

GENDER AND THE VICTORIAN PERIODICAL

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CHAPTER ONE

The writing subject

'No one but a man could have written like this', declares the anonymous author of an article entitled 'The Reviewer of the Period' in *Tinsley's Magazine* in 1868, just one of a barrage of outraged journalistic responses to Eliza Lynn Linton's then still anonymous fulminations against the 'Girl of the Period' in the *Saturday Review* (618).¹ The writer of another anonymous article, 'The Women of the Day', on the notoriously misogynistic *Saturday* series, this time in *Saint Pauls*, guesses that its author is a young curate, determining that 'the articles, if not masculine, are certainly not feminine' (305). Identifying himself as a man, who wishes 'to treat the subject from a purely masculine standpoint' (312), he further complicates the gender politics surrounding the 'girl of the period' article and the series to which it belongs by his comments on the *Saturday Review's* house style and readership. It is a paper, he avers, 'in which all things, human and divine, are treated . . . from the point of view of the clever college don, who belongs to a West-end club, spends his long vacation on the Continent, and is the accepted authority of his common-room' (303). Yet it is one 'which numbers among its readers an unusually large proportion of the female sex'. Moreover, adds this defender of 'The Women of the Day', '[i]ts politics, if I may venture to say so, are of an eminently feminine order; its cleverness is just of the kind which women think very clever; and its satire is of a calibre which women can understand and appreciate' (304). Articles such as these suggest how very complex was the gendering of journalistic discourse in the mid-nineteenth century. Moreover, they invite specific comparisons between the girl of the periodical and the reviewer of the period. The author of the article 'The Reviewer of the Period' poses the rhetorical question: 'Are English girls, as a class, to be stigmatised as next door to hetairæ because a few of their number . . . choose to dress immodestly and to talk slang?' observing '[a]s fairly might we accuse all reviewers of being intemperately and inconsiderately abusive because the *Saturday* indulges in such Billingsgate' (619). Raising as it does questions relating to the sex of the journalist,

the autonomy and integrity of the writer's style and ethical position, and the gender of periodical discourse, the controversy surrounding Linton's 'Girl of the Period' demonstrates both the pervasiveness and the instability of the gender ideologies that inform and are reproduced by the periodical press.

The common practice of publishing articles anonymously, rather than over the signatures of individual contributors – a practice still widespread in the 1860s, but increasingly under attack – focusses such questions in particularly intriguing ways. On the one hand, anonymity enabled women to enter the profession of writing without having to reveal their identity and expose themselves to criticism for engaging in public discourse. On the other, it often forced them to write, if not necessarily in the style of 'the clever college don', favoured by the *Saturday Review*, then at best from the 'purely masculine standpoint' endorsed by the contributor to *Saint Pauls*. The 1860s was a decade in which both journalistic anonymity and the 'Woman Question' were the subjects of heated debate in the press, and yet they are topics which appear not to have been explicitly connected in the public imagination. Articles on female authorship and female authors, though, including features on female journalists, both generic and named, can be found in periodicals throughout the century, and a surprising number of women did write under their own names.

In this chapter we will address the question of the gendered writing subject in relation to both anonymity and signature, paying particular attention to the special dilemmas of the female journalist, whether performing masculinity or femininity; or, indeed, in different contexts, both. In so doing, we do not mean to suggest, of course, that it was only female writers who had to negotiate problematic questions of gender identity. Although Mary Ann Doane expressed the view some two decades ago in 'Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator' that 'sexual mobility would seem to be a distinguishing feature of femininity in its cultural construction' while 'the male is locked into sexual identity' (81), recent work on Victorian masculinities, through close analysis of the diverse and unstable formations of the masculine subject, has revealed it to be no less mobile a category than the feminine. Nevertheless, the work of feminist theorists on the feminine masquerade, equally with that of queer theorists on gender performativity,² seems particularly resonant in relation to the professional theatricalities and artifices that female journalists were obliged to perform in the Victorian period because of their still marginal status in the writing profession. Postmodern theories of gender as contingent and enacted may therefore be understood to inform and frame our

discussion, though we are ever mindful of the very real constraints upon the historical Victorian woman's opportunities and capacity for liberatory self-transformation. As Kali Israel astutely observes in her study of Emilia Dilke, *Names and Stories: Emilia Dilke and Victorian Culture*, 'unequal access to resources, material and historical differences of position, privilege and experience, and powerful structures of prestige and exclusion, are not magicked away by masquerade'; and we 'would be wishfully misguided if, in attempting to locate temporary resistances, we neglect overarching institutional and discursive powers' (196).

I

Eliza Lynn Linton herself, the first woman to be paid a regular salary on a major newspaper, rather spectacularly demonstrates both the possibilities of and the constraints upon gender performativity for the Victorian female journalist. In perhaps her most extreme exercise in literary transvestism, the *Autobiography of Christopher Kirkland* (1885), she writes her own life reversing not only her own sex but also that of many of her characters 'for their better disguise' as quoted in George Layard's 'Preface' to *Mrs. Lynn Linton: Her Life, Letters, and Opinions*. Recounting 'Christopher's' entry into professional journalism, on the basis of her own experiences at the offices of the *Morning Chronicle*, she describes the exchange between the editor and the young aspirant:

'So! you are the little boy who has written that queer book [she had published a historical romance, *Azeth the Egyptian*, in the previous year, 1847] and want to be one of the press gang, are you?' he said half-smiling . . .

'Yes, I am the man,' I said.

'Man, you call yourself? I call you a whipper-snapper . . . I say though, youngster, you never wrote all that rubbish yourself! Some of your elder brothers helped you. You never scratched all those queer classics and mythology into your own numbskull without help. At your age it is impossible.' (266-7)

The editor, based on John Douglas Cook, sends Christopher/Eliza off to write a leader on a Blue Book, telling him/her to "'Keep to the text; write with strength; don't talk nonsense, and do your work like a man'" (269). Having passed the sex test, the protagonist is duly assigned a position; we are told, 'I filled the office of handy-man about the paper' (270-1).

This episode, and the style in which it is recounted, inevitably recall other accounts of Victorian women's attempts to enter the professional world of writing, such as Charlotte Brontë's letter to Wordsworth over the

signature C. T., extracted in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, with what Gaskell describes as its 'touch of assumed smartness', in imitation of 'the flippancy which was likely to exist in her brother's style of conversation' (202). Linton's overt simulation of a masculine subject position and style likewise recalls Harriet Martineau's response to a proposal by the editor of the *Edinburgh Review* in 1858 to write an article on the repatriation of black African slave-labourers to Liberia. 'I'm your man', she confidently informed its editor, Henry Reeve. In "'I'm your Man": Harriet Martineau and the *Edinburgh Review*', Valerie Sanders recounts that when Martineau later submitted her article on 'Female Industry', she wrote to him 'I do hope you will like it, & that you will think I have succeeded in making it look like a man's writing' (36, 44). Another woman who recognised the value of assuming a masculine authorial persona was George Eliot. Before she adopted her pseudonym, while still writing anonymously for the press, she performed some convoluted sexual displacements in her articles for the *Westminster Review*, which she had secretly edited in the early 1850s. Thus, even as she argues for a proper recognition of women's intellectual and cultural talents, in her article 'Woman in France: Madame de Sablé' (1854), she positions herself as a male reader of the periodical press rather than as a female journalist, in her metatextual excursion on the growing power of the press:

As the old coach-roads have sunk into disuse through the creation of railways, so journalism tends more and more to divert information from the channel of conversation into the channel of the Press: no one is satisfied with a more circumscribed audience than that very indeterminate abstraction 'the public', and men find a vent for their opinions not in talk but in 'copy'. We read the *Athenæum* askance at the tea-table, and take notes from the *Philosophical Journal* at a soirée; we invite our friends that we may thrust a book into their hands, and presuppose an exclusive desire in the 'ladies' to discuss their own matters, 'that we may crackle the *Times*' at our ease. (15–16)

Undoubtedly the custom of anonymous publication in the press made such trans-sex discursive identifications possible for women trying to establish a foothold in the profession, as well as for women such as Eliot and Martineau whose reputations were such that they no longer needed to resort to such subterfuge. Indeed, it also enabled male contributors to write for magazines, such as the *Lady's Magazine* and, later, *Woman*, that were supposedly by, as well as for, women.³ Yet the gendered context of such opportunistic acts of ventriloquism differed markedly between men and women. The wit and bravado of women's performance of a masculine voice often concealed the considerable personal and professional costs of

being a woman in a man's world. Linton wrote of *Christopher Kirkland* to a female friend, 'It was an outpour no one hears me make by word of mouth, a confession of sorrow, suffering, trial, and determination not to be beaten, which few suspect as the underlying truth of my life' (Layard, 'Preface').

Leaving aside such knotty questions as the 'underlying truth' of a life, to consider instead the institutional and discursive parameters within which female journalists wrote, it is instructive to examine how even the terms of the anonymity debate itself were markedly gendered. In 'Salesmen, Sportsmen, Mentors: Anonymity and Mid-Victorian Theories of Journalism', Dallas Liddle identifies the three main positions that were taken in the debate:

Supporters of journalism's traditional anonymity rallied in defense of a paternalistic, mentoring model of discourse in which the writer, speaking the values of the larger society and invested with corporate authority, takes the role of instructor and guide to the reader. Some advocates of the new signature system responded that periodical publishing was, in economic fact, a marketplace governed by relationships between buyers and sellers of ideas, all of whom were unitary economic actors. Anonymity was inimical to the free and fair working of this market, since it hid information (the author's identity and qualifications) relevant to the value of an intellectual product, and gave editors and writers an incentive to produce inferior work. A second school of signature advocates sought higher moral ground and argued that the arena of public discourse, like the playing fields of Eton and Rugby, was a place to test and strengthen moral character, and that the adoption of signature would foster responsibility and forthright manliness among journalists. (33)

Liddle's focus is on male culture, and he does not allude to the implications for women's journalism of his analysis of the terms of the anonymity debate. But it reminds us how closely constructions of masculinity and constructions of femininity articulate with each other, for it is clear that none of these exemplary figures for the journalist – neither the paternalistic mentor, nor the trader in the literary marketplace, nor the sportsman on the playing fields of culture – offers a role that a woman could comfortably fill. It is only in the domestic sphere that women assume authority and offer mentoring advice in their own person or over a female signature, in the women's pages of general periodicals or in women's magazines. Furthermore, women are characterised as consumers and commodities, but ideologically excluded from participation as traders in the business economy. Christian Isobel Johnstone's anonymous article on 'Women of Business', in *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, begins:



Plate 2. 'The House of Business Young Lady', *Girl of the Period Miscellany* 1 (1869): 43.

We adore the sex! It is to be hoped that readers of our gallant miscellany have been made fully conscious that we neglect no occasion of ministering to the triumphs of the petticoat! Harriet Martineau, the sublime, – Mrs. Norton, the beautiful, – Mesdames Hemans, Hall, Gore, Austen, Fry, Somerville, Marcet, – have received in turn sufficient honours at our hands, sufficient homage at our knees! but for the lives of us, we cannot help abhorring what is called a capital Woman of Business! . . . It is the woman who goes out of her way to buy and sell, and plot and counterplot, whom we utterly abominate. (596)

The fact that the author of this piece was a woman assuming a collective male voice, only reinforces the inapplicability of the journalist-as-writer-in-the-marketplace argument to women. We need look no further than the pages of the *Girl of the Period Miscellany*, at a rather risqué apology for the 'House of Business Young Lady', at work in a showroom (Plate 2), to see the limits of women's role in business even as it was envisaged in this unconventional publication (43). And indeed no further than the *Girl of the Period Almanack* and an article entitled 'July. – The Amazon Athletic Club', for a sense of the perceived absurdity of their antics on a playing field (Plate 3).



Plate 3. 'July. – The Amazon Athletic Club', *Girl of the Period Almanack for 1869*.

One of the major questions about which the anonymity debate revolves is whether the journalist's voice should be individualised, original and identifiable, or speak the collective wisdom, in the flattened style of the journal. Originality seems to have been a particularly elusive quality for Victorian women to aspire to, and the field of writing was no exception, as an interesting article, 'Female Authorship', in *Fraser's Magazine* makes abundantly clear. It takes the form of a conversation between two women, one of whom is a writer (young, beautiful, happily married with children, rather than an ink-stained, bluestocking spinster), who is asked by her older friend about the trials of female authorship. One difficulty upon which she remarks is that she is constantly being advised to imitate the work of more successful writers: "Now our good friends would never think of telling Dr. Chalmers that he would do well to imitate the style of the *Pickwick Papers*, nor probably would they tell Wordsworth that if he wrote in the style of Horace Smith, his work would be more generally read . . . But they will not let us, little stars, possess our small talents in peace" (462). Yet at the same time as she is discouraged from developing her individual voice, and urged to copy the styles of other writers, she is criticised for her lack of originality, even for plagiarising from other writers, as she explains:

One person reads a poem of mine, and says, with a peculiarly knowing look, 'murmuring sound,' – is not that too much like Milton?

'Not distant far from thence a murmuring sound.'

Nay, I assure you I scarcely exaggerate – and doubtless from that day my friend considers me a plagiarist, and declares he has 'found me out.' But they will not always give me credit for borrowing my ideas from so high a source; sometimes it is a passage in Mr. Brown's or Mrs. Tomkins's last work, that some unlucky expression of mine resembles, and which I am consequently thought to have borrowed, unconsciously, of course, as I am delicately told. (462)

When it comes to female authors, it seems, weighty matters such as the status of the individual in journalistic culture, the value placed upon individual writers with individual belief systems and individual styles, which were such key issues in the anonymity debate, are reduced to gossip and innuendo about a woman's capacity for original thought.

That women all too often faced profound challenges in their pursuit of a career as a writer is made very clear in a number of mid-century periodical articles on female authorship. An 1864 article on 'Literary Women' in the *London Review*, for example, appears at first to be sympathetic to those 'clever women' who cannot understand 'why men in general entertain a strong objection to feminine authorship', and indeed rehearses what some of the more cynical explanations for their objection might be. However, it then goes on to offer the true reasons why 'literature is not a profession to which English gentlemen are pleased to see their sisters and their daughters turn'. With breathtaking circularity, the author explains that a broad and comprehensive experience of the world is necessary for a great writer, and that therefore no woman can qualify without first 'undergoing a defeminizing process' (328). We are told:

A literary education is the work of a long time; and women who write the best almost always display their want of its discipline sooner or later. Literary genius means among other things the power of bringing sympathy and passion under the stern control of artistic law. Without this self-control, passion itself becomes weak or luxuriant; and sympathy degenerates into weakness. There is no other training that gives it except the laborious study and appreciation of classical models; and this training is almost out of the reach of women. (328)

To be a great writer requires a classical education; this is unavailable to women; ergo, women can't be great writers; or if they do somehow acquire the necessary education, they must pay the price of their womanhood. In either case that problematical category, the female writer, is disqualified and disavowed.

But while articles such as these offered all too many disincentives for women to aspire to 'literary genius', and while others like 'On The Employment of Females' warned against 'the unrequited toil, the hopes, the fears, the utter blank of heart, that attend every aspirant to literary fame, whose abilities are mediocre, or whose patronymic is untitled' (305), the female author and her work did have a presence in Victorian journalism, as the subject of articles and reviews, throughout the century. After all, as Robert Williams in 'Female Character' declared in 1833 in *Fraser's*, 'No age has been so fruitful in female genius as the present. From all ranks of society women have come forth, and have distinguished themselves in almost every department of literature' (599). Such acclamation of women's intellectual breadth and capacity was, however, rare. More typically, reviews of publications by women, particularly in the early part of the period, were heavily prescriptive in delineating what it was appropriate for a woman to write. William Hazlitt, for example, anonymously reviewing Lady Morgan's *Life and Times of Salvator Rosa*, disapproves of her 'pretension' in taking on such a subject, declaring contemptuously:

Women write well, only when they write naturally: And therefore we could dispense with their inditing prize-essays or solving academic questions; – and should be far better pleased with Lady Morgan if she would condescend to a more ordinary style, and not insist continually on displaying the diplomatist in petticoats, and strutting the little Gibbon of her age! (318)

Felicia Hemans is greeted more approvingly in the *Edinburgh Review*, but the reader is again treated to a view of what woman writers can and cannot do. In particular, we are told in Francis Jeffrey's review of her *Records of Woman* and *The Forest Sanctuary*:

They cannot, we think, represent naturally the fierce and sullen passions of men – nor their coarser vices – nor even scenes of actual business or contention – and the mixed motives, and strong and faulty characters, by which affairs of the moment are usually conducted on the great theatre of the world . . . Perhaps they are also incapable of long moral or political investigations . . . They are generally too impatient to get at the ultimate results, to go well through with such discussions. (32)

A later review by Thomas Macaulay, of Lucy Aikin's *Life of Joseph Addison*, is critical of the author for not being sufficiently 'acquainted with her subject', and for being unreliable in her judgement of his achievements: 'It is proper . . . to remark, that Miss Aikin has committed the error, very pardonable in a lady, of overrating Addison's classical attainments' (197). Again, she has ventured beyond her proper literary sphere.

The review of Lucy Aikin's biography begins with a general discussion of whether a female author under review may rightfully plead 'the immunities of sex'. In the opening sentence, we are informed that '[s]ome reviewers are of opinion that a lady who dares to publish a book renounces by that act the franchises appertaining to her sex, and can claim no exemption from the utmost rigour of critical procedure', but that the present reviewer dissents from that view. This foregrounds one of the besetting problems for female writers in the period; the tendency on the part of reviewers, if not to disparage, then to patronise their womanly efforts. *Fraser's* demonstrates both tendencies respectively in the portraits of Harriet Martineau and Caroline Norton in William Maginn's 'Gallery of ILLUSTRIOUS Literary Characters'. The condescending tone of the encomium to the latter in 1831 gives a fair idea of how female authors were often viewed at this juncture:

Fair Mrs. Norton! Beautiful Bhouddist, as Balaam Bulwer baptises you, whom can we better choose for a beginning of our illustrious literary portraits, when diverging from the inferior sex, our pencil dares to portray the angels of the craft? Passionately enamoured, as we avowedly are, of L.E.L. – soul-struck by the wonders of Mrs. Hemans's muse – in no slight degree smitten by Mary Anne Browne – venerating such relics of antiquity as Lady Morgan or Miss Edgeworth – pitying, (which is akin to loving,) the misfortunes of Mrs. Heber or Miss — we yet must make Mrs. Norton the leader of the female band. She writes long poems – she is a sprig of nobility – and she is the granddaughter of that right honourable gentleman whose picture is suspended above her head . . . We display her as the modest matron making tea in the morning for the comfort and convenience of her husband. (222–3)

Within a few years the world was to see another side to the Honourable Mrs Norton, but for now her success in the eyes of this writer seems to owe more to her beauty and womanliness, not to mention her pedigree, than to her literary talent. By contrast, the portrait of Harriet Martineau later in the series (1833)⁴ is a spiteful attack upon 'the fair philosopher' whom, we are told, no man is likely to seduce from 'the doctrines of no-population'; it is 'a wonder that such [pro-Malthusian] themes should occupy the pen of any lady, old or young, without exciting a disgust nearly approaching to horror' (Maginn, 'Gallery', 576).

II

There is plenty of evidence to be found in the pages of the press at mid-century to support George Eliot's acerbic comments in the *Westminster Review* on the critical reception of 'lady novelists', and its damaging effects on women's writing. While, for instance, the reviewer (probably William

Maginn) of Mrs S. C. Hall's *Sketches of Irish Character* in *Fraser's* of 1831 gushes 'We have a most stupendous regard for Mrs. S. C. Hall; and, as we do not remember ever to have beheld the beauty of her benevolent countenance, our readers will readily conceive that the lady owes the enjoyment of our grace and favour to her merits as a writer, and to our diligence as perusers!' ('Sketches of Irish Character', 100), the reviewer of Harriet Martineau's *Cousin Marshall* (again probably Maginn) writing in the same journal the following year declares "What a frightful delusion is this, called, by its admirers, Political Economy, which can lead a young lady to put forth a book like this!" – a book written by a woman against the poor – a book written by a young woman against marriage!' ('On National Economy', 403), Eliot in 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists' caustically observes how:

By a peculiar thermometric adjustment, when a woman's talent is at zero, journalistic approbation is at the boiling pitch; when she attains mediocrity, it is already at no more than summer heat; and if ever she reaches excellence, critical enthusiasm drops to the freezing point. Harriet Martineau, Currer Bell, and Mrs Gaskell have been treated as cavalierly as if they had been men. (161)

Dismissive of genuinely talented women writers, the patronising reviewer, 'in the choicest phraseology of puffery', according to Eliot, 'tell[s] one lady novelist after another that they "hail" her productions "with delight"' (161).

Eliot's own parodic 'phraseology of puffery' here interestingly anticipates Althusser's account in 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' of the mechanism by which ideology works to interpellate or 'hail' the individual as a subject:

Ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals . . . or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects . . . by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!' . . . the hailed individual will turn round. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion he becomes a subject. Why? Because he has recognized that the hail was 'really' addressed to him. (163)

This precisely describes how the patriarchal press interpellates the woman writer, according to Eliot's account. She points out the irony that it is only by 'recognising' themselves as acceptably 'silly' lady novelists that female authors gain the approbation of the reviewer. Fully cognisant of the formidable cultural power of the press, Eliot takes the opportunity of her own anonymous critical article in the *Westminster Review* to formulate a different paradigm for female authorship, one which serves as a blueprint for the novelist she will become.

As this example suggests, the periodical press was not so much the oppressive organ of a dominant ideology as a crucial site of ideological struggle, of those ‘uneven developments’ which Mary Poovey has so effectively analysed. While reviewers of a certain cast continued to ‘hail’ the productions of lady novelists ‘with delight’, others gave increasingly respectful critical consideration not only to ‘feminine’ writers, such as Jane Austen, who, according to Harriet Childe-Pemberton in ‘Women of Intellect. Jane Austen’, ‘furnishes an instance of high literary talent with the most genuine womanliness’ (378), but also to ‘unfeminine’ writers, including those sanctioned by Eliot, and indeed Eliot herself. And so, by contrast with the portrait of Harriet Martineau drawn for the *Fraser’s* ‘Gallery’, William Howitt’s view in the *People’s* ‘Portrait Gallery’ of 1846 is that ‘Harriet Martineau presents one of the finest examples of a masculine intellect in a female form which have distinguished the present age’, and she is but one of a number of intellectual women who ‘are setting a stirring example to their sisters to doubt the wise saws which the mouths of the mankind of all ages have uttered in patronising grandiloquism over the womankind, – “pretty creatures and clever – to a certain extent”’ (143). Howitt himself has no time for such ‘[s]weet courtesy! beautiful condescension!’ ‘[B]ut is one or the other needed?’ he asks. ‘Just listen to a little fact’ (143). Even if they seemed unable to ignore the sex of the author altogether (so exercised were they by the question whether it was a womanly soul or a masculine intellect that she harboured in her female form), male reviewers who allowed themselves to forget their chivalrous manners wrote in a more balanced way about women’s literary work. In the case of a man such as William Howitt, marriage to a successful author and prolific journalist, Mary Howitt, may have helped him to view the business of women’s writing as no more peculiar than men’s. George Henry Lewes was notably less inclined to worry in public about those ‘women [who] have made an invasion of our legitimate domain’ (‘A Gentle Hint’, 189) after setting up house with Mary Ann Evans. Female authors are treated more matter-of-factly still in a periodical whose very name sanctions the association of women and journalism. An anonymous review of ‘The Hon. Mrs. Caroline Norton’ in *Eliza Cook’s Journal* in 1853–4 declares ‘Female authorship is now so common a thing, that the woman who has written a book is no longer regarded as a *lusus naturæ*. A woman who writes is not now considered “a blue,” for the tint of female stocking has become all but cerulean’ (39).

Caroline Norton, Mary Howitt, George Eliot and Harriet Martineau, as well as other successful authors such as Margaret Oliphant, first established themselves as professional writers and in many cases continued to support

their literary work as novelists or poets, through their writing for the periodical press. Journalism offered hitherto unavailable opportunities not only for prominent literary figures such as these but also for women of more modest writerly ambition. An article entitled ‘What Will You Write for the Magazine?’ published in *Eliza Cook’s Journal* in 1851 comically recounts the experiences of a supposed friend and correspondent of Eliza, asked by her to produce “an essay,” “a poem,” at least a little tale, or if it was only an advertisement – a comic advertisement, anything would be acceptable to a magazine in its birth’ (351). Utterly bereft of a subject and of all inspiration, the woman friend finishes by writing an advertisement: ‘TO LET, with immediate possession, for a short time, the tenement lately occupied by the Advertiser’s brains, they having gone for the season to enjoy the delight of wool-gathering’ (352). Her husband is unimpressed, coolly remarking “Ah! it does not do for wives to turn authoresses! here have you, my dear, spent the whole evening to no profit – while little Johnny has contrived to set his pinafore on fire, and burned”. As she rushes to the nursery, the would-be author ‘secretly registered a vow to abjure for the future the Grey Goose Quill’ (353).

Likely enough this piece – the submissive and self-deprecatory stance of which is, of course, nicely overridden by the evident fact that it was published – was a complete fabrication, perhaps even written by Eliza Cook herself, who continued to ply her own grey goose quill for some years to come and wrote proudly under her own name. A poet and journal editor, Cook was a woman who never seemed short of a topic to write about, and for whom the periodical press was a perfect vehicle. And she was not alone. Christian Isobel Johnstone, like Cook, both edited a journal, *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine*, and reviewed for it, with a special interest in bringing the work of new women writers to the reading public. According to Michael Hyde and Walter Houghton in the *Wellesley Index*, not only did she write over 400 articles between 1832 and 1846, but under her editorship the magazine employed an unusually high proportion of female contributors, including Harriet Martineau, Catherine Gore, Eliza Lynn Linton, Mary Russell Mitford, Amelia Opie and Mary Howitt (iv: 479). Marysa Demoor’s *Their Fair Share* reveals just how important the role of the editor was in determining the gender demographics of a journal. Through her painstaking work on the *Athenaeum*’s ‘marked file’, she has discovered that, although it had a surprisingly large number of female contributors even in its first decades (including Geraldine Jewsbury who, according to Monica Frykstedt in *Geraldine Jewsbury’s ‘Athenaeum’ Reviews*, published a staggering 2,300 book reviews in its pages in the 1850s and 1860s (15)), the final three

decades of the century saw a considerable increase in the number of reviews by women, a fact which Demoor attributes to the changes which took place under the proprietorship of Sir Charles Wentworth Dilke.⁵ She also observes a broadening out of the topics on which women were commissioned to write, although even in early to mid-Victorian journals, when women were typically assigned topics that were coded feminine, some notable female reviewers were given the opportunity to take on prominent male writers of the day. Some of the most memorable reviews of Ruskin's work, for example, are by women – George Eliot, Elizabeth Rigby, Emilia Dilke – while Lady Morgan's notorious reviews of Carlyle's *French Revolution*, *Chartism*, and *Past and Present* are only the best known of her notices of major cultural texts to be published in the *Athenaeum*.⁶

The reason why a study such as Demoor's is so valuable is that the identity of a great number of contributors to the Victorian periodical press is still unknown. As she notes, even prolific reviewers such as Geraldine Jewsbury 'do not figure prominently' in the principal resource available to modern scholars, the *Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals 1824–1900*, crucial though that is as a research tool. At mid-century, most women published anonymously, as was standard, and even where an article is said to be 'by a woman', such as an article of 1856 in the *Train*, with the title 'A Word or Two about Women', authored by One of the Sex' (181–5), or later, in 1880, in *Time*, 'Woman's Rights. By a Weak-minded Female' (114–18), the claim is not necessarily to be believed. But throughout the period some authors, women as well as men, were given a by-line when it was felt that their regular association with a journal would boost readership. Thus, as Margaret Beetham points out, in the 1830s and 1840s Mrs Hofland and Camilla Toulmin wrote signed pieces for the *Lady's Magazine and Museum of Belle Lettres*, and the names of prominent contributors were advertised on the cover (*A Magazine of Her Own?*, 43). And by the last decades of the century, when the practice of anonymity had been eroded, journals and in particular women's magazines are full of signed articles by women: Annie S. Swan and Lady Jeune, for example, writing for *Woman at Home*, Charlotte O'Connor Eccles in *Windsor Magazine*, Isabella Tod in *Leisure Hour*.

By the 1890s magazines for girls and young women were actively promoting journalism as a profession.⁷ The *Girl's Own Paper* in 1890, for example, carried a signed article on 'Young Women as Journalists' in which it is considered to be 'the most natural thing in the world' for young women to seek a career in journalism. Its readers are warned of the hardships entailed in being a reporter, but are informed that '[a] great deal of the most effective work on our newspapers has been done by women; and, could it be told,

the public would today be surprised to learn how much of the total is still done by them' (306). As part of a series in 1896 on 'How Women May Earn a Living', *Woman's Life* offers helpful practical advice to women on short story writing, and how to submit their work to a magazine (85–6). And in 1899, an article in the *Young Woman* undertakes to explain 'What it Means to be a Lady Journalist', beginning by pointing out that 'there are few professions which are more exacting':

Because my lady sees Miss Reporter at the dance, and the bazaar, and the afternoon garden party; at every fashionable function, and at half the theatres . . . my lady imagines that Miss Reporter's life is a bed of roses, which brings her into touch with everything that is beautiful, and makes no demand upon her which it is not a pleasure to fulfil. My lady's mistake is natural, but it is a mistake nevertheless, and as an increasing number of girls look with envious eye on the lady journalist every day, it is well that there should be a good understanding of what it means to be a lady journalist. (93)

Having disabused the reader of the idea that the job is an easy one, the anonymous writer makes it clear that, far from requiring shorthand skills alone, it demands a capacity for original and creative thought, particularly from female journalists. In an interesting reversal of the conventional wisdom about the gender of originality, we are told, 'Women are certainly not employed in journalism to do merely mechanical work of that kind. As a rule, they are engaged to do original work, which men could not do so well, or which they could not do, perhaps, at all' (93). Emily Crawford in an 1893 article in *Review of Reviews* on 'Women as Journalists' makes a similar point when she argues that women write well and have 'in a greater degree than men the faculty of throwing life into what emanates from their pens' (quoted in Demoor, *Their Fair Share*, 17).

In 1898, Arnold Bennett published *Journalism for Women: A Practical Guide*, in which he advises would-be journalists to establish a base in London, to get themselves a reader's ticket to the British Museum, and to branch out into subjects that are not conventionally thought of as feminine. He also suggests which journals are most likely to accept their work, directing them to the high quality middlebrow general magazines. His was one of several guides for female journalists published around the end of the century. Frances Low wrote a series of articles in the *Girl's Realm* in 1903, which were collected in 1904 into a volume with the title *Press Work for Women: A Textbook for the Young Woman Journalist*, which was also intended to function as a practical manual for would-be journalists. Although somewhat disparaging of female journalism, after the manner of George

Eliot's critique of silly novels by lady novelists, it takes its subject seriously, and insists on the development of a proper professionalism among women wishing to enter upon a career in journalism. The case was put for women journalists in the mainstream press too. G. B. Stuart, for example, reports in the *Athenaeum*, for which she was a regular writer, on the paper she gave on 'Women in English Journalism' at the first international press congress in 1894: 'Miss Stuart's paper, after dealing with the specific qualifications which women possess for journalism, touched on their increasing number and power during the last thirty years, and maintained that they had created, not usurped their present position' (quoted in Demoor, *Their Fair Share*, 18).

By the 1890s, then, the female journalist had well and truly come out.⁸ She had a professional association, in the form of the Society of Women Journalists, founded in 1894 by Joseph S. Wood, editor of the *Gentlewoman*, and she had a platform by virtue of her assured place in the pages of the periodical press. The eight-page 'Portrait Gallery of Contributors to the *Girl's Own Paper*' issued with the 1,000th number of the journal in 1899 (between 320–1) demonstrates how far journalism had moved from the anonymity debates of the 1860s. It was, by then, common practice to print a separate list of contributors as well as identifying the authors of each article in the index, and it is interesting to see how many are women, not only in women's and girls' magazines but in publications for men and boys, such as the illustrated monthly magazine, the *Young Man* (although the topics on which they wrote were notably gendered in journals like the *Boy's Own Paper*). Female journalists, such as Annie S. Swan, were featured and interviewed, much as celebrities and football players are in magazines today, and their views sought on the suitability of their profession for women. Arthur Lawrence's 'A Chat with Mrs. Sarah A. Tooley' in *Young Woman* on the topic of 'Interviewing as Women's Work', elicits the story of how she entered her career, which seems to have been genetically ordained: 'Any physiognomist', observes the writer of his subject, 'who noted the keen blue eyes and fine forehead, would have known that all Mrs. Tooley's predilections were for literature' (441). Interestingly, though, even as they focus so directly on the individual identity of the writer (we are told that 'the position occupied by Mrs. Sarah A. Tooley is well-nigh unique' (441)) such articles also draw attention to the continuing anonymity of a lot of journalistic labour. Here, the writer, while signing his own name below the article, points out that 'lady journalists do a good deal of interviewing work', but notes that '[a] great deal of such work is done anonymously' (441). Similarly, in an interview in *Woman's Life* titled

'Mrs Humphry ("Madge," of "Truth"), a woman described as '[o]ne of the most energetic and successful women journalists of the day', we are reminded of the anonymity conferred by the use of a pseudonym by her anecdote about a social function at which 'a lady was introduced to Mrs. Humphry's sister as "Miss — , 'Madge,' of 'Truth,' you know." "Oh no," was the prompt reply, "my sister is 'Madge' of 'Truth' " (301).

The incident recalls Eliza Lynn Linton's story of twice being introduced to the writer of 'The Girl of the Period': 'The first time he was a clergyman who had boldly told my friends that he had written the paper; the second, she was a lady of rank well known in London society' (quoted in Layard, *Mrs. Lynn Linton*, 145). Yet though it may have been as hard to establish the truth of 'Madge' of 'Truth's' identity as it had been to discover the author of 'The Girl of the Period', by the 1890s the idea of women making a career in journalism was considerably more acceptable than it had been thirty years previously. Women writers were altogether more visible in mainstream periodicals as well as in specialist women's magazines. As Mrs Humphry, 'Madge', herself comments in her interview for *Woman's Life*:

The scope of women's work in the journalistic world is much greater now. When I first became a journalist only a few papers published ladies' letters, and these dealt principally with domestic servants, the management of babies, and similar subjects. Now women go in for golf, bicycling, and other games; in fact, the athletic girl is a new development, and as woman's world is widened, so is the field for women writers. (301)

As if to underscore her point, an advertisement for 'Cyclinia', a herbal preparation for the complexion 'specially for Cyclists', is printed alongside her article (302).

III

Like the female journalist herself, the athletic girl who had been a mere laughing matter in the 1860s is starting to be taken seriously in the 1890s, and the same might be said of the feminist, even though the niche audience of most women's magazines remained the woman with domestic responsibilities such as servants and babies to manage. These constructions of femininity are sometimes strategically connected in interesting ways, when a more adventurous woman's work is packaged in such a way as to appeal to women confined to the domestic sphere. Thus, interviews with women writers are frequently presented in the form of 'A Friendly Chat with the Girls', as in the series 'Between Ourselves' in the *Young Woman*, which has

as its logo a sketch of a group of women having a cosy chat.⁹ Connections between the writing woman and the new athletic woman are sometimes suggested by the illustrations, as in the picture of the author with her bicycle which accompanies the Baroness von Zedlitz's 1896 article in *Woman's Life*, 'Chat with Madame Sarah Grand' (501). As part of the same series, 'Chats with Well Known Women', the Baroness interviews the explorer and writer Mary Kingsley, bringing that most intrepid of travellers into the domestic drawing room for a fireside chat (431–2). In a similar fashion, articles designed to help women manage their finances are smuggled in among less weighty domestic material. Some women journalists seem to have moved from the one category to the other with ease. Charlotte O'Connor Eccles, for example, in one issue advises readers of the *Windsor Magazine* 'How Women Can Easily Make Provision for their Old Age' (315–18), while in another she writes on the topic 'Are Pretty Women Unpopular?' (737–41).

As 'Madge's' comments on the widening of the field for women writers suggest, though, while the range of new feminine types had indeed expanded in the course of the century, types they nevertheless remained. Athletic girls and the other 'new women' to be found in the pages of the late nineteenth-century periodical press were as stereotypically and exaggeratedly depicted as the domestic angels, girls of the period, and blue-stockings of an earlier era. Indeed, if the periodical press may be said to have provided a theatre for cross-gender performativity, equally it may be seen as providing a stage for the performance of femininity. In this context, Joan Rivière's concept of the masquerade of femininity is suggestive. In her foundational essay 'Womanliness as a Masquerade', Rivière analyses the strategic adoption of a mask of femininity by the intellectual woman who, having assumed the position of the subject of discourse rather than its object, then tries to compensate for her appropriation of masculinity by excessively performing femininity. As she explains it, 'Womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it – much as a thief will turn out his pockets and ask to be searched to prove that he has not the stolen goods' (213).

It is arguable that some female writers for the Victorian periodical press assumed and wore a mask of womanliness for the very reasons Rivière proposes, to compensate for their theft of the masculine subject position and thereby avoid reprisals. The mask took different forms. Most notable are those women, such as Isabella Beeton and Sarah Stickney Ellis, and the countless lesser-known writers for the domestic culture industry, who flaunted the persona of the domestic angel in contradistinction to their

actual identities as professional writers. But no less excessive are the self-professed authorial athletic girls and modern girls, for whom the 'girl of the period' established a prototype. Even the feminist may be said to have publicly performed feminism in the newly established women's presses, exaggeratedly enacting her positionality as a woman.

Mary Ann Doane in 'Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator' argues that modern theories of the masquerade, based on the view that gender identity is arbitrary and contingent, see such evidently artificial enactments of femininity as subversive acts of resistance to patriarchal positioning (81). But can we reasonably attribute the politics of postmodern gender performativity to the Victorian writing subject? Or are these women writers rather to be seen as interpellated subjects, performing the femininity that ideology has prescribed for them, just as others performed masculinity under the mask of anonymity? While both theories of masquerade and of interpellation do help us to understand how Victorian women tried to negotiate the material conditions within which they worked as professional writers for the press, neither entirely captures the historical specificity of their problematic subjectivity and their uses of sexual style. It is in the context of the material form of the Victorian periodical that such theories may most usefully be invoked. For it was the fundamentally heterogeneous form of the Victorian periodical, its multiple and mostly anonymous authorship, its imperative of diversity, that provided a very particular space, both fluid and dynamic, in which women could negotiate a writing identity or writing identities. The periodical's very refusal of a single authorial voice, the calculated diversity of genres and modes both within the cover and between journals, encouraged experimentation, creating a medium of interpellation but also a cultural space in which interpellation might be resisted, a place in which gender was made and remade.

Anne McClintock maintains in *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* that 'no social category exists in privileged isolation; each comes into being in social relation to other categories, if in uneven and contradictory ways', and gender came into existence 'in and through relation to' other categories, such as class and race. Furthermore, she points out, 'power is seldom adjudicated evenly' (9). Women writing at the end of the century still constituted only a small and relatively powerless proportion of what was a decidedly male profession; though more prominent and more accepted than their mid-century sisters, they encountered similar disincentives, experienced similar disappointments and frustrations, and resorted to similar tactics, which sometimes involved invoking their superior class position and using their connections. A number of hostile

reviewers in the course of the period comment on the proportion of published female writers who are titled, while the editor of the *Cornhill* complains in his pages about an acquaintance who had been prevailed upon by a scheming woman to use his influence to get her translation of a tale by the Archbishop of Cambrai into print, and had tried to take advantage of their friendship to foist her upon him – without success. When we examine the fine texture of stories about women's experiences of seeking to publish their work in the periodical press, what is most notable is the complexity of their response to the system that confronts them, the combination of powerlessness and feisty resourcefulness in their dealings with the world they inhabit, but also the particular social dynamics of that world.

One example must suffice to illustrate McClintock's argument that gender, sexuality, class and nation are 'articulated categories' within that social world (4). Having begun this chapter with the story of Eliza Lynn Linton's approach to a periodical editor, we conclude with the Irish writer and illustrator Edith Somerville's account, in a letter to her collaborator Violet Martin of a discouraging visit to Oscar Wilde, then editor of the *Woman's World*, in 1888, before the former had achieved fame or the latter notoriety (in *The Selected Letters of Somerville and Ross* edited by Gifford Lewis). After hawking her work around the editorial offices of the illustrateds, she writes:

H. and I went down to Oscar yesterday (he was out on Monday) sent him a letter and we were marched in. He is a great fat oily beast. He pretended the most enormous interest – by Egerton's advice I said I was the Bart's niece as Oscar knows him well – but it was all of no avail. Neither Carbery, Vernissage (with pictures and I wouldn't give it without,) nor possibly Atelier des Dames would he have. He languidly took the sonnets and is to return them by post. He talked great rot that 'French subjects should be drawn by French artists' – I was near telling him that, as Dr. Johnson said – 'who drives fat oxen must himself be fat'. He assumed deep interest in the 'Miss Martins', asked if they were all married: I said 'mostly all'. He was kind enough to say that Edith was pretty and nice – and bulged his long fat red cheeks into an affectionate grin at the thought of her. He then showed me a book of very indifferent French sketches – was foully civil, and so goodbye. I then took Carbery to *Cassells Family Mag.* Office. A dear little intelligent vulgarian in charge – such a relief. (67–8)

The encounter of this impoverished member of the Irish aristocracy with first the Irish expatriate Wilde, to whom she introduces herself as 'the Bart's niece', and then the unnamed 'intelligent vulgarian' nicely captures the national and class dynamics of which McClintock writes, as first Somerville is patronised by Wilde, and then the 'dear little' *Cassells* editor is patronised by her. But of course the gender dynamics are also intriguing. As the male

editor of a women's magazine, Wilde occupies an ambiguously gendered position professionally. Although he was not at this point, as far as we know, disadvantaged professionally by his sexuality, still some years away from public exposure, he was presumably obliged to perform masculinity, to engage in his own form of gender masquerade. Later, of course, he was to theorise his belief in 'the truth of masks'.

It is interesting how prominent a theme dissimulation is in Somerville's short account of their meeting. He is, self-evidently to his visitor, playing a part. 'Fouly civil', he 'pretended the most enormous interest' in her, and 'assumed deep interest in the "Miss Martins"', his forced smile as insincere as his compliments. And yet it appears that, despite the artificiality of his own demeanour, and despite the aesthetic of the mask that he was to develop in his critical essays, the excuse he gives her for not accepting her French subjects is that they lack integrity, an integrity that can only be conferred, it seems, by the artist/writer being what he or she appears to be: "French subjects should be drawn by French artists". Somerville's silent retort, "who drives fat oxen must himself be fat", underscores the irony of this master of the performative adopting such an uncompromisingly essentialist position. Wilde's professed concern with the authenticity of the subject only has the effect of confirming the truth of masquerade. Indeed, the whole episode reminds us that it was not only women who were obliged to perform or to subvert masculinity in pursuit of a professional identity.

Edith Somerville's account of her attempt to interest the respective editors of the *Woman's World* and *Cassell's* in her work provides an amusing and illuminating vignette of one Victorian woman's attempt to publish in the periodical press. As it turned out, being the niece of a Baronet did not help in her case. Her next letter reports resignedly, '*Cassell's*' [sic] has returned West Carbery. Oscar cleaves silently to the sonnets, and has doubtless – in a poetic frenzy – used them to light the gas' (Lewis, *Selected Letters*, 71).

Wilde himself, a writer for the periodical press, of course, as well as an editor, was consistently sceptical about journalism, and critical of its power as, not the so-called 'fourth estate', but 'the only estate. It has eaten up the other three'. 'We are dominated by Journalism', 'a really remarkable power', he complains in 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism', which appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1891 (1,094–5). And yet he is clear that the power of modern journalism, which, he claims in an earlier essay 'The Critic as Artist' (1890), 'justifies its own existence by the great Darwinian principle of the survival of the vulgarest', is conferred by the reading public in the country which 'invented and established Public Opinion' (1,055):

It was a fatal day when the public discovered that the pen is mightier than the paving-stone, and can be made as offensive as the brickbat. They at once sought for the journalist, found him, developed him, and made him their industrious and well-paid servant. (1,094)

The truth of Wilde's perception of the significance of the press, and its tendency to pander to the worst prejudices of the reading public, was to be revealed all too painfully within a few years, but even at this point he knew where the real power lay: not with the editor of a journal, who could choose to accept or reject, or indeed light the gas with the unsolicited submissions of would-be writers; and not with the journalists themselves, 'because the unhealthy conditions under which their occupation is carried on oblige them to supply the public with what the public wants, and to compete with other journalists in making that supply as full and satisfying to the gross popular appetite as possible' (1,095). The true power of the press resides, at the end of the Victorian period as at its beginning, in its readers.