal rock bands, whose members — though totally unfamiliar with *Der Ring des Nibelungen* — appear in quasi-medieval costumes and clouds of dry ice. It is in the bedrooms of a thousand of teenage boys amusing themselves with fantasy role-playing games. And, of course, it marches across movie screens in shape of a million digitally created Teutonic looking elves and giants.

In all those times and places however, somewhere far off in the distance, Wagner's music can be heard playing. People there are reading Dickens's and Zola's books as well. It is just that sometimes we fail to notice because their creators' fame obscures them.

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