# Part 1:
# Heroism and the Periodical Press of Nineteenth-Century Britain

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – CC BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

# 1. The Cultural Importance of Heroism in Victorian Britain

In June 1864, the satirical periodical *Punch* (1841–1992) published a note that read

> Universal Hero-Worship Company (Limited).
> Incorporated under the Companies' Act, 1862.
> [By operation of which the liability of each shareholder will be limited to the amount of cheers, or other manifestations of enthusiasm (including banners, dinners, subscriptions to memorials, &c. invested).] (Universal Hero-Worship Company, *Punch*, 4 Jun 1864, 236)

This short comment points to the omnipresence of the heroic in Victorian culture. From biographies of 'great men' to mass events such as the Duke of Wellington's funeral, from programmatic texts like Thomas Carlyle's *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* to commemorative flasks in the shape of parliamentary reformer Lord Brougham: heroes and public hero-worship were a characteristic of the Victorian age. Worshipped through public attention and "other manifestations of enthusiasm", heroism was a public and media phenomenon. At the time of a developing mass consumer culture, as the note in *Punch* makes clear, heroes were also a commercial commodity and their groups of admirers potential consumers. Thus, these few sentences reveal significant details about heroism in the public (and popular) culture of the nineteenth century. They recognise the widespread fascination with heroes and heroic acts, but at the same time profess unease about their massive presence in contemporary culture.

The ubiquity of the heroic in Victorian culture also shows that heroism was an answer to a general societal demand. At a time of transformation, diversification and rapid change in professional and private life, charismatic leader figures as well as role models became simultaneously both more desirable and more disputed. Referring to the thinkers of the age, to Thomas Carlyle, Matthew Arnold, Alfred Tennyson and John Ruskin and their ideas of guidance through a superior individual, Walter Houghton identifies hero-worship as a key characteristic of the *Victorian Frame of Mind*.[1] However, while some "lost in the maze of ideas […] loo[ked] to a savior",[2] others felt that prophet-like hero figures had been rendered anachronistic by the ideas of evolution and a growing democratisation movement. Hence, competing concepts of the heroic were negotiated, justified and defended among intellectuals as well as in popular culture catering to all seg-

---

[1] As Juliette Atkinson puts it, "venerating great men provided a means of reaffirming faith in the individual at a time when scientific advance and the successive blows dealt to religious institutions threatened to reduce human action to a set of impersonal laws." Juliette Atkinson: Victorian Biography Reconsidered, Oxford 2010, p. 47.

[2] Walter Houghton: The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830–1870, New Haven 1957, p. 310.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

ments of society. While most of the scholarship on the heroic in Victorian culture has centred on individual historical actors and thinkers[3] or specific works of literature, the competing concepts of the heroic and their particular functionalisations in popular culture have not been examined yet.[4]

[3] As the most influential nineteenth-century voice on heroism until today, most scholarly work has been conducted on Thomas Carlyle and his ideas on heroism. See for example James Eli Adams: The Hero as Spectacle. Carlyle and the Persistance of Dandyism, in: Carol T. Christ / John O. Jordan (eds.): Victorian Literature and the Victorian Visual Imagination, Berkeley 1995, pp. 213–232; Ulrich Broich: On Heroes and Hero-Worship, Especially in English Romanticism, in: Anglistik 16.2, 2005, pp. 49–62; Rainer Emig: Eccentricity Begins at Home. Carlyle's Centrality in Victorian Thought, in: Textual Practice 17.2, 2003, pp. 379–390; Mark Engel: Collating Carlyle. Patterns of Revision in Heroes, Sartor Resartus, and The French Revolution, in: Davis R. Sorensen et al. (eds.): The Carlyles at Home and Abroad, Aldershot 2004, pp. 240–247; Ranjan Ghosh: Carlyle's "Hero as Poet" and Sri Aurobindo's Poetic Theory. Reconfiguring Few Dimensions of Creativity, in: Angelaki 11.1, 2006, pp. 35–44; Monroe Z. Hafter: Heroism in Alas and Carlyle's On Heroes, in: MLN 95.2, 1980, pp. 312–334; Charles H. Haws: Carlyle's Concept of History in Heroes and Hero-Worship, in: John Morrow (ed.): Thomas Carlyle 1981. Papers Given at the International Thomas Carlyle Centenary Symposium, Frankfurt am Main 1983, pp. 153–163; Geraldine Higgins: Heroic Revivals from Carlyle to Yeats, Basingstoke 2012; Paul E. Kerry: The Outsider at the Gates of Victorian Society. Thomas Carlyle's On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History, in: Steven Wright (ed.): The Image of the Outsider in Literature, Media, and Society, Pueblo 2002, pp. 369–373; Karina Momm: Der Begriff des Helden in Thomas Carlyles On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History, Freiburg 1986; Ian Ousby: Carlyle, Thackeray, and Victorian Heroism, in: Yearbook of English Studies 12, 1982, pp. 152–168; Morse Peckham: Victorian Revolutionaries. Speculations on Some Heroes of a Cultural Crisis, New York 1970; Branwen Bailey Pratt: Carlyle and Dickens. Heroes and Hero-Worshippers, in: Dickens Studies Annual. Essays on Victorian Fiction 12, 1983, pp. 233–246; Richard Salmon: Thomas Carlyle and the Idolatry of the Man of Letters, in: Journal of Victorian Culture 7.1, 2002, pp. 1–22; id.: "The Unaccredited Hero". Alton Locke, Thomas Carlyle, and the Formation of the Working-Class Intellectual, in: Aruna Krishnamurthy (ed.): The Working-Class Intellectual in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain, Surrey 2009, pp. 167–193; David Sonstroem: The Double Vortex in Carlyle's On Heroes and Hero Worship, in: Philological Quarterly 59.4, 1980, pp. 531–540; Ilia Stambler: Heroic Power in Thomas Carlyle and Leo Tolstoy, in: European Legacy. Toward New Paradigms 11.7, 2006, pp. 737–751; John S. Tanner: When God Is Hero. Worshipping God as Hero in Carlyle and Hopkins, in: The Hopkins Quarterly 10.4, 1984, pp. 145–163; Michael Timko: Thomas Carlyle. Chaotic Man, Inarticulate Hero, in: Carlyle Studies Annual 14, 1994, pp. 55–69; Jane Wright: Sincerity's Repetition. Carlyle, Tennyson and Other Repetitive Victorians, in: Timothy Milnes / Kerry Sinanan (eds.): Romanticism, Sincerity, and Authenticity, New York 2010, pp. 162–181.

[4] Valuable exceptions are John Price's study on *Everyday Heroism* which considers the growing public importance of acts of lifesaving by civilians and their public recognition (cf. John Price: Everyday Heroism. Victorian Constructions of the Heroic Civilian, London 2014) and Christine MacLeod's *Heroes of Invention* which traces the ascription of hero-status to inventors and engineers before and after the industrial revolution (cf. Christine MacLeod: Heroes of Invention. Technology, Liberalism and British Identity 1750–1914, Cambridge 2007).



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

As the defining mass medium of the Victorian era, periodicals constitute a source situated within the everyday life of British society in the nineteenth century. The Victorian print market underwent enormous growth and diversification, with periodicals, journals and newspapers for every political and religious orientation or private interest being established and widely read. As a site for the negotiation and dissemination of current ideas, periodicals provide rich ground for the examination of the heroic. Heroism materialises in the periodical press as a cultural construct and product shaped by the worldviews of its producers, the expectations of the readers and regulation of the market.

As a means of communication between reader and periodical, heroes represent different worldviews and identities which producer and consumer can be presumed to agree upon in the act of consumption. Periodicals as a publishing genre "within capitalist economies in which class, gender, and other differences"[5] play a crucial role have not yet been analysed with regard to the heroic. Though some scholars have taken examples from the periodical press to support a more general argument, there are no studies of the heroic which take periodical texts and the cultural practices around them seriously as "an object of enquiry in its own right".[6] Over the last decades, due to some extraordinary pioneering scholarship on Victorian popular print culture,[7] the periodical has been established as an object worthy of analysis in itself rather than "as an empty vessel, a neutral medium for content that can be extracted and often analysed in a misleadingly decontextualized form".[8] Thus, this study is not only situated in literary and cultural studies research of the heroic, but is equally a contribution to the study of Victorian periodicals and their social and cultural functions. It will examine how and by which stylistic and formal means heroes and heroic acts are constructed, designed and presented in selected periodicals of the second half of the nineteenth century[9] intended for specific readerships. For this purpose, three period-

5 Margaret Beetham: Time. Periodicals and the Time of the Now, in: Victorial Periodicals Review 48.3, 2015, p. 324.

6 Matthew Philpots: A Return to Theory, in: Victorian Periodicals Review 48.3, 2015, p. 207.

7 Among those scholars I would like to pay special tribute to Margaret Beetham. I have not only profited from her ground-breaking work on periodicals as a publishing genre and a gendered space, but am grateful for the support and advice she has provided in the realisation of this study.

8 Ibid.

9 From mid-century, the periodical is considered a mass medium, with the flood of affordable (family) magazines entering the market after the abolition of the 'Taxes on Knowledge' (cf. chapter 3.2). This assertion determined the beginning of the period of examination in 1850. The end of the period in 1900 was chosen for the more practical reason that the periodicals are only digitised up until 1900 in the ProQuest *British Periodicals* database. To account for specific events of cultural significance, such as the Boer War (1899–1902), issues from 1901 and 1902 were consulted in the National Library of Scotland.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

icals have been chosen for close investigation: *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal* (1832–1956), *Leisure Hour* (1852–1905) and *Fraser's Magazine* (1830–1882).

These periodicals offer a rich basis for analysis and comparison. *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*, the main focus of this study, was published weekly and sold at 1½d, and was thus affordable even to the lower ranks of society, which the editors Robert and William Chambers explicitly wanted to address. The publication attempted, as stated in the editor's address to the readers in the first issue in February 1832, to be free of all religious and political bias and opinion and tried to instruct and educate the broadest possible audience. Wanting to appeal to the whole of the family, the journal published a broad range of genres, from informative reports, travel writing, history and biographical articles to fiction, poetry, popular science, practical advice and contributions for children. Although *Chambers's Journal* was written and produced for the lower classes, it also had a large middle- and upper-class readership, which the editors themselves commented upon in their disappointment at the fact that more educated than uneducated readers consumed their product (cf. Address of the Editors, *CJ*, 25 Jan 1840, 8). Within *Chambers's Journal*, a distinct didactic functionalisation of the vocabulary of the heroic becomes obvious. Coinciding with a growing general societal emphasis on personal progress, as for example propagated by Samuel Smiles in his influential work *Self-Help* (1859), the periodical used heroism as a validation for norm-conforming moral behaviour rather than extraordinary transgressive acts. Influenced by the publishers' location in Edinburgh and the Scottish tradition of Presbyterianism, a clear heroic profile[10] emerged, which foregrounded values such as selflessness and perseverance applied for the benefit of the community rather than for individual gain.[11] In positive as well as negative ascription, the heroic was utilised in *Chambers's* as a means to negotiate and mediate cultural values and norms.

The analysis of this publication will be complemented by a comparative discussion of *Leisure Hour* and *Fraser's Magazine*, which were chosen for their distinct orientations. *Leisure Hour*, a weekly published by the Religious Tract Society, aimed at a similar market as *Chambers's Journal*, but with a religious focus, while *Fraser's Magazine* was a monthly periodical that catered to a very specific educated conservative upper-class audience. Quite distinct in their orientation, intended readership, and institutional background within the commercial marketplace, the three periodicals form a suitable basis for a comparative study of heroic representations.

---

10 For the idea of a discursive heroic profile of periodicals see Barbara Korte: Viele Helden für viele Leser. Das Heroische in viktorianischen Publikumszeitschriften, in: Ronald G. Asch / Michael Butter (eds.): Bewunderer, Verehrer, Zuschauer. Die Helden und ihr Publikum (Helden – Heroisierungen – Heroismen 2), Würzburg 2016, pp. 93–114.

11 As will be elaborated in chapter 2.1 in greater detail, the idea of individual progress could be integrated with the idea of selflessness and work for the common good, since any personal progress was considered as directed at the betterment of society as a whole.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

The main focus in the study of heroes often lies on their polarity, their ability to make boundaries visible by transgressing them, their status as outsiders of the communities they inspire and their strong individual agency and charismatic attraction.[12] While heroic figures exhibiting these characteristics still circulated in Victorian society,[13] they are, in the framework of this study, mostly significant in their absence. Publications with a didactic orientation such as *Chambers's Journal* or *Leisure Hour* focused on the communal and socially integrative functions of the heroic and used its vocabulary to create a "collective emotional investment"[14] to bind its consumers to a specific identity. The likeness of heroic figures to the readership of the periodicals is stressed rather than their extraordinariness or transgressive potential. As will be shown in the main body of this study, the hero[15] acts as a projection screen for the periodicals and constitutes a "heroic totality"[16] of what is already present in each and every member of the intended readership.

---

12 For this strand of research see for example Maurice Blanchot: The End of the Hero, in: Maurice Blanchot (ed.): The Infinite Conversation, Minneapolis 1993, pp. 368–378; Josef Früchtl: Das unverschämte Ich. Eine Heldengeschichte der Moderne, Frankfurt am Main 2004; Bernhard Giesen: Triumph and Trauma, Boulder 2004; id.: Zwischenlagen. Das Außerordentliche als Grund der sozialen Wirklichkeit, Weilerswist 2010; Nikolas Immer: Der inszenierte Held. Schillers dramenpoetische Anthropologie, Heidelberg 2008; Albrecht Koschorke: Zur Funktionsweise kultureller Peripherien, in: Susi K. Frank et al. (eds.): Explosion und Peripherie. Jurij Lotmans Semiotik der kulturellen Dynamik revisited, Berlin/Boston 2012, pp. 27–40; Jurij M. Lotman: Die Struktur literarischer Texte, Munich 1993; Christian Schneider: Wozu Helden?, in: Mittelweg 36. Zeitschrift des Hamburger Instituts für Sozialforschung 18.1, 2009, pp. 91–102; Ralf von den Hoff et al.: Heroes – Heroizations – Heroisms. Transformations and Conjunctures from Antiquity to Modernity. Foundational Concepts of the Collaborative Research Centre SFB 948, in: helden. heroes. héros. E-Journal zu Kulturen des Heroischen, special issue 5: Analyzing Processes of Heroization. Theories, Methods, Histories, 2013, pp. 9–16, DOI: 10.6094/helden.heroes.heros./2019/APH/01.

13 Within the Victorian print market, transgressive hero-figures (often coinciding with a focus on physicality) can especially be found in publications which aimed at entertainment through sensational stories, for example in the so-called Penny Dreadfuls or adventure literature especially designed for boys.

14 Geoffrey Cubitt: Introduction, in: Geoffrey Cubitt / Allen Warren (eds.): Heroic Reputations and Exemplary Lives, Manchester 2000, p. 3.

15 Following Lee Edwards, this study will not refer to heroes and heroines, but will refer to both male and female actors who are assigned heroic attributes as heroes: "Not heroines, tamed and subordinate, without identity except in relation to male hero, but independent *heroes*." Lee R. Edwards: Psyche as Hero. Female Heroism and Fictional Form, Middletown 1984, n.p. Almost exclusively associated with works of fiction, the heroine, Edwards argues, can only ever exist in relation to a hero, whereas "a hero can theoretically exist in a narrative without a heroine" (ibid., 5). The texts analysed in this study are by no means forward-thinking in their portrayal of gender roles and women's agency, and female heroism is often exercised in relation to male actors. However, the decision to examine female heroes rather than heroines is a deliberate one in order to shed light on such practices of power: "The hero dances in the spotlight. The heroine is eclipsed, upstaged, in darkness." Ibid, p. 6.

16 Ibid.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – [CC BY] - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

In differentiation from the extraordinary hero figure, as for example designed by thinkers such as Carlyle, a second dominant type of hero emerges over the course of the nineteenth century, which substitutes the distance between a group and their heroes inherent to many other conceptualisations with proximity.[17] In this line of thinking, identification is a key characteristic in the relationship between heroic figures and their audience. The audience has to be able to find their own identity in that of the hero. When Walter Houghton emphasises the "Victorian tendency to think of men in two categories, heroes and ordinary mortals",[18] this separation is not as clear-cut as Houghton makes it out to be. As an answer to a "collective need",[19] the heroic could be adopted by collectives and imbued with their own meaning: "It was because the heroic image could serve so ambiguously as message and as compensation that it won so conspicuous a place in the Victorian imagination."[20] Being "[i]ncarnations of abstract ideals and ineffable desires",[21] heroes provided a projection screen for virtues without having to be exactly defined. Informed by the idea of a social imaginary, the heroic can thus be cast into a "form that allows us to conceive what it is towards which the sign points"[22] without having to make it explicit.[23]

Given the diverse landscape of popular print culture, the heroic as a projection screen was attractive for most publishers: "The flexibility of the terms 'hero' and 'hero-worship' meant that there were opportunities to celebrate new kinds of heroes."[24] Due to the openness of the concept, the heroic could be utilised by all kinds of different groups for the purpose of identity affirmation and stabilisa-

---

17 For the idea of closeness and distance see also chapter 2.2 of this study. On adoration and admiration see Ines Schindler et al.: Admiration and Adoration. Their Different Ways of Showing and Shaping Who We Are, in: Cognition and Emotion 27.1, 2013, pp. 85–118 and Veronika Zink: Von der Verehrung. Eine kultursoziologische Untersuchung, Frankfurt am Main 2014.

18 Houghton: Victorian Frame, p. 306.

19 "When understood as personal figurations, heroic figures represent an individual, 'Gestalt-like' offer to societies, a reaction to a collective need." Von den Hoff et al.: Heroes, p. 9.

20 Houghton: Victorian Frame, p. 340.

21 Edwards: Psyche, p. 4.

22 Wolfgang Iser: The Fictive and the Imaginary. Charting Literary Anthropology, Baltimore 1993, p. 2.

23 Iser emphasises the importance of the imaginary in relation to fiction and the different functions of fictional genres as compared to more factual texts will become apparent in the specific analyses (cf. for example chapter 4.2). On the idea of a heroic imaginary see also Mohr, who emphasises the potential which lies in the opaque quality ("Unschärfe", Jan Mohr: Männer mit Äxten. Heroismus in der Populärkultur, das Imaginäre und Hard Rock. Ein Versuch, in: KulturPoetik. Journal for Cultural Poetics 12.2, 2012, p. 231) of the imaginary, or Lucien Braun: Polysémie du concept de héros, in: Noémie Hepp / Georges Livet (eds.): Héroïsme et création littéraire sous les règnes d' Henri IV et de Louis XIII, Paris 1974, pp. 19–28, who situates the hero in a culture's imaginary.

24 Atkinson: Victorian Biography, p. 50.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – [CC BY] - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

tion.[25] In that way, prophet heroes to be adored from afar could exist simultaneously with everyday heroes mediated as exemplars to be emulated. A diverse set of heroes with different possibilities regarding autonomy and agency, with different values, morals and limitations were represented under the same vocabulary.

In the analyses of these differentiated representations of the heroic within the periodical marketplace, this study – in a discourse-centred approach – follows a number of intersecting guiding questions:

- Which kinds of figures, qualities and acts are labelled heroic in the different publications?
- Can dominant domains of the heroic be identified?
- Is the vocabulary of heroism imbued with a specific meaning, is it appropriated and re-interpreted by the periodicals or used with reference to a preconceived notion of heroism?
- How are issues of class, age, education, gender, ethnicity, space and individual agency discussed in the context of heroism, and how do these relate to the intended readership?
- To what extent are larger societal issues linked to the representation of the heroic?
- Does the vocabulary of the heroic and its functionalisation coincide with specific genres?
- Which stylistic and formal means are employed in the construction of the above?

The first part of the study will offer an overview of the contemporary competing models of heroism in Victorian society and the social functions they imply. It will locate the periodical material within the print culture of the nineteenth century and provide a theoretical framework for its examination. Part two will be concerned with the representation of heroism in *Chambers's Journal*. As dominant domains of the heroic, it considers the representation of heroism in military contexts, in relation to processes of civilisation, and in everyday life. To complement these findings, it will compare other selected publications of the Chambers publishing house and consider whether the heroic profile was exclusive to the periodical or could also be found in publications for other readerships. The third and last part of the study will, in a comparative analysis, consider the representation of the same domains of heroism in *Leisure Hour* and *Fraser's Magazine*. It will elaborate how the different political and religious perspectives are reflected in the publications' portrayal of the heroic before coming to an assessment of the representation of heroism on the periodical market for different readerships.

[25] Atkinson notes that "[i]n effect, hero-worship could be appealed to in order to justify an astonishing range of ideals". Ibid., p. 48.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

The following study would not have been possible without the large amount of digitisation work done over the last decades. All three periodicals examined are available as full text until their 1900 editions on the ProQuest *British Periodicals* database. As an entry point into the corpus, I chose a semantic approach by searching the database for keywords from the semantic field of heroism.[26] This search resulted in around 2,400 results for *Chambers's Journal* for the examination period of 1850 to 1900, in more than 2,200 results for *Leisure Hour* and over 2,900 results for *Fraser's Magazine*. As this corpus would have been too large to handle, I examined alternate years, later selectively adding years of particular cultural significance for heroism, such as times of war.

The remaining texts were fed into a customised database in which they were categorised according to different parameters. I recorded the general data for each text, that is issue number, title of publication, page numbers, and, if available, author. Additionally, I grouped the articles according to their genre, the time the texts were set in and their domain of heroism; this last category constituted a first broad qualitative categorisation of the represented heroism. It soon became clear that the discourse of heroism was predominantly negotiated in the context of the military, the idea of progress and civilisation and in the realm of everyday life. These domains also serve as the structure of the case studies and as axes of comparison in the main part of this study. As a last step within the database, I excluded those articles which only used the word 'hero' or 'heroine' as a synonym for 'protagonist' in a literary text. These preliminary measures resulted in a body of around 1,000 texts from the three periodicals for the examination period. However, the quantitative figures only served as a first access to the corpus and cannot be considered a meaningful analysis on their own. They point to tendencies yet are necessarily reliant on contextualisation and relativisation through the qualitative analysis which this study provides. It is important to keep in mind the semantic and discursive approach. When referring to a hero or heroic act, the study is not drawing on a preconceived notion of the heroic, but referencing a fictional or historical person being labelled as heroic in the periodicals. Through close readings, the study analyses the vocabulary of heroism in the different publications and examines the discourse around what is called heroic. Following this approach, the analyses are not actor-centred, but focus on the discourse around heroism. While specific historical actors might feature in the discourse as heroic figures, it is the representation, negotiation and functionalisation of the heroic in its context which stands at the heart of this study.

26 As search terms I used 'hero', 'heroes', 'heroine', 'heroines', 'heroic' and 'heroism' as well as 'hero*', meaning all words beginning with the root 'hero-'.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

# 2. Discourses on Heroism in Nineteenth-Century Britain

Heroism and hero worship are present throughout the Victorian period and it is not surprising that Walter Houghton devotes a whole subchapter in his seminal study *The Victorian Frame of Mind* to the examination of Victorian attitudes towards hero worship.[1] As he puts it,

> when the Victorian period began, all the prerequisites for hero worship were present: the enthusiastic temper, the conception of the superior being, the revival of Homeric mythology and medieval ballad, the identification of great art with the grand style, the popularity of Scott and Byron, and the living presence of Napoleonic soldiers and sailors.[2]

This environment not only sparked a high tide of literary and artistic representation of heroic conduct, but also encouraged a more abstract discussion on hero figures and heroism. This chapter will first explore and compare a number of conflicting and competing concepts of heroes and heroism and then extract general theoretical considerations as a foundation for the examination of nineteenth-century representations of heroism.

## *2.1 Contemporary Theoretical Considerations on Heroes and Heroism*

As Houghton's quote illustrates, heroic characters and actions were omnipresent in nineteenth-century artistic works. On a theoretical level, high standards were not only applied to heroism within the texts, but also to the writers of epics, ballads and other material stages of heroic conduct. Thus, thinkers such as Matthew Arnold or John Ruskin called for a Grand Style, which Arnold related back to Homer. Following his example, a writer of the Grand Style should make sure

> that he is eminently rapid; that he is eminently plain and direct; both in the evolution of his thought and in the expression of it, that is, both in his syntax and in his words; that he is eminently plain and direct in the substance of his thought, that is, in his matter and ideas; and, finally that he is eminently noble.[3]

The quality of authors' writing is here directly connected to their personality. It results from a state of mind and seems to only be explicable through abstract concepts such as 'nobility'. Therefore, Arnold's and Ruskin's idea of Grand Style[4]

---

1 Cf. Houghton: Victorian Frame, pp. 305–340.
2 Ibid, p. 310.
3 Matthew Arnold: On the Study of Celtic Literature and On translating Homer, New York 1970 [1861], p. 162.
4 For Grand Style see for example George P. Landow: Aesthetic and Critical Theory of John Ruskin, Princeton 1971; Edward Alexander: Matthew Arnold and John Stuart Mill, London 2010 [1965]; id.: Matthew Arnold, John Ruskin, and the Modern Temper, Columbus 1973;

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

is rather an expression of the artist's genius in the romanticist sense than of knowledge of style or technique. According to Arnold, Grand Style arises "when a noble nature, poetically gifted, treats with simplicity or with severity a serious subject"[5] and grand artworks, as Ruskin claims, are "produced by men in a state of enthusiasm. That is, by men who feel *strongly* and *nobly*"[6] and show the artist's "human character and form in their utmost, or heroic, strength and beauty".[7] Underlying these ideas is a clear conception of a genius artist superior to others. This superiority not only expresses itself in artistic quality, but in a moral nobility, as well as in the strength and earnestness of the writer or painter. Thereby, the Grand Style as proposed by critics such as Ruskin and Arnold already exhibits two central qualities which reoccur in other considerations of heroism in the nineteenth century: sincerity and nobility of character.

However, a period as eventful and transformative as the Victorian age could not have produced one consistent idea of heroism; as technological, scientific, religious and social changes occurred, different and conflicting opinions on heroes, their constitution and relation to the rest of society arose. The following chapter will identify and discuss two larger strands of thought regarding the heroic by elaborating upon the theories of their two primary representatives: Thomas Carlyle and Samuel Smiles.

### *"The History of the World is but the Biography of Great Men" – Carlyle's* On Heroes, Hero Worship and the Heroic in History

Thomas Carlyle's ideas of hero worship and heroism are present throughout his oeuvre from his biographical work on men such as Frederick the Great to his literary pieces and his social criticism. The theory finds its most explicit form in a series of lectures which Carlyle delivered in London in 1840. In these lectures, he designs a general concept of heroism and hero-worship and develops six different categories of heroes, devoting one lecture to each and providing representatives for each type of hero. Carlyle structures the lectures chronologically, beginning with ancient Paganism and concluding the lectures with Napoleon and the nineteenth century.[8]

Amrollah Abjadian: Ruskin and the School of "Grand Style", in: Etudes Anglaises. Grande-Bretagne, Etats-Unis 29, 1976, pp. 15–26 or Jason Camlot: Style and the Nineteenth-Century British Critic. Sincere Mannerisms, Aldershot 2008.

5 Ibid., p. 289.

6 John Ruskin: Modern Painters, New York 1863 [1860], p. 14.

7 Ibid., p. 15.

8 The following is not an attempt at a critical evaluation of Carlyle's concept, but a summary of the characteristics which are relevant for the analysis of the material in this study. Evaluating Carlyle's concept from a present day perspective would not be effective, but rather obstructive for that purpose. For a critical analysis of the lectures see for example Eric Bent-



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

The hero that Carlyle introduces in his lectures is someone with a special insight into the world; a man[9] who can see the reality behind idolatry and superficiality, a man who has a direct connection to the divine presence of god and who goes about his life with a genuine sincerity and truthfulness. In some way, be it through literature, song or direct action, the hero will try to mediate his insight into the world to others, will try to make them see what he sees and thus has the possibility of changing and shaping the world. A true hero proves his sincerity and genuine earnestness through selfless dedication and devotes his life fully to his cause.

Carlyle describes the development of heroism as a descending movement, a kind of devolution, throughout his lectures. Beginning with the *Hero as Divinity* and the example of Odin in his first lecture, Carlyle depicts the heroes as a direct representation of the divine. He depicts Odin as mediating between the divine and the world and thus providing guidance for his followers. Through developing and passing on runes, he further shows Odin as a mediator of a way of thinking, thereby creating a legacy for his ideas that reaches beyond his immediate presence.

The following lectures, *Hero as Prophet* and *Hero as Poet*, can then already be seen as an increasing removal from the divine. Had Odin been a god himself, the prophet, described by Carlyle through the example of Muhammad, is merely god-*inspired* and the poet, examples for which are Dante Alighieri and William Shakespeare, already stands completely outside the divine realm. Nevertheless, Carlyle believes them to possess a "seeing eye" which "discloses the inner harmony of things" (*OH* 94). Though he still functions as a mediator between the "inarticulate" (*OH* 101) and society, the poets does not want to convey a "heavenly message" (*OH* 100). With the *Hero as Priest*, Carlyle enters the realm of practicality even further. The heroic priest, though again more closely linked to the divine, is the first one to consciously *utilise* his heroism. Carlyle emphasises the role of reformers, of priests fighting for a cause (cf. *OH* 105) and bringing about change.

With the *Hero as Man of Letters*, Carlye then turns to a form of heroism which is directly linked to the "new ages" (*OH* 138). The Man of Letters in his opinion is facing the fragmentation of life, the "Machine-Sceptics" (ibid.), and is shown as trying to convey the beauty and mystery of nature, to bring god back into men's hearts. This changed environment, however, already hints at the fact that the Man of Letters is a different kind of hero for Carlyle; although the character-

ley: The Cult of the Superman, Gloucester 1969; Stambler: Heroic Power, or Higgins: Heroic Revivals.

[9] Carlyle in his lectures only ever refers to male heroes and does not explore the possibility of female heroism. In my summary of his ideas I will therefore use 'he' and 'man' when referring to the representatives of Carlyle's concept.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

istics developed before – genuineness, sincerity, truthfulness, faith – still apply to him, he is not a bringer of light anymore, but himself a seeker.[10]

Though Carlyle attributes so much importance to the Man of Letters, a crucial change can be perceived in this "new" (*OH* 138) form of heroism, one which Carlyle does not reflect upon: this hero, so the characterisation, still wants to convey the mystery of the world, wants to mediate the divine presence he himself is still struggling towards. Nevertheless his heroism, through the connection with print media, has become something marketable, something which is commercialised, bought and sold, a quality which does not necessarily fit the scheme of the genuine, sincere hero.

Carlyle's lectures close with the *Hero as King*, who for him constitutes the quintessence of all heroic figures:

> Priest, Teacher, whatsoever of earthly or of spiritual dignity we can fence to reside in a man, embodies itself here, to *command* over us, to furnish us with constant practical teaching, to tell us for the day and hour what we are to *do*. (*OH* 175)

Styling the Hero as King as the epitome of all heroes seems to be somewhat inconsistent. Keeping in mind that Carlyle sees the development illustrated over the six lectures as a devolution, a step-by-step departure from the immediate impact of the divine, it is surprising that a secular King, and with the example of Napoleon an ultimately failed King and Emperor without institutionalised religious blessing, should rank higher than a priest or a prophet. As a political figure, this hero *actively* guides people towards order and his importance thus exceeds or moves away from the recognition of the divine in the world. It is he, says Carlyle, who sees the flaws in the existing order and thereby is able to establish a new and better one, fighting a "war of Belief against Unbelief" (*OH* 182) in search of a new, true form of society. In Oliver Cromwell and Napoleon, Carlyle chooses two well-known figures, both of whom were not only known for their political success and the establishment of a new order, but primarily associated with the destruction of previously existing structures. Presenting Cromwell and Napoleon in a favourable light could thus have been perceived as a provocation to many. A large part of Carlyle's last lecture is devoted to Napoleon, whose sincerity, ambition and faith he praises.[11]

---

10 Carlyle perceives Goethe to be an exception to this, considers him to be the most important Man of Letters, a "true Hero; heroic in what he said and did" (*OH* 141), but does not discuss his example in greater details, since he believes him too far removed from the audience's life and fears that his arguments would "to the great majority of you, remain problematic, vague" (ibid.).

11 Keeping in mind Carlyle's enormous dislike for the eighteenth century and the fact that throughout his life he remained an advocate of a patriarchal society, monarchy and strong hierarchies, he re-interprets the French Revolution to fit his concept. He presents the revolutionaries' claim for liberty and equality as a sign of frustration with existing heroes and he interprets the revolution as a search for the truth, which for Carlyle was equivalent to the search for a hero (cf. *OH* 181). Thus, Carlye focuses on Napoleon restoring order



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

Significantly, Carlyle denies Napoleon the status as hero at the end of this life. Since he, according to Carlyle, "parted with Reality" (*OH* 217), he could not be considered a true and sincere man anymore and, in his last years, only remained "a great implement too soon wasted [...] our last Great Man" (ibid.). Thus, Carlyle closes his lectures with a hero who is both supposed to belong to the highest category of heroism, but at the same time already constitutes a compromise of Carlyle's concept, since he lacks the faith in a divine presence and eventually ends up without sincerity and consistent principles. Having put an ultimately failing hero at the end of his remarks on heroism, the bleak outlook for heroism became apparent to the listeners and readers. Thus, the development described by him from the Pagan hero-worship of Odin to Napoleon can be perceived as a diminishing one; the hero changes from god to a godlike and finally to a god-inspired person.

Carlyle's lectures and the subsequently published book were very popular at their time and were received positively by both critics and the general public. For example, John Sterling wrote to Carlyle's wife saying that he could now "see many things more clearly than before. It is a sublime Book, – the best in all English prose so far as I know".[12] Joseph Barrett wrote in the *Monthly Review* (1749–1845) in 1841, after the lectures were published, that

> thousands will read and re-read them with ever-increasing delight and profit; for there is more thought, strength, and strangeness in the duodecimo than in all the books put together that have come under our notice for months. [13]

And indeed, the lectures were suitable for "thousands"[14] of the general reading public, despite Carlyle's poor reputation for his complicated style (which Matthew Arnold called 'Carlylese') that seemed hard to comprehend for many readers, highly abstract and too strongly influenced by his intensive study of the German poets. Similarly, the case studies about the great men of history seemed to be more easily comprehensible than the more complex theoretical parts to the visitors of his lectures: "attention was keenest when he touched on the career and personal character of the man of whom he happened to be speaking, and flagged when he went off into disquisition of literary criticism."[15] Although the attention "flagged" during the theoretical parts of the lecture, Carlyle reached his audience and, through the frequent use of repetition of the main requirements of the hero, may well have succeeded in imprinting his concept on his listeners. The same can be presumed for the printed work, which was published by James

---

rather than on the revolution itself. This enables him to read the movement as one longing for orientation and order given to the people from above.

12 Quoted in Momm: Begriff des Helden, p. 67.

13 Quoted in D. J. Trela / Rodger L. Tarr: The Critical Response to Thomas Carlyle's Major Works, Westport 1997, p. 95.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., p. 70.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

Fraser in 1841. By attaching his concept of heroism to anecdotes and biographical information about the heroic representatives, his audience was able to relate to his ideas and his view soon became part of common knowledge for the upper and middle classes.

Carlyle's theory remains one of the most enduring considerations of heroism until today. What is striking about it in comparison to other concepts is that Carlyle does not seem to require his heroes to be necessarily active or to perform an extraordinary act.[16] Thus, the heroism in Carlyle's sense rather shows itself in a messianic design than in 'mortal' expressions such as braveness or high moral fibre, which are often associated with heroic behaviour. Carlyle's reasons for calling somebody heroic thus were firmly rooted in a transcendental view of the world. A hero in the messianic sense could be understood as someone chosen by a divine power and equipped with special abilities. It is this *being chosen* and the connectedness to the divine that enabled Carlyle's heroes to perform extraordinary deeds – which manifest themselves in 'conventional heroic behaviour' such as braveness in the face of danger – but could, as illustrated by the examples given above, also come forward in other ways. Thus, Carlyle's theory creates a Pantheon of unattainable messiahs, of heroes that the average person can adore and worship, but cannot become like. Although Napoleon, the exception in more than one respect, shows a case of failed heroism, the concept would never allow somebody to all of a sudden *start* being heroic; in this line of thinking, one either *is* a hero or can never be one. Unlike others, Carlyle's concept does not mirror movements brought about by industrialisation and the societal changes of the nineteenth century. It remains, at its core, a transcendental and unmaterialistic theory that does not encourage its audience to better themselves or improve their condition but holds on to a hegemonic idea of improvement from above and propagates a hope for the coming of a saviour. Although Carlyle's idea of heroism was and remains popular, he did not only receive support but also sparked a counter-strand of the discourse on heroism. The most well-known representative of this other line of thinkers is Samuel Smiles.

### *Improvement through Role Models – Samuel Smiles's* Self-Help

Like Carlyle, Smiles first put forth his considerations on heroism in the form of lectures. However, his ideas are fundamentally different both in content and regarding the impetus for the lectures. In 1845 Smiles was invited to speak at a Mutual Improvement Society, a group of men of different ages who wanted to exchange knowledge for the sake of self-improvement and education. As Smiles

[16] Ralf von den Hoff et al. note that the heroic is constituted in a two-fold performative way: "First, in the actual performance of a deed, and second, in the staging of the performance for (and by) others." Von den Hoff et al.: Heroes, p. 13.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

puts it himself in the introduction to *Self-Help*: "Those who knew a little taught those who knew less – improving themselves while they improved the others; and, at all events, setting before them a good working example."[17] Contrary to the public lectures held by Carlyle, which were attended by an educated audience in a public event, the lectures held by Smiles were initiated by a group of men who were interested in improvement and instruction, but had not enjoyed formal education. Smiles, a Scot who originally trained as a surgeon, had turned to journalism and popular education in a professed attempt to show people how to best take advantage of the changes brought about by the industrial revolution. Thus, lectures in Mechanics' Institutes or Improvement Societies, which were attended by workers and middle-class businessmen, were the ideal ground for Smiles to plant his seed. The spirit of the events was described as industrious, sincere, yet friendly. The introduction to the first edition of *Self-Help* states that Smiles

> could not fail to be touched by the admirable self-helping spirit which they had displayed; and, though entertaining but slight faith in popular lecturing, he felt that a few words of encouragement, honestly and sincerely uttered, might not be without some good effect. And in this spirit he addressed them on more than one occasion, citing examples of what other men had done, as illustrations of what each might, in a greater or lesser degree, do for himself; and pointing out that their happiness and well-being as individuals in after life, must necessarily depend mainly upon themselves – upon their own diligent self-culture, self-discipline, and self-control – and, above all, on that honest and upright performance of individual duty, which is the glory of manly character. (*SH* v)

In the same vein, Smiles envisaged that the printed version of his lectures, which he "leaves in the hands of the reader; in the hope that the lessons of industry, perseverance, and self-culture, which it contains, will be found useful and instructive as well as generally interesting" (*SH* vi). Thus, the introduction to the book already declares its purpose. It is to be seen as a guidebook for men to make something of themselves, to better themselves and be useful for society. As if advertising the worthiness of the following elaborations, the introduction states that the members of the self-improvement classes taught by Smiles came "to occupy positions of trust and usefulness" (*SH* v). Thereby, the lessons given by Smiles are proven successful before they even begin.

The main body of the printed version of the lectures, which was not published until 1859,[18] is divided into thirteen sections, some of which show a specific character trait (e.g. "Application and Perseverance"), while others present "Leaders of Industry" or look at "Facilities". All chapters are united in their structure,

---

[17] Samuel Smiles: Self-Help, London 1997 [1859], p. iv. In the following, I will cite from this work by using the abbreviation *SH* and the page number in parentheses.

[18] In the early 1850s, Smiles had negotiated with Routledge about the publication, but had been rejected in the end. It was not until 1859 that he decided to publish it independently from his own funds.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

they present the audience with biographical sketches of 'heroes', of role models who exemplify specific virtues or disciplines.

The first of the thirteen chapters is headed *Self-Help – National and Individual* and deals with the very character of self-help and the condition of the individual within English society: "[A] State depends far less upon the form of its institution than upon the character of its men. For the nation is only the aggregate of individual conditions, and civilisation itself is but a question of personal improvement" (*SH* 2).[19] Smiles breaks down the condition of the state to the individual and turns his concept of self-help into a private as well as a political one. Thereby, he values the 'common man' whom he finds equally important, if not even superior, to famous men: "Though only the generals' names may be remembered in the history of any great campaign, it has been mainly through the individual valour and heroism of the privates that victories have been won" (*SH* 4). By valorising persons just like the very men he was addressing, Smiles tries to give appeal to the idea of self-help, creating a remuneration that is outside the realm of fame, glory and public recognition.[20]

However, Smiles also points out that the way towards becoming such a hero is arduous and that – although he provides them with instructions – anyone who wants to better themselves has to achieve this improvement on their own: "There is no power of law that can make the idle man industrious, the thriftless provident, or the drunken sober, though every individual can be each and all of these if he will, by the exercise of his own free powers of action and self-denial" (*SH* 2). Real improvement for individual and society therefore can only be gained by the one virtue which Smiles regards as the highest: perseverance. If acted out continuously, perseverance could, so Smiles argues, teach people from humble birth special competences and even make them rise the ranks: "The facts of nature are open to the peasant and mechanic, as well as to the philosopher, and by nature they are alike capable of making a moral use of those facts to the best of their powers" (*SH* 11–12). Thus, he does not only stress that men from lower ranks of society can make something of themselves,[21] but also that every humble knowledge or skill can be of use to society in its immediate effect on the individual's environment. Hard labour is not only necessary in order to rise in society – be it the micro-society of one's neighbourhood or the national macro-society – but, as Smiles points out, has to be kept up continuously. As examples of this, Smiles points to successful men like Robert Peel, Edward Bulwer-Lytton or Benjamin

[19] Similar to Carlyle, yet not as exclusively, Smiles mostly talks about men in his work, therefore I am going to use male pronouns apart from the rare cases in which he includes women into his concept.

[20] Interestingly, the many biographical sketches he uses as examples only show public figures, which reveals a tension between the propagation of humility and the necessity of external incentive.

[21] As proof for this, he points to men like Richard Arkwright, Lord Tenterden, William Turner, William Shakespeare, James Cook, Robert Burns or Ben Jonson (cf. *SH* 4).



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

Disraeli who, so his argument, only remained in their positions, and thereby useful to society, through their never-ending efforts to become better persons. Thus, the first chapter sets the tone for the whole of the work and already stresses the recurring demand for perseverance and hard work of men of all ranks.

Under the headline of *Leaders of Industry – Inventors and Producers*, Smiles shows how self-help and perseverance were applied in English industry to the benefit of the nation as a whole. And although the call for hard work remains the same, Smiles in this chapter adds an additional quality by stressing not only the fact that each individual is decisive for the whole, but that every person has a responsibility towards society at large as well. Thus, he condemns fame as a motivator but calls for a higher cause to work for. This idea he sees exemplified in the lives of inventors, whose discoveries often were "effected step by step – one man transmitting the result of his labours, at the time apparently useless, to his successors, who took it up and carried it forward another stage, – the sentinels of the great idea answering each other across the heads of many generations" (*SH* 25). With that, Smiles not only demands perseverance, but also a high tolerance of frustration on the way to personal and societal improvement. However, not only "great ideas" (ibid.) are propagated, but the practical side of inventions is also emphasised. Thereby the subject was brought closer to the specific audience, the middle and working classes; avoiding abstract theoretical elaborations, he stresses the importance of workers, who actually implement and use inventions. As one example, Smiles recalls the steam engine which "was nothing, however, until it emerged from the state of theory, and was taken in hand by practical mechanics; and what a noble story of patient, laborious investigation, of difficulties encountered and overcome by heroic industry, does not that marvellous machine tell of!" (*SH* 25). Significantly, Smiles thereby transfers the importance of the individual to the influence of whole groups or classes of people involved in a process. In that line of thinking, workers and producers were just as important as thinkers and inventors and only jointly constituted an industry, which for Smiles was at the heart of English national identity:

> Men such as these are fairly entitled to rank among the heroes of England. Their patient self-reliance amidst trials and difficulties, their courage and perseverance in the pursuit of noble aims and purpose, are no less heroic of their kind than the bravery and devotion of the soldier and the sailor, whose duty and whose pride it is heroically to defend what these valiant leaders of industry have heroically achieved. (*SH* 45)

Here, it is decidedly the sailor and the soldier, not the captain or the general, whose actions are regarded as heroic; those who *do* are put in the centre of attention. Thus the factory workers whom Smiles was addressing in his lectures are promoted to the rank of "leaders of industry" (ibid.) alongside inventors such as James Watt or James Hargreaves. The ordinary converges with the exceptional, since "the greatest results in life are usually attained by simple means, and the exercise of ordinary qualities" (*SH* 46).



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

Continuing his praise of the ordinary, Smiles in the chapter on *Application and Perseverance* explicitly puts the ordinary hero in opposition to the genius. It was "not so much men of genius" (*SH* 50) which he finds have "moved the world" (ibid.), but "men of intense mediocre abilities, untiring workers, persevering, self-reliant, and indefatigable; not so often the gifted […] as those who apply themselves diligently at work, in whatever line that may lie" (ibid.). This phrase, a quasi-demonisation of talent, is a call for mediocrity which in turn is valorised. Here, the didactic purpose of Smiles's work becomes prominent; the reader can presume that Smiles is *not* addressing geniuses but 'ordinary' people whom he wants to motivate to work hard. However, in order not to exclude anyone, he then seems to redefine genius, when he says that "all men have an equal aptitude for genius; and that what some are able to effect under the influence of the fundamental laws which regulate the march of intellect, must be within the reach of others who, in the same circumstances, apply themselves to like pursuits" (*SH* 48). Thereby, the idea of genius is turned from something innate to something which one can aspire to and achieve through perseverance, the only possible hindrance being unequal opportunity. As an example, Smiles uses the most obvious realm of genius – the arts – and explains that musicians and dancers can only ever be artistic at their best through hard and continuous work (cf. *SH* 51–52).

For an average man to become a hero, Smiles not only requires him to embody certain values and be determined, but also to achieve a balance between body and mind. Under the heading of *Self-Culture*, he thus asks for "the education or training of all parts of a man's nature; the physical and moral, as well as the intellectual. […] It is only by training all three together that the complete man can be formed" (*SH* 240). He goes on to explain that lack of physical exercise not only leads to health problems, but also affects the intellectual capacities. The remarks on physical education are, in comparison to the long and often repetitive arguments about perseverance and mental discipline, rather short and this again illustrates the target audience which Smiles addresses:

> The chief disadvantage attached to the calling of the laborious classes is not that they are employed in physical work, but that they are too exclusively so employed, often to the neglect of their moral and intellectual faculties. While the youths of the leisure classes, having been taught to associate labour with servility, have shunned it [...]. (*SH* 244)

Wanting to reach working- and middle-class men, he was speaking and writing for an audience which was engaged in physical labour on a daily basis. Therefore, he did not have to convince his listeners or readers that they should do physical work, but seemed to have felt that his emphasis should lie on the intellectual side for the lower social ranks. By quoting examples such as Newton, Watt or Stephenson, all of whom engaged in manual labour early in their life and then complemented this physical exercise by intellectual training, Smiles again sug-



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY – https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

gests that careers such as theirs can be repeated by young men of a lower social background and gives them role models they could aspire to.

The realm of politics being relatively unattainable for active involvement by the general public, politicians only feature in one chapter of *Self-Help*. Here, the value of courage, in addition to perseverance and discipline, is foregrounded and positive as well as negative examples provided. The latter is exemplified by Napoleon, whom Smiles at first attests good 'self-help material': "Napoleon, he would have the word 'impossible' banished from the dictionary. 'I don't know,' 'I can't,' and 'impossible,' were words which he detested above all others. 'Learn! Do! Try!' he would exclaim" (*SH* 157). Napoleon thereby shows determination, discipline and will to work hard for the sake of improvement. What makes Napoleon a warning example though is the way in which he utilised his qualities, since "power, […] without beneficence, is fatal to its possessors and its subjects" and "knowledge, or knowingness, without goodness, is but the incarnate principle of evil" (ibid.). Thus, Napoleon was, in the author's view, too concentrated on fame and personal gain and thus gave the wrong outlet to his qualities. As the positive counterexample, he establishes an Englishman, the Duke of Wellington: "Napoleon's aim was 'Glory;' Wellington's watchword, like Nelson's, was 'Duty'" (ibid.). Wellington, in Smiles's depiction, embodies all of his ideal characteristics, he is "resolute, firm, and persistent", "self-denying, conscientious, and truly patriotic", he possesses "the patience, the firmness, the resolution" (ibid.) to go through difficult situations. Interestingly, Wellington's peninsular campaign is the only military political action which Smiles mentions. Apart from that, he exclusively refers to civilising missions and to representative men such as Robert Livingston, John Williams or William Carey, whose mission was not military, but scientific or didactic.

The closing remarks of *Self-Help*, which Smiles leaves to historian Thomas Fuller and his description of Francis Drake, sound like practical advice to the audience:

> Chaste in his life, just in his dealings, true of his word; merciful to those that were under him, and hating nothing so much as idleness; […] always condemning danger, and refusing no toyl; he was wont himself to be one (whoever was second) at every turn, where courage, skill, or industry, was to be employed. (*SH* 334)

Smiles's concept can be seen as an inclusive one, which touches every aspect of the life of those who attempt to follow it. Though it does not require anything to begin with, thereby enabling any individual to identify with it, it calls for hard mental and physical work, for a high tolerance of frustration and a self-denying attitude. In valorising the hard-working yet socially not necessarily high-ranking man, Smiles creates a heroism of 'the common man' and attempts a re-evaluation of what is heroic and desirable. By comparing established great men such as Wellington or Nelson to common workers, Smiles uses heroism as a didactic tool, turning the hero into a role model.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY – https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

The concepts offered by Thomas Carlyle and Samuel Smiles not only represent different strands in thinking about heroes, but thereby design different views of Britain and its people. What Carlyle attributes to genius and divine presence, Smiles attributes to hard work and self-denial. Where Smiles wants an active people who try to shape the world themselves, Carlyle wants a people for whom the world is shaped and who follow an all-knowing leader. However, not only Smiles and Carlyle were publicly debating heroism; they were the most prominent and sometimes even omnipresent representatives of different ways of thinking, but their positions were supported, ingested and developed further by other thinkers as well.

In search of a grand leader, the American poet and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson, whose writings were widespread in Britain as well, adopts Carlyle's general assumption. Emerson is of the conviction that "nature seems to exist for the excellent. The world is upheld by the veracity of good men: they make the earth wholesome" and he believes that "the search after the great is the dream of youth and the most serious occupation of manhood".[22] Man's great aim, he believes, is not trying to become a "good"[23] man nor striving for excellence, but finding a great man to follow whose excellence one can venerate. Thus, Emerson, like Carlyle, advocates that the majority of the population be inactive, their only activity being the search for a guiding figure which can lead them in their passivity. This great man then "inhabits a higher sphere of thought"[24] and has a "mental and moral force"[25] which exceeds that of 'normal' men. These chosen leaders, Emerson believes, "can, without aid from the eyes, or any other sense, proceed to truth and to being".[26] As examples he chooses Shakespeare, Plato, Napoleon, the Duke of Wellington and Johann Wolfgang Goethe. His ideas mirror those of Carlyle. However, Emerson believes in an evolution of heroes where Carlyle sees a devolution: "Yet, within the limits of human education and agency, we may say, great men exist that there may be greater men. The destiny of organized nature is amelioration, and who can tell its limits?"[27] Thus, there can always be a new and 'better' hero, who can teach the majority of people and give them guidance.

In a similar vein, the British scholar William Linwood gave a lecture on "Great Men" on the occasion of the American Unitarian preacher Reverend Channing's

[22] Ralph Waldo Emerson: The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. 4: Representative Men. Seven Lectures, Cambridge 1987 [1850], p. 3.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., p. 5.
[25] Ibid., p. 8.
[26] Ibid., p. 10.
[27] Ibid., p. 20.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

death in 1842 and proclaimed that "greatness is greatness, wherever found or however exercised; and when it appears, it is the TRUE inspiration from Heaven, rendering its possessor an Emanuel, a god with us".[28] Thus, the religious Linwood not only draws a direct connection between great men and god, but also reaffirms the belief in one deeper truth behind reality. Further, he is not only sure that great men or heroes have existed in every age, but also that they are essential for society:

> No age, no country of the world, has ever been left entirely destitute of great men and benefactors, who have guided the enquiries, assailed the prejudices, and *aided the progress of the popular mind*. It is a false notion which pervades men that truth has been kept wholly from humanity, or that a period has ever existed when no *prophet* appeared to champion and expound it. All times and ages have had their truth and its teachers.[29]

These "saviours, prophets, heroes"[30] live "to alter, to push forward, to expand, the opinions and habits and laws he [the "Great Man"] finds at work when he enters the lists of Providence, and wages war with the social and political defilements of his times".[31] Although in a more religiously charged institutional context, heroes are here again used as a means of guiding people, of giving a leader, a prophet to the "popular mind". Thus, this strand of concepts of heroism is strongly class-oriented. The belief in a majority of people possessing a "popular mind" who do not need to be educated to think for themselves, but who need to be guided by a messianic saviour, thereby keeping the hierarchy in place, is common to all conservative, traditional theories on extraordinary men. The great men constructed in these theories have a number of common features: all of them have a religious, supernatural side; they all possess superior knowledge, insight or intuition over their contemporaries and can uncover a truth which others would not be able to see. Where the various ideas and associated examples differ is in the actual active involvement of the representatives. Whereas some examples, such as the ever-returning Shakespeare, give insight through the mediary of their works only, other examples are in close contact with a group of people, literally teaching and educating them. These examples, however, mostly come from the religious realm. The level of activity of these hero-prophets thus does not seem to be a qualitative criterion for their greatness. They can be active, in a didactic, a political, even a military sense, but do not necessarily have to, as long as they share their higher insight. Furthermore, there seems to be a consensus that heroism is something that transcends time: "Errors and delusions

[28] William Linwood: Great Men, Their Characteristics, Influence and Destiny. A Lecture Occasioned by the Death of the Rev. E.W. Channing, London 1843, p. ii.
[29] Ibid., p. 9, emphasis mine.
[30] Ibid., p. iii.
[31] Ibid., p. iv.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY – https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

pass away, but truth endures; heroes pass away, but heroism endures; fogs and mists pass away, but heaven's lights endure; ages pass away, but god endures".[32]

In summary, one can see that there is a strong conservative, even elitist, tendency in this strand of theories on heroism. The hero is understood as a saviour-figure with superior abilities, who not only gives guidance and orientation to a group of people who are perceived as less gifted, but thereby also ensures the power-balance in a society which is perceived as justly hierarchical.

In contrast to the above concepts rooted in religious or spiritual beliefs and in a strong notion of social hierarchy, another approach to dealing with the public at large and extraordinary figures emerges. Alongside Samuel Smiles's works, the temperance movement, utilitarianism and self-improvement societies produced a number of texts directed at large audiences from working-class men to children, which have a different take on heroes. The 'great man' is here reinterpreted as an improved version of the common man, the sacrality of the messiah-hero is exchanged for the moral conduct of the everyday hero. Thus, the texts which can be associated with the promotion of role-model heroes, apart from *Self-Help* such texts as Kingsley's *The Heroes*, Charlotte Yonge's *Book of Golden Deeds* or later in the century Comte's *Calendar of Great Men*,[33] focus much more on practical examples than on theoretical considerations:

> The chief use of biography consists in the noble models of character in which it abounds. Our great forefathers still live among us in the records of their lives, as well as in the acts they have done, and which live also; […] furnishing examples for our benefit, which we may still study, admire and imitate. (*SH* 303)

In this vein, many of the above-named texts had a clear didactic purpose, they wanted to educate and support middle- and working-class men, women and children in their development and thus also mirrored their audience in the way they were constructed. The great variety of examples that most of the texts provided gave the listener or reader the opportunity to identify themselves with the lives described.[34] As seen in Smiles's text, the audience was supposed to find themselves in the beginnings of the later successful and extraordinary persons and

---

32 Ibid., p. 41.

33 Though not a British thinker, Comte's idea of positivism influenced Britain strongly. Not only intellectuals like Harriet Martineau and George Henry Lewes propagated a positivist worldview, but its ideas also entered the lectures of Mechanics' Institutes. "In fact, by the 1860s, […] the social and religious aspects of Comtean positivism, including its scientific celebration of the new ideal of 'altruism' were becoming much better known." Thomas Dixon: The Invention of Altruism. Making Moral Meanings in Victorian Britain, Oxford 2008, p. 63. Significantly, as Dixon's quote shows, Comte's ideas were used as a way to negotiate science and religion in a world in which the two were increasingly mutually exclusive.

34 The didactic value of biographical sketches becomes even more apparent when keeping in mind the statements by attendees of Carlyle's lectures who thought that his description of exemplary men were the parts of his talks at which – in contrast to the theoretical parts – everybody paid attention. Cf. Trela / Tarr: Critical Response, pp. 18–19.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – [cc BY] - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

thereby feel encouraged to tread a similar path, to work hard and become role models themselves.

However, as the contrast between Carlyle and Smiles has already shown, the ideas of the more utilitarian approach to heroism differ greatly from the more conservative concepts. Whereas the latter relied on the innate grandness of a person, the former placed a much greater emphasis on the possibility of every person to evolve and improve themselves. Thus, the focus in this line of thinking was much more on the individual's attempt to become a better person and on the core values and virtues which a 'common hero' should possess. The examples given therefore often showed hard-working people who, through self-denial, endurance and diligence, made a good living and came to be respected role models of their environment. Many other texts focus on a specific event in the life of sometimes fictional but often factual well-known figures, in which they perform an extraordinary deed which exemplifies specific qualities. This combination of showing virtues 'in action' and assigning them to specific heroes was used particularly in texts for the working classes and in works directed at children.

Since children were in the early stages of their development and were often considered still uncorrupted, they were a popular target audience for texts describing popular everyday heroes. The texts were supposed to give them guidance and role models which they could aspire to and the range of didactic material displaying heroic behaviour addressed to children was enormous. Thus, for example, Charles Kingsley in 1856 dedicated a book on *The Heroes, Greek Fairy Tales* to his "dear children"[35] which reiterates stories about Perseus, the Argonauts and Theseus, Greeks "who were brave and skilful, and dare do more than other men".[36] Kingsley had written the stories for his own children as a Christmas present in 1855 and the preface gives an appropriate Christian background for the occasion. He stresses that great things can only come from god and claims that the Greeks' wisdom and hunger for knowledge was given to them by god. The preface also shows quite clearly that the stories have a strong didactic facet; when he states that the "kings and heroes" and the "queens"[37] did household work and other chores themselves and how they were valued and respected because of these abilities and talents, he immediately draws a connection to the present, saying that this is "as it is now at school".[38] Thus, the extraordinariness of the presented heroes is domesticated in order to turn them into role models for diligent behaviour for children in nineteenth-century Britain. Being a hero is connected to hard work, to strength and, at the end of the preface, also to love for one's country. Kingsley tells his children that heroes have to "do good for [their]

35 Charles Kingsley: The Heroes, Hildesheim 1968 [1856], p. vii.
36 Ibid., p. xix.
37 Ibid., p. xviii. It is important to note here that a man can be both king and hero, women, however, are only referred to as queens.
38 Ibid.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY – https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

fellow-men" and leave their "country better than they found it".[39] The preface already gives a guideline for reading the book – as a collection of tales about role models for honest work, love for god and one's fellows. The actual stories which follow always have telling headlines such as "How Perseus slew the Gorgon" or "How the Argonauts were driven into the Unknown Sea" which evoke the action displayed in the story and also hint at related virtues. Thus, one can assume that the story of Perseus slaying Medusa will focus on manly strength and the story about the Argonauts at sea will be about bravery in the face of the unknown. Although the represented figures could just as well be examples of transgressive hero figures, the way in which the narratives are framed by Kingsley leads to a didactic domestication of their heroism.

Similarly, Charlotte Yonge's *Book of Golden Deeds* has a didactic purpose. However, apart from some well-known examples such as Florence Nightingale, the book presents incidents in the lives of 'common' men and women, sometimes even children. Thereby, the narratives can be related to the readers' lives even more easily and the preface already points out what the audience is supposed to learn from the book:

> What have been here brought together are chiefly cases of self-devotion that stand out remarkably, either from their hopelessness, their courage, or their patience, varying with the character of their age; but with that one essential distinction in all, that the dross of self was cast away.[40]

Again, the headlines of the short chapters either foreshadow what is going to happen in the story (e.g. *The Heroes of the Plague*) or indicate the actors involved, so that readers can pick chapters which they might identify with (e.g. *The Shepherd Girl of Nanteree* or *The Housewives of Lowenburg*). Apart from self-devotion, it is enthusiasm, "united with the utmost tenderness of heart [and] the very appreciation of suffering"[41] which for Yonge enables heroism. The examples in her book were therefore intended to make "the young and ardent learn absolutely to look upon danger as an occasion for evincing the highest qualities".[42] Thus, Yonge wanted to teach children to become fearless, but in a moral way, since only "fearlessness for a good cause is heroic!"[43]

After the 1860s, a flood of books like Yonge's and Kingsley's appeared on the popular print market. Titles like *Clever Girls of Our Time Who Became Famous Women, Clever Boys of Our Time and How They Became Famous Men* or books "Dedicated To Youths and Young Men as a Stimulus to Earnest Living"[44] presented

---

39 Ibid., p. xx.
40 Charlotte M. Yonge: A Book of Golden Deeds, London 1864, p. 17.
41 Ibid., p. 12.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid., p. 14.
44 Joseph Johnson: Clever Boys of Our Time and How They Became Famous Men, London 1879 [1860], title page.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

easily digestible biographical sketches with a moral lesson for young readers to turn to and adapt to.[45]

However, not only children were given guidebooks for moral conduct and self-sacrificing work ethos, but there were similar works for adults as well. August Comte's *Calendar of Great Men*, which was first proposed in 1849,[46] can be seen as one of the most prominent examples of such works. Although 'Comtism', as the movement came to be called, was in large parts an intellectual trend, the Comtists "did not ignore the working class".[47] According to Comte, the pioneer of positivism and one of the fathers of the discipline of sociology, "the proletarians were closest to the condition of altruism and hence to the positive state, being the least tainted by liberal individualism".[48] One means of spreading his belief in humanity's ability to govern itself was through his solar calendar. It consisted of 13 months of 28 days in which the months were named after great figures in Western European history in the fields of science, religion, philosophy, industry and literature and were aligned in chronological historical order. Each day was named after a figure in history and each week and month had a patron which exemplified the field of human progress depicted in it. Since Comte believed that knowledge about the past would lead to further progress in the future, 559 persons were "selected as types of the general advancement of civilisation".[49] However, not only great men who brought about progress were treated in the calendar, but also 'villains of history' were shown as warning examples. The men selected for the calendar were to be considered as substitute "Saints and Heroes" of humanism, "as men to be remembered for effective work in the development of human society as society existed in Western Europe about the beginning of the nineteenth century".[50] Thus, their aim, as depicted in the biographical sketches of the 559 men, was not to impose their superior knowledge on others in a self-centred manner, but to bring progress to society. Thus, the main moral of the calendar for the reader is a notion of working hard towards an improvement of society as a whole; thus, the work of the individual is placed into a larger scheme and the achievements are important in their relevance for a

---

45 A commented bibliography of gift and prize books with a focus on the heroic from the Victorian and Edwardian era for a range of different readerships has been compiled, cf. Christiane Hadamitzky / Barbara Korte (eds): Hero Books on the Victorian and Edwardian Print Market. Commented Bibliography, 2016, www.heroic-as-gift.uni-freiburg.de/, 22 January 2020.

46 The earliest English edition of the positivist calendar I could identify was published in 1891; it is however possible that earlier editions exist. However, positivism was being discussed widely in the British public from the 1850s onwards (cf. Fn. 33).

47 Christopher A. Kent: Higher Journalism and the Promotion of Comtism, in: Victorian Periodicals Review 25.2, 1992, p. 54.

48 Ibid.

49 Auguste Comte: The New Calendar of Great Men. Biographies of the 559 Worthies of All Ages and Nations, London 1920 [1849], p. v.

50 Ibid., p. vi.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

common greater good, not because of personal success. Additionally, with Comte's emphasis on scientific developments, the Comtists' popular print products provided a way to conceptualise unsettling concepts, such as Darwin's theories, in a broader setting and view them as something enriching in a long historical line of succession.

It has thus become clear that the second strand of works on heroism, with representatives like Smiles, Yonge, Johnson or, in some of his publications, Comte, has a completely different target audience than the more conservative writings. They focus on the working and middle classes, for whom the books were intended to be a guideline. However, the examples were constructed as an encouragement for the readers, as role models for their own development and a call for active involvement in working on one's own personality for a greater good (be it a religious or a secular, humanist moral one).

A diagnosis which opens John Stuart Mill's *Utilitarianism*[51] can be seen as a motivation for both lines of work discussed above:

> There are few circumstances among those which make up the present condition of human knowledge, more unlike what might have been expected, or more significant of the backward state in which speculation on the most important subjects still lingers, that the little progress which has been made in the decision of the controversy respecting the criterion of right and wrong.[52]

Both the more hierarchy-oriented concepts of heroism and the approaches centred on the 'common man' want to offer an answer to the question of what is right and wrong and found answers in different worldviews.

### *The Missing Female Hero*

Though the different lines of thinking about heroism were very dissimilar in the roles they assigned to heroes, they were united in their limited acknowledgement of the role of women within the public sphere. Although thinkers like Carlyle and Emerson might have been more extreme in their habit of ignoring the existence of accomplished women, Smiles, Comte and Kingsley followed the same pattern. Thus, female heroes seemed to be impossible in the works of the conservative writers. Although not explicitly stated, the conservative concepts of heroism implied that heroism was not considered a field for women. This was, for one, mediated by the complete lack of female examples for heroic behaviour. The only women to be mentioned in Carlyle's *On Heroes* are Muhammad's wives and their description rather discredits female agency. They are described as being

---

51 Significantly, the text had first been published in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1861 before appearing as a volume in 1863.

52 John Stuart Mill: Utilitarianism, Oxford 1998 [1861], p. 49.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

driven by jealousy and thus not possessing the vision and rational perspective which is a precondition of Carlylean heroism.

Although Smiles's *Self-Help* was not as exclusively masculine as the conservative works, the great majority of exemplary persons shown in the work are male. The few women who are depicted are presented in a way that emphasises their subordinate status. Smiles, for example, mentions Madame de Genlis and "her charming volumes" (*SH* 83); this description of her achievements almost ridicules her literary merits and implicitly shows that women were expected to be "charming", not clever, witty or intellectual. Similarly, in Smiles's later works such as *Brief Biographies*, a publication with biographical sketches of didactic purpose, only six of the thirty-six biographies were of women. These six biographies are grouped together and thus explicitly marked as a gendered 'other' in the paratext. The women, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Frances Brown, Sarah Margaret Fuller, Sarah Martin, Harriet Martineau and Caroline Chisholm, all had an artistic or philanthropic background and lack the transgressive qualities often held to be essential for masculine heroism. Thus, female heroism was, if at all possible, always a passive one, one which was located in high arts or distinguished by extraordinary altruism. Female heroism was, in theoretical considerations, however never physical or norm-transgressing, but mostly oriented to the existing passive role commonly designated to women in Victorian society.

The only exceptions to this lack of representation of female heroism seem to be didactic books directed at girls. Works such as Joseph Johnson and William Pairman's *Clever Girls of Our Time Who Became Famous Women* described extraordinary women but avoided references to the heroic paradigm. The field of action of these women was, again, quite limited and mostly included artists such as George Eliot, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Angelica Kauffman, Frederica Bremer, Frances Brown or Mary Thornycroft. Apart from artistic talent, philanthropy was brought forth in these didactic writings, especially through the examples of Sarah Martin and Florence Nightingale. Additionally, it was mostly the childhood of the "clever girls" which was described and not their extraordinary adulthood. Thereby, the narratives foreground their behaviour and values at a relatively ungendered age and can serve as role models for the young female readers. In other works for children, such as the above mentioned *Book of Golden Deeds*, which was intended for children of both sexes, women or girls again play a subordinate role and those persons who were actually doing 'golden deeds' remained to be boys or men in the majority of cases.

It can thus be stated that the nineteenth-century discourse on heroism exhibits a void regarding female heroism. Female heroes were missing from the theoretical considerations on heroism, both from conservative and more didactically oriented thinkers, thereby reflecting the general role assigned to women in Victorian life.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

## *2.2 Heroism and Social Identity*

Though the different strands of thinking about heroism are united in their exclusion of women from the heroic sphere and the attempt to provide orientation, they differ in the way they deal with the individual and the community. The first group is looking for a heroic individual who has an innate ability which sets him apart from the community. It is this ability then which enables him to lead the community and to show them what is right and wrong. This can happen in different ways, through political action, through religious guidance or in writings. In these concepts, the community's main action is the acknowledgement and worship of the hero, followed by subordination to his 'truth' and 'reality'. "It is true", writes Mill, that "confusion and uncertainty, and in some cases similar discordance, exists respecting the first principles of all the sciences" and regarding "the trustworthiness of the conclusions of those sciences".[53] The messiah-like hero is an answer to this confusion and uncertainty of people who may turn to such a figure for orientation. Especially for men and women with religious beliefs, the solution of leaving one's mental and spiritual fate, one's view of the world, in the hands of a prophet-like representative of god, may have been appealing.

Furthermore, the different conceptions of what a hero is and which kind of hero should be worshipped also fall back on the admirers' ideas of themselves, since hero worship necessarily creates a relation between worshippers and worshipped. Heroes in the vein of Carlyle rank high above those who admire them and are unreachable in their messiah-like features. Thus, they can only ever be worshipped and, since their heroism is presented as innate, never seriously be emulated. Thus, the concept can be utilised as one that established order and control and can only be effectively empowering for a small minority.

Writers like Smiles or Comte tried to answer questions of right and wrong as well, but went in a different direction. They did not see great men as chosen ones marked by a divine aura – and their concepts are much less religiously charged – but wanted to provide the opportunity for everyone to aspire to extraordinariness. Of course, this effort always has to be viewed in the context of the existing class structures: the writers of such guidebooks or didactic biographical works did not completely do away with hierarchies and were only in a position to advise the lower ranks of society on what was important because of their higher education and status. Nevertheless, they attempted to prompt action among their readers. They did not produce an abstract theory, but provided biographical sketches on which the readers could model their own values and actions. Though embedded in a system of power relations, thinkers like Smiles tried to create the image of an everyday hero whom their audience could aspire to, who would val-

---

53 Ibid.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

orise their career and general being and motivate them to work hard for more than their own personal gain. Accordingly, the selected biographies in works like *Self-Help* tend to be less political and grand than the examples in *On Heroes*, and focus more on the virtues behind the actions and the benefit they constitute for society at large.[54]

Following Schindler et al.'s considerations on admiration and adoration, the main difference between the concepts on an abstract level can be seen in the relation between heroes and their group of followers. While the heroism as described by Carlyle or Emerson is shaped by a distanced adoration or worship, the idea of heroism in the context of self-help relies on the idea of admiration. It supposes a much smaller distance between hero and admiring group, even relies on the likeness between the two. This also points to different utilisations of the heroic as represented through the opposing concepts:

> [A]dmiration motivates the internalisation and emulation of ideals embodied by an outstanding role model. Adoration motivates adherence to the teachings and expectations of a meaning maker and benefactor perceived as superhuman or sacred. Thus, the primary function of admiration is to promote individual learning and change, whereas adoration primarily serves to bind communities together.[55]

The concept of a messiah-like[56] hero figure relied heavily on the idea of the hero being other than his group of admirers and aimed at creating a situation of social adherence "to maintain social cohesion",[57] in which the majority of people followed a small group of leaders. The hero in the vein of Smiles, however, was designed with the idea of emulation in mind. Through the object of a hero in the likeness of the admiring group, admiration aimed to "enhance one's own agency in upholding ideals".[58]

One can see that the works of Samuel Smiles and Thomas Carlyle exemplify two main directions of thinking about heroes and heroism. Carlyle was addressing an educated audience and arguing for a messiah-like hero to 'save' and instruct the masses – and thereby also to keep hierarchies in place or establish new ones. By contrast, the ideas directed at the working classes are more universal and inclusive. By stating that everyone can become a great man and do heroic deeds and stressing the likeness between audience and presented hero rather than

---

[54] In comparing the two lines of work, the example of Napoleon is especially interesting. Though some of the representatives of heroic men, such as Wellington or Shakespeare, are given as examples for both notions of heroism, Napoleon is considered one of the greatest heroes by men like Carlyle and a villain by Smiles and Auguste Comte.

[55] Ines Schindler et al.: Admiration, p. 85.

[56] In *Von der Verehrung*, Veronika Zink emphasises the distance which adoration entails and further characterises it as always having a sacral element: "Bei der Verehrung handelt es sich um ein genuin sakrales Phänomen." Veronika Zink: Von der Verehrung. Eine kultursoziologische Untersuchung, Frankfurt am Main 2014, p. 59.

[57] Schindler et al.: Admiration, p. 89.

[58] Ibid.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – CC BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

creating distance, writers like Samuel Smiles were trying to educate and train untaught workers and children into becoming more ambitious and diligent.

Significantly, these lines of thought did not succeed each other, but emerged at roughly the same time[59] and existed alongside each other. As pointed out above, they can also be seen as different ways of answering the questions posed by scientific and technological changes and their effects on society. While both give orientation to people, the competing concepts do not only construct characteristics of hero figures but indirectly represent different concepts of the individual and their possibilities and duties in society.

Thus, there seem to be certain abstract features that unite those considered heroes and the way they are venerated. Heroes can be seen as representatives of specific views of the world. They are personified versions of societal values and norms as perceived by a specific group. It is this group that, in a reciprocal process, both receives and creates a heroic figure as an epitomisation of their perception of the world. They can be perceived as marking a collective's values, but also its hierarchies, structures and rules. Heroes can only become relevant in their function for a given group of admirers. Thus, they can be actual individuals, but also fictional, imaginary or historically distant, as long as they fit the habitual profile of the group and perform a social function. If one thinks of heroic figures in this way, the fundamentally different concepts of thinkers like Carlyle and Smiles can be united on a theoretical level: for both, heroes embody their view of the world, their habitus. Their heroes differ in the way the admirers relate to them, the hierarchies and structures they are embedded into are different, but both perform a social function. They both act as a medium of assurance – be it through more distant forms of adoration or through identification – for the members of a group.

As Cubitt writes, heroes are "endowed by others, not just with a high degree of fame and honour, but with a special allocation of imputed meaning and symbolic significance – that not only raises them above others in public esteem but makes them the object of some kind of collective emotional investment".[60] Thereby, heroes represent a certain group and its ideals and norms and also fulfil a social and cultural function in that they stabilise the society of their admirers. As a cultural construct, heroes are necessarily mediated. Although many heroes and heroines, as the nineteenth-century examples above have shown, are persons of historical influence, they always need someone who labels them or their actions heroic. Thus, a hero is always part of a group's communicative processes. Range and media contribution of these processes may vary, but they need to both affect the actors in the communicative act personally – the actions or

59 The idea of the common hero comes up mid-century, whereas the idea of a divine hero is formulated by Carlyle in the early 1840s.
60 Cubitt: Heroic Reputations, p. 3.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY – https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

values of a hero have to be relevant for their individual life – and have a normative power for the group.

Thus, heroes can act as an assurance of values, norms and concepts of life, both on an individual as well as on a collective level:

> In the history of Europe since antiquity, certain heroisms have defined the self-understanding, self-portrayal, and imagination of social groups – especially those in power – sometimes in distinction from each other, sometimes in reference to one another. The orientation towards heroes as human models is extremely important for the formation of heroisms as habitus patterns.[61]

As Cubitt states, heroic figures perform significant community-building functions as "products of the imaginative labour through which societies and groups define and articulate their values and assumptions, and through which individuals within those societies or groups establish their participation in larger social or cultural identities".[62] Accordingly, heroic figures are not defined by their 'real' actions, but by the meaning which is given to them through others.

Both the liminal heroes of Carlyle as well as the exemplary heroes of Smiles can be understood as defining and contouring collectives. While the latter type embodies a norm and defines what is appropriate *within* the boundaries of a society, liminal heroes such as Cromwell or Napoleon mark social and cultural boundaries by transgressing them. Thus, heroes have the potential to stabilise social order, but at the same time can threaten existing structures.

The Victorian era has been described as a time of growing distance from a heroic "ideal that served their forefathers long and faithfully".[63] In this context, the identificatory potential of heroic figures grew in importance, both the individual's relation to heroes as well as the public utilisation of heroism's potential to stabilise hierarchical structures. Stuart Hall notes that identity – individual as well as collective – "is constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristic with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation".[64] Societies thus rely on their members' identification with a collective interpretative system. This includes things such as (religious or other) belief, moral guidelines or regimes of power (e.g. between social classes, genders, profes-

---

[61] Von den Hoff et al.: Heroes, p. 11.

[62] Cubitt: Heroic Reputations, p. 3. Cubitt also notes the tension that arises with the idea of an exemplary hero, which will emerge in many of the analyses in the main body of this thesis. As John Price summarises, "Heroes, according to Cubitt, are both 'representative', in that they embody values with which others can identify, and 'exceptional', in that they live or behave outside of normal rules or conventions. This, it is argued, is a particular problem in the use or construction of 'great heroic' individuals as exemplars." Price: Everyday Heroism, p. 6.

[63] Ian Ousby: Carlyle, Thackeray, and Victorian Heroism, in: Yearbook of English Studies 12, 1982, p. 152.

[64] Stuart Hall: Questions of Cultural Identity, London 2002, p. 2.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

sions) as a frame providing meaning. However, identification needs "material and symbolic resources",[65] groups need symbols in order to maintain their bonds and avoid worries about the future stability of a society. Thus, the common ground of a group can only become effective when it is mediated through symbolic material or actions, since identification "is grounded in fantasy, in projection and idealization".[66] Heroic figures as representatives of a group form an integral part of its identity, constitute the projected ideal of what a group believes or aspires to. Identities, individual or collective, are about "the process of becoming, rather than being"[67] and it is not about "'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves".[68] Identification through heroes thereby becomes both an active and passive process: on the one hand, a society is passively represented and thus perceived from outside through the selected heroes; on the other hand, the selection – at least for parts of the group – is an active and conscious process, a decision about the identity for the whole group, who also internally use their representatives as a reference point for their view of the world.

Thus, heroes both encourage and control groups through their identificatory function. They are used as a part of a society's repertoire of symbolism and embody a group's values. They can be used as guiding figures in times of inner or outer turmoil, but they can also be used for didactic or ideological purposes to keep members of a group 'in line'. A heroic figure for a group both constitutes what is ideal and implicitly marks out those who are different. Heroes, as symbols, can be seen as a bridge between the personal and the social. Since they embody the ideal, and thus the expectations of a group, the personal relation to them and their values can be used as a marker for one's place within society. Consequently, heroic figures and the representation of heroic actions are part of the symbolic repertoire of societies and also part of what constitutes identities. Since "the inner core of the subject [is] not autonomous and self-sufficient, but [is] formed in relation to 'significant' others, who mediate to the subject the values, meanings and symbols – the culture – of the world he/she inhabit[s]",[69] personal identity is always connected to cultural identity and one's conception of oneself is "formed out of a common history, ancestry, and set of symbolic resources".[70] Those regarded as exceptional or exemplary are necessarily an integral part of this conception.

---

65 Ibid.
66 Ibid., p. 3.
67 Ibid., p. 4.
68 Ibid.
69 Stuart Hall (ed.): Modernity and Its Futures, Cambridge 1992, p. 275.
70 Chris Barker: Cultural Studies. Theory and Practice, London 2012 [2000], p. 231.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

Although the idea of heroes as symbols for the stabilisation of society and their selection as a continuous re-negotiation of a society is plausible, it also implies questions of hierarchies, power and agency. One always has to be aware of the fact that heroes are cultural constructs, are consciously selected and only surface in medial representation through others. Thus, the question of who selects those representative of and for a specific group is crucial. Though the heroes of Carlyle and Smiles differ greatly in their characteristics and the function they are supposed to fulfil for their audience, they share the fact that they were selected by the authors as prototypes for a specific ideal and embody this ideal only through the act of representation. Although the intended effect is fundamentally different, they both aim for a form of identification. Therefore, heroes as represented in media are always embedded in a system of power relations and, if used didactically or even ideologically, take away agency from those who adopt them as symbols of meaning-making.

It can thus be summarised that heroic figures, though they may refer to living acting human individuals, are always cultural constructs that only exist through medial communication. They constitute an important part of the habitus, the identificatory repertoire of a community, and are part of the cultural and personal identity of its members. Heroes offer a sense of belonging and significance for groups and, though also possessing disruptive potential, often have a stabilising function. Thereby, they are formed by those creating their image and are always also instruments for the exertion of power.

Having established that a hero can only become an object of cultural reference and worship through materiality, the following chapter will deal with the medium which will stand at the heart of the main part of this study. In order to be able to analyse the heroic as materialised on the pages of popular periodical publications in the second half of the nineteenth century, it will provide an overview of the history and functionality of Victorian periodicals.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – CC BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

# 3. Periodical Culture in Nineteenth-Century Britain

> Perhaps there is no single feature of the English literary history of the nineteenth century, not even the enormous popularisation and multiplication of the novel, which is so distinctive and characteristic as the development […] of periodical culture.[1]

The periodical, as George Saintsbury's analysis in his 1896 *History of Nineteenth Century Literature* illustrates, was the defining medium of the nineteenth century. The increase in the number of periodical and newspaper publications[2] between 1800 and 1900 and subsequent increase in readership was enormous; they seemed to have been, as Richard Altick put it in his groundbreaking 1957 study *The English Common Reader*, the media "best adapted to the needs of a mass audience".[3] Thus, the periodical press of the nineteenth century is today widely acknowledged as a mass medium.[4] But why were periodical publications so popular and successful in the nineteenth century, what was their political, cultural and societal role and how did the players in this Victorian *circuit of culture* influence each other? This chapter will give an overview of the development of the periodical press in nineteenth-century Britain, a short account of those publications

---

[1] George Saintsbury: A History of Nineteenth Century Literature 1780–1895, London 1896, p. 166.

[2] Although it has often been discussed whether periodicals and newspapers can be dealt with as separate entities, whether they are separate – to borrow Margaret Beetham's expression – publishing genres (cf. Margaret Beetham: Towards a Theory of the Periodical as a Publishing Genre, in: Laurel Brake et al. (eds.): Investigating Victorian Journalism, New York 1990, pp. 19–32), and whether newspapers are not themselves periodicals, I will maintain this distinction between the two formats.

[3] Richard Altick: The English Common Reader, Columbus 1998 [1957], p. 318.

[4] On the periodical as a mass medium see Altick: Common Reader, Patricia Anderson: The Printed Image and the Transformation of Popular Culture 1790–1860, Oxford 1991; Scott Bennett: Revolutions in Thought. Serial Publication and the Mass Market for Reading, in: Joanne Shattock / Michael Wolff (eds.): The Victorian Periodical Press. Samplings and Soundings, Leicester/Toronto 1982, pp. 225–257; Frank Bösch: Zwischen Populärkultur und Politik. Britische und deutsche Printmedien im 19. Jahrhundert, in: Archiv für Sozialgeschichte 45, 2005, pp. 549–584; Simon Eliot: Some Patterns and Trends in British Publishing 1800–1919, London 1993; John Feather: A History of British Publishing, London 2005 [1988]; Ian Haywood: The Revolution in Popular Literature. Print, Politics and the People 1790–1860, Cambridge 2004; Martin Hewitt: The Dawn of the Cheap Press in Victorian Britain. The End of the "Taxes of Knowledge" 1849–1869, London 2014; Andrew King / John Plunkett (eds.): Victorian Print Media. A Reader, New York 2006; E. M. Palmegiano: The First Common Market. The British Press on Nineteenth-Century European Journalism, in: Media History Monography 11.1, 2009, pp. 1–44; Beth Palmer / Adelene Buckland (eds.): A Return to the Common Reader. Print Culture and the Novel 1850–1900, Farnham 2011 or John Plunkett: Queen Victoria. First Media Monarch, Oxford 2003.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

which will be discussed in the main body of this study, their influence in the first half of the century and a description of their role between 1850 and 1900. Finally, a theoretical framework for dealing with periodical publications will be introduced.

## *3.1 The First Half of the Nineteenth Century*

There were only a few periodicals with high circulations on the market at the beginning of the nineteenth century,[5] the leading ones being *The Quarterly Review* (1809–1967) and *The Edinburgh Review* (1802–1929). This was for one due to the fact that publishing a journal in the first decades of the century was an expensive undertaking. For example, "printing-house compositors were the best-paid skilled workers in London; […] Newspaper compositors made even more – 40s. in 1801 and 48s. in 1810 – which accounts in part for the high prices of newspapers at this period".[6] Furthermore, material costs were significant and many book – but subsequently also periodical – publishers had to regulate their print runs according to paper availability. The price of paper increased rapidly since the government had to find ways to fill the treasury, which had been considerably emptied by the ongoing war with France. Thus, the Excise Duty on paper was doubled in 1801.[7] General availability also became a problem in the early years of the nineteenth century, as publishers not only had to compete with one another for paper, but with other tradesmen as well: "The Industrial Revolution brought with it a demand for paper; the expanding printing industry needed paper and there was no substitute for paper for wrapping grocery items such as sugar, tea or small quantities of flour."[8] But even with paper at hand, publishing a periodical was an expensive undertaking, since taxes on publications were constantly rising as well. The potential of serial publications as a source of tax revenue was high and thus the Stamp Act of 1819 tried to close all potential loopholes that publishers had used before. Although tax evasion had been possible before the passing of the act by a declaration that the newspaper or magazine published opinion only and no news, this option was removed in 1819, with the result that all publications had to be stamped and paid for before they could be sold. The new legislation had been aimed at the radical press, which the government was concerned about for publishing anti-religious and anti-governmental opinions;

5 Altick: Common Reader, p. 318.
6 Ibid., p. 262.
7 Cf. ibid.; also, when running short in Britain, paper was often imported from the European mainland. However, the customs duties were very high and in any case exceeding the excise duty within Britain. For a detailed account of the development in paper prices see H. Dagnall: The Taxes on Knowledge. Excise Duty on Paper, in: The Library 6.4, 1998, p. 348 and Hewitt: Cheap Press.
8 Dagnall: Taxes, p. 348.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

however, the act not only affected radical publications, but all those with low circulation numbers, small funds and financial difficulties. Thus, all publications appearing at least once a month and costing less than 6d were subject to a tax of 4d, a measure which made many small and cheap publications disappear from the market altogether. This led to protest among intellectuals like Leigh Hunt as well as social reformers such as Sir Edwin Chadwick, one of whom eventually coined the term 'Taxes on Knowledge' for the taxation on printed goods.[9] This name was soon adopted by all opponents of the policy, as it could be seen as a political statement and a description of the effects of the taxation. As Henry Parnell, former Treasurer of the Navy, put it in his 1830 *On Financial Reform*:

> The duty on paper has an injurious effect on many other trades beside that of the paper maker. […] The greatest evil of all is the high price of books which it gives rise to. This places a great obstacle in the way of the progress of knowledge, of useful and necessary arts, and of sober and industrious habits. Books carry the productions of the human mind over the whole world, and may be truly called the raw materials of every kind of science and art, and of all social improvement.[10]

The taxes not only had consequences for the publishers, who had to invest more money into their business or sometimes even had to stop publishing their journals, but subsequently for the readers as well. Cheap periodicals became rarer after the act. Those that were still affordable for the even middle ranks of society were mainly subsided by religious organisations and thus were mostly comprised of didactic religious rather than informative content. William Chambers, whose *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*[11] was to become one of the first affordable periodicals at a low price of 1d, described the cheap publications in the first half of the nineteenth century as papers containing "disjointed and unauthorized extracts from books, clippings from floating literature, old stories, and stale jocularities".[12] This was mostly due to the fact that, apart from publishing and selling illegally, the only way to avoid taxation after the Stamp Act was to reprint text which had already appeared in books or was out of copyright. Thus, the non-religious cheap periodicals tended to consist of collections of reprints of old tales.[13] The leading publications, however, were still quite expensive, *Blackwood's* (1817–

9 The question of who coined the term has not been answered conclusively. Both Finer, Chadwick's biographer, as well as Holyoake, who wrote about Hunt's life, claim that their 'subject' invented the phrase. Cf. S.E. Finer: The Life and Times of Sir Edwin Chadwick, London 1952, p. 35; George Jacob Holyoake: Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life, London 1892, p. 293.

10 Henry Parnell: On Financial Reform, London 1830, p. 37.

11 A more detailed profile of *Chambers's*, *Fraser's* and *Leisure Hour* can be found at the beginning of the corresponding text corpus analysis chapters.

12 Quoted in Altick: Common Reader, p. 319.

13 This loophole of the taxation laws also led to a revival of gothic fiction. Cf. Altick: Common Reader, p. 321.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY – https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

1980) and *Fraser's* were sold at 2s6d, and the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Quarterly Review* were even as expensive as 6s.

Still, not being able to afford a weekly or monthly periodical on one's own did not mean not being able to read one. After the 1819 act, many subscription reading rooms were established in which one could access a variety of publications for a yearly subscription fee. This fee would have been lower than the cost of regularly buying a publication oneself and the reading room had the additional advantage of offering more than one periodical or newspaper and subscribers could choose according to their taste. Furthermore, coffee houses would have had newspapers and some monthly publications in stock and the practice of 'hiring out' newspapers and journals was common, albeit illegal:

> A London newsman might make seventy or eighty lendings of the morning's *Times* in a day, at a penny an hour, after which he would post the used copies to subscribers in the country who paid him 3d. for a copy mailed the day of publication and 2s. for one mailed the day following.[14]

Once it had arrived in the countryside, the publication would have continued to travel from hand to hand in the village and might even have been sold off to travellers the following day.[15] Also, sometimes several families would jointly subscribe to a magazine or a newspaper together and would then share it. As Horn describes in his study *Victorian Pleasures and Pastimes*:

> Often papers were handed round from one family to another, as the Revd J.C. Atkinson remembered of mid-century Danby in the North Riding of Yorkshire. He claimed that only about three newspapers were brought into the whole areas. "I myself remember the *Yorkshire Gazette* passing on from one farmer to another, and its circulation hardly ceasing until it was three or four weeks old."[16]

A writer in the *Monthly Magazine* (1796–1843) was sure that "not less than 5,000 [of these informal subscription groups were] serving with mental food at least 50,000 families".[17] This calculation may be slightly optimistic, but nonetheless it is clear that, even in the first half of the nineteenth century, periodicals reached a wider middle-class audience than the circulation numbers can account for and might even have had a small working-class readership.[18] In terms of content, the periodicals of the first half of the century were primarily marked by informative

---

14 Ibid., p. 323.

15 Cf. ibid.

16 Pamela Horn: Pleasures and Pastimes in Victorian Britain, Stroud 1999, p. 209.

17 Quoted in Altick: Common Reader, p. 323.

18 This was further intensified by the emergence of lending libraries. On the importance of lending libraries in Victorian Britain see for example Altick: Common Reader, Chris Baggs: "In the Separate Reading Room for Ladies Are Provided Those Publications Specially Interesting to Them". Ladies' Reading Rooms and British Public Libraries 1850–1914, in: Victorian Periodicals Review 38.3, 2005, pp. 280–306; Alistair Black: Lost Worlds of Culture. Victorian Libraries, Library History, and Prospects for a History of Information, in: Journal of Victorian Culture 2.1, 1997, pp. 95–112; Guinevere L. Griest: A Victorian Leviathan.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

and news articles. Richard Altick points out that the population was, in the wake of the Napoleonic wars, keen on staying up-to-date on political events and saw newspapers and periodicals as a necessary source for this type of information.[19]

However, as the mid-century drew closer, the British print market moved towards mass production and periodicals became one of the first mass media. The various factors which contributed to the rise of popular reading material are extremely difficult to bring into a linear or causal framework. Historical research long focused on cultural and educational developments and connected the rise of literacy with the growing market for reading matter. Contemporary publishers such as Newes and Northcliffe also "perceived that the spread of elementary schooling had created a new class of consumers"[20] and thus the growing number of educated middle- and working-class readers were the reason for the growth in edition and circulation numbers. Nevertheless, Altick observes that

> viewed in long perspective, the relationship between the development of a mass audience in the 19th century and the rise of the cheap periodical was simple: the growth in the number of readers made periodical publishing an increasingly attractive commercial speculation, the more reading habit spread. But examined more closely, the process proves to have been no clear circle of cause and effect.[21]

Following this assumption, historians like Harold Perkin have argued that the impact of rising literacy rates on the popular press was far smaller than originally thought, amounting in the, as Perkin terms it, "egregious truism"[22] that people would obviously have been required to be able to read if they were to consume a newspaper or journal. However, there would have been publications for people with limited reading abilities as well, although many were of ill repute, such as the so-called Penny Dreadfuls.[23] Illustrations could make an article or a story more accessible and could, for example, draw the attention of children towards a

---

Mudie's Select Library, in: Nineteenth-Century Fiction 20.2, 1965, pp. 103–126; ead.: Mudie's Circulating Library and the Victorian Novel, Bloomington 1970; Bob Nicholson: Counting Culture; Or, How to Read Victorian Newspapers from a Distance, in: Journal of Victorian Culture 17.2., 2012, pp. 238–246; Lewis Roberts: Disciplining and Disinfecting Working-Class Readers in the Victorian Public Library, in: Victorian Literature and Culture 26.1, 1998, pp. 105–132 and id.: Trafficking in Literary Authority. Mudie's Select Library and the Commodification of the Victorian Novel, in: Victorian Literature and Culture 34.1, 2006, pp. 1–25.

19 Cf. Altick: Common Reader, p. 321. Reading rooms and coffee houses thus would not only have been places of information but also spaces to discuss the news.

20 David F. Mitch: The Rise of Popular Literacy in Victorian England, Philadelphia 1992, p. 71.

21 Altick: Common Reader, p. 318.

22 Harold James Perkin: The Origins of the Popular Press, History Today 7.7, 1957, p. 429.

23 For scholarship on this periodical genre see for instance Patrick A. Dunae: Penny Dreadfuls. Late Nineteenth-Century Boys' Literature and Crime, in: Victorian Studies. A Journal of the Humanities, Arts and Sciences 22, 1979, pp. 133–150; Robert J. Kirkpatrick: From the Penny Dreadful to the Ha'penny Dreadfuller, London 2013; Rohan McWilliam: The Melodramatic Seamstress. Interpreting a Victorian Penny Dreadful, in: Beth Harris (ed.):



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

publication which could only be fully consumed by their parents.[24] However, the possibilities which an enlarged readership offered to the publishers could not have been taken up had it not been for technological developments. Amongst those, "the printing machine may have been the most dramatic of the technical changes in the printing trade".[25] But it was not only this most obvious technological change that dramatically affected the whole publication process: "it was accompanied by the arrival of machine-made paper, stereotype plates and edition bindings, and several new techniques for reproducing illustrations."[26] At first, especially newspapers and journals with weekly circulation profited from these technological advances; the usage of steam-presses and stereotype plates equalled an enormous gain in time since publications could be produced closer to the publishing deadline. Thus, more recent news could be published using a steam-press than when running multiple hand presses. Furthermore, through printing from stereotype plates, reprints could be produced more easily. The growing railroad network connected the industrial areas of Britain and readerships outside the urban centres would be reached in a speed unheard of before.

---

Famine and Fashion. Needlewomen in the Nineteenth Century, Aldershot 2005, pp. 99–114; Elizabeth Penner: "The Squire of Boyhood". G. A. Hutchison and the Boy's Own Paper, Victorian Periodicals Review 47.4, 2014, pp. 631–647 or John Springhall: "A Life Story for the People?" Edwin J. Brett and the London "Low-Life" Penny Dreadfuls of the 1860s, in: Victorian Studies. A Journal of the Humanities, Arts and Sciences 33.2, 1990, pp. 223–246; id.: "Pernicious Reading?" The Penny Dreadful as Scapegoat for Late-Victorian Juvenile Crime, in: Victorian Periodicals Review 27.4, 1994, pp. 326–349 and id.: "The Mysteries of Midnight". Low-Life London "Penny Dreadfuls" as Unrespectable Reading from the 1860s, in: Martin Hewitt (ed.): Unrespectable Recreations, Leeds 2001, pp. 160–175.

24 On periodicals and illustrations see for example Laurel Brake / Marysa Demoor (eds.): The Lure of Illustration in the Nineteenth Century. Picture and Press, Basingstoke 2009; Simon Cooke: Illustrated Periodicals of the 1860s, London 2010; Paul Goldman: Beyond Decoration. The Illustrations of John Everett Millais, London, 2005; Katherine Haskins: The Art-Journal and Fine Art Publishing in Victorian England 1850–1880, Farnham/Burlington 2012; Brian Maidment: Comedy, Caricature and the Social Order 1820–50, Manchester/New York 2013 or Brian Maidment / Aled Jones: Illustration, in: Laurel Brake / Marysa Demoor (eds.): Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland, Ghent/London 2009, pp. 304–305.

25 Aileen Fyfe: Steam-Powered Knowledge, Chicago 2012, p. 5. The first steam-printing machine was used by the *Times* as early as 1814; however, the technology only affected a larger market from the 1830s onwards and only percolated through the whole printing industry at the beginning of the second half of the nineteenth century. For more information on new printing technologies and their influence on society see Richard Altick: The Presence of the Present. Topics of the Day in the Victorian Novel, Columbus 1991; Elizabeth L. Eisenstein: The Printing Press as an Agent of Change, Cambridge 1982; Lee Erickson: The Economy of Literary Form. English Literature and the Industrialization of Publishing 1800–1850, Baltimore 1995; Robert Escarpit: Book Revolution, London 1966; Feather: British Publishing; David Finkelstein: Publishing and the Materiality of the Book, in: Kate Flint (ed.): The Cambridge History of Victorian Literature, Cambridge 2012, pp. 13–33 or John Sutherland: Victorian Fiction. Writers, Publishers, Readers, New York 2005.

26 Fyfe: Steam-Powered, p. 5.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY – https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

It was through these developments that, despite the high taxes on publications, the 1830s and 1840s saw the rise of several cheaper publications which were the forerunners of the flood of periodical publications to hit the market after 1850. Thus, "Bible and tract societies […] were using both steam printing and stereotyping earlier than might have been expected".[27] It was by employing those means that organisations such as the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (SDUK) were able to distribute high circulation numbers as early as the 1830s. However, this was only possible due to ideological commitment, which above all meant that the organisations were not interested in maximising their profits. As charities, these publishing societies were of course somewhat removed from the traditional commercial marketplace and publishers like Charles Knight, who published the *Penny Magazine* (1832–1845) for the SDUK, but nevertheless was an independent businessman, were struggling to make their work profitable. This was even more so true for the Edinburgh-based brothers William and Robert Chambers, who attempted to publish easy, readable, educational and entertaining information for the masses and whose business was independent. In the case of Chambers, profitability was achieved by keeping the printing presses running all week long. After having been successful with their *Chambers's Journal*, they filled the time in which the printing presses were not occupied by the periodical with other publications and began to establish a whole range of informational and educational books, thus making the most of their resources.[28]

It was these two journals then that paved the way for affordable mass-market periodicals. Unlike other publications before, Knight's and the Chambers's periodicals offered a more holistic programme which neither included only information, nor resorted to serialised tales which were out of copyright. In the "Address to His Reader" of the first issue in 1832, William Chambers describes his weekly as one which would offer something to everyone; it would contain – among other things – practical information, essays on education, science, finances, articles on gardening, farming, observations on the building of roads and bridges, information on technological development and literature (cf. Address to the Reader, *CJ*, 4 Feb 1832, 1). Though the educational imperative is quite obvious from this short collection of topics to be included in the journal, the last item – literature – was especially important since its entertaining qualities had the potential of enlarging the magazine's readership.

Furthermore, Knight and the Chambers brothers were also the first among publishers of cheap papers to employ professional writers. Unlike the other contemporary publishers of penny papers, they did not merely stick together snippets from books but printed articles which were written specifically for publica-

[27] Ibid., p. 7.
[28] A more in-depth characterisation of the Chambers's printing and publishing establishment will be provided in chapter 4.1.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

tion in their journals. Thereby, an enormous difference in quality could be observed between these new cheap journals and those magazines which selected their contents with tax evasion in mind.

Thus, the first two prominent cheap periodicals can be seen to have started what would later become almost a convention among popular family magazines and which was arguably one of the formulas for success: professional writing, fiction and illustrations. It was therefore not surprising that almost all family papers published in the second half of the century opened their issues with large images illustrating the serialised fiction, which was regularly the first text in the periodical.

## *3.2 The Second Half of the Nineteenth Century*

After the Repeal of the Stamp Act in 1855 and the abolition of the last of the 'Taxes on Knowledge', the Paper Duty, in 1861, circulation numbers were going through the roof. By the end of the 1850s the first periodicals had "attained a circulation of more than 100,000".[29] These numbers grew even more in the sixties, for which Altick gives circulation numbers of monthly "London publications"[30] which range from 250,000 to 1,500,000. The market that had grown so rapidly did not merely supply the upper and upper-middle classes, but predominantly consisted of middle and lower-middle class audiences.[31] "Obviously, the greatest increase in periodical-buying occurred among the lower-middle class and the working class",[32] and this was a readership which did not simply want to be informed about the occurrences in parliament and court, but also wanted to be

[29] Ibid., p. 357. On the mid-century as a time of transition for periodicals see also Margaret Beetham: Magazines, in: Laurel Brake / Marysa Demoor (eds.): Dictionary of Nineteenth Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland, Ghent/London 2009, pp. 391–392; Graham Law / Amy Loyd: The Leisure Hour, in: Laurel Brake / Marysa Demoor (eds.): Dictionary of Nineteenth Century Journalism, Ghent/London 2009, pp. 356–357; Maidment / Jones: Illustration; James Mussel: New Journalism, in: Laurel Brake / Marysa Demoor (eds.): Dictionary of Nineteenth Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland, Ghent/London 2009, p. 443 or Jennifer Phegley: Educating the Proper Woman Reader. Victorian Family Literary Magazines and the Cultural Health of the Nation, Columbus 2004.

[30] Altick: Common Reader, p. 358.

[31] This can be assumed from the fact that those periodicals which were addressed to an upper-middle- and upper-class audience did not undergo a massive increase in circulation. Cf. ibid.

[32] Ibid.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

entertained in the little leisure time they had.[33] Periodicals therefore offered much more than the mere supply of information.[34]

They included reports on current events in the region, the country and the world and thus would, for example, inform the readers about decisions being made in London, but also about developments in the colonies or on the American continent. Informative articles, however, went far beyond mere political information but covered a broad variety of topics from, depending on the orientation of the periodical, gardening to history of the arts, from hints on cooking, household management and education to notices of concerts or recitals coming up in the region. Some of the publications also contained sections such as "Answers to Correspondents" which give answers from the writers to questions posed by readers. Thus, the periodical also provided information on Victorian readers' lives, since the readers often sent in questions regarding issues in their everyday lives. But apart from instruction and information, the publications offered entertainment and distraction from everyday work life. The publications often contained short tales, poems, essays on societal events, short anecdotes and even stories especially designed for children. Among the entertaining content, the serialised novel, published in weekly or monthly instalments, came to be one of the most popular forms of publishing and reading fiction.[35] Accompanied by illustrations, the serialised novels appealed to the whole of the family.[36] They were read, often out loud, by the parents or older children and gave the younger children pictures to look at and thus an opportunity to experience the story as well. The publication in instalments not only had the advantage of drawing the readers into the story and ensuring that they would buy the next issue of the periodical as well, but also benefited those in the audience for whom reading still was an exhausting task. Though literacy was constantly rising throughout the cen-

---

[33] An orientation of many popular weekly periodicals towards the middle and working classes can also be presumed from the fact that they usually appeared on Saturday in order to be consumed during the working population's leisure time on Sunday.

[34] This remained the domain of the daily newspapers, which also experienced an increase in circulation after the Repeal of the Stamp Act and Paper Duty, which lead to the emergence of newspapers in the countryside and local journalism.

[35] On serial publication of fiction in Victorian periodicals and subsequent book publication see for example Catherine Delafield: Serialization and the Novel in Mid-Victorian Magazines, Farnham 2015; Jennifer Poole Hayward: Consuming Pleasures. Active Audiences and Serial Fictions from Dickens to Soap Opera, Lexington 1997; Linda Hughes / Michael Lund: The Victorian Serial, Charlottesville 1991; Graham Law: Serializing Fiction in the Victorian Press, Basingstoke 2000; David Payne: The Reenchantment of Nineteenth-Century Fiction, Basingstoke 2005; J. Don Vann: Victorian Novels in Serial, New York 1985 or Deborah Wynne: The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine, Houndsmill 2001.

[36] Wynne notes: "Although features occasionally appeared which were more likely to appeal to one gender or age group than another, they were usually presented in such a way as to be intelligible to other family members." Wynne: Sensation Novel, p. 16.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

tury,[37] there were still many people, especially among the lower ranks of society, who, while literate, would still not have been able to read a whole book at a time. Thus, the serial novel was a way of enjoying literature without becoming too frustrated with one's own ability. The value of this kind of reading practice not only applied to the serial novel but to the periodical as a whole. With its many short articles and stories, it was not only suitable for people with limited reading skills, but the reading could also be done over the whole of the week or month in short intervals. By giving people a successful reading experience, the periodical itself also contributed to the creation of a mass audience; without requiring sustained attention and perfect reading skills, the periodical offered information and entertainment, to which the inclusion of literature contributed immensely:

> Particularly after 1850 I see their relation [of literature and periodicals] as symbiotic, productively mutual, and interdependent. Rather than claiming credit for the greater importance of periodicals on the basis that they 'carried' literature, as Saintsbury and other scholars do (and of course the periodicals carried much else), I want to suggest that the widespread incorporation of the novel into mainstream periodicals in the 1850s and after helped to assure the proliferation and economic viability of the periodical press. Consumers of popular culture, attracted to fiction, supplemented those arguably graver readers of the miscellany of articles on history, philosophy, and science to make journals viable and sustainable; the greater inclusion of fiction, its appropriation, crucially broadened readership, and arguably advertising as well. Basically, I am arguing that the novel 'made' the periodical press in these 50 years as much as the press fostered and 'carried' the novel (as well as other literature), legitimizing it in the admixture of a "miscellany" context.[38]

Serialised fiction thus not only amused the masses, but was also a clever business transaction, since "there was less risk all round for […] the author and the publisher".[39] If readers liked the first parts of a novel, they were likely to buy the following ones. As Margaret Beetham points out, "the consumer of the periodical is not so much satisfied as stimulated to return at regular intervals to buy the next number of the product. [...] [Thus, t]he periodical was designed to both ensure rapid turnover and to create a regular demand".[40] Furthermore, serialised novels presented publishers with the additional opportunity of earning money twice, since most of the novels were published in book form after they had appeared in a periodical.

Similarly, the medium was an opportunity for writers to make their living. Being employed at a periodical would ensure regular income for writers and

---

[37] In the 1830s, only 50 per cent of the population were able to read and write; by the end of the century, almost universal literacy was accomplished. Cf. King / Plunkett: Print Media, p. 12.

[38] Laurel Brake: The Advantage of Fiction. The Novel and the "Success" of the Victorian Periodical, in: Beth Palmer (ed.): A Return to the Common Reader, Farnham 2011, pp. 11–12.

[39] Ibid., p. 12.

[40] Margaret Beetham: A Magazine of Her Own?, London 1996, p. 21.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

make publication of larger works, for example in a series, easier than finding a book publisher outside the periodical realm.[41] Since most of the articles were published anonymously[42] or sometimes even written collaboratively, the contributors were able to voice controversial opinions in their pieces, since those could not be traced back to them with certainty. Therefore, many of the most eminent figures of Victorian literature started off as periodical writers. The most well-known example is of course Charles Dickens who, before publishing his own periodicals *Household Words* (1850–1859) and later *All the Year Round* (1859–1895), worked as a journalist for several different newspapers and periodicals. He was, however, not the only prominent literary figure who became known through periodical writing. John Stuart Mill first wrote for magazines, as did Leslie Stephens, James Knowles as well as Thomas Carlyle, Walter Pater and William Thackeray. The periodical "made authors",[43] and some of them, such as Thackeray, even followed Dickens's example and founded their own periodical. 'Journalist' was not as yet a fully defined profession and there was often little separation between journalism and literature.[44] But it was not only the quality of literary contributions to the periodicals that was of a high standard, the medium also attracted eminent figures from all of the other significant fields. Scientists like Charles Lyell or Thomas Henry Huxley, economists like John McCulloch, church representatives like Cardinal Manning and J. H. Newman or politicians like Benjamin Disraeli were frequent contributors to various periodicals. In short: "all the major novelists, generals and captains in the army and navy, diplomats, judges, bishops, travellers, [...] African explorers"[45] were writing for magazines. The brightest minds of the age voiced their opinion through the medium of the periodical at a time which was full of transformation and doubt, which saw great changes in technology through urbanisation and technological progress, but also in frames of mind. One need only mention the most prominent shift in Victorian thought, Charles Darwin and his theory of evolution, to recall the destabilisation of people's beliefs, not knowing how to relate religious

41 Especially novels published as serials provided a solid income for authors. Contributors for *Chambers's Journal*, for example, received an average sum of £10 to £15 for an instalment of a novel from the 1870s to the 1890s (cf. payment records in the publishing house's archive, "Payment Records" NLS Dep 341/368, 370 and 371). Rarely, an author would receive a substantially larger amount of money per instalment, the most notable example being James Payn, editor of the periodical from 1858 to 1874, who received £70 for each instalment of several novels during the time of his editorship (Payment Records 1871–1879, Dep 341/368: unnumbered, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh). Significantly, his name was not recorded in full in the ledger, but only his initials.

42 Up until today, even articles by the most well-known Victorian writers often cannot be attributed with certainty.

43 Laurel Brake / Marysa Demoor (eds.): Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland, Ghent/London 2009, p. v.

44 Matthew Rubery: Journalism, in: Francis O'Gorman (ed.): The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Culture, Cambridge 2011, p. 179.

45 Houghton: Victorian Frame, p. 3.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – CC BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

traditions to new scientific findings and where to place oneself in this matrix.[46] Therefore, the fact that important figures from all fields of interest wrote for the masses functioned as orientation and security for many. As Cardinal Newman put it, periodicals "instructed audiences what to think and what to say".[47]

The periodical thus had various functions for the readers: it served as a means of information and entertainment, but also as a medium in which they sought guidance through a world which had become increasingly complicated.[48] As such, the periodical was a suitable medium to create role models and represent and shape values and standards. In 1842, Thomas Carlyle wrote to John Sterling: "there is at present no preaching in England, and a visibly growing appetite (the sternest *necessity* there has long been) to have some: [...] the Printing Press is the only, or by far the chief, Pulpit in these days."[49] Accordingly, writers and publishers early on saw the potential of periodicals to educate children and adults from the lower ranks of society through cheap print publications. Especially after schooling was made compulsory for children between the age of five and thirteen in the Education Act of 1870, the market for children's periodicals grew considerably.[50] This, however, also shows that the educational goal that publishers seemed to pursue was always linked to their own financial interest.

This interest was also strongly tied to technological developments. Railways hastened the pace of business transactions and passenger trains created a new

---

46 For the conflict between science and religion in Victorian Britain, see Dennis R. Alexander: The Implications of Evolutionary Biology for Religious Belief, in: Kostas Kampourakis (ed.): The Philosophy of Biology, Dordrecht 2013, pp. 179–204; Peter J. Bowler: Evolution. The History of an Idea, Berkeley 1989 (especially pp. 218–245); John Hedley Brooke: Religious Belief and the Content of the Sciences, in: Osiris 16, 2001, pp. 3–28; Colin Campbell: The Romantic Ethics and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism, Oxford 1987; Gary B. Ferngren: Science and Religion. A Historical Introduction, Baltimore 2002; Aileen Fyfe: Science and Religion in Popular Publishing in 19th-Century Britain, in: Peter Meusburger et al. (ed): Clashes of Knowledge Dordrecht 2009, pp. 121–132; Peter Harrison: "Science" and "Religion". Constructing the Boundaries, in: The Journal of Religion 86.1, 2006, pp. 81–106; David C. Lindberg / Ronald L. Numbers: Beyond War and Peace. A Reappraisal of the Encounter between Christianity and Science, in: Church History. Studies in Christianity and Culture 55.3, 1986, pp. 338–354; James Moore: The Historiography of Science and Religion, in: Gary B. Ferngren (ed.): Science and Religion. A Historical Introduction, Baltimore 2002, pp. 208–218; Ronald L. Numbers: Science and Religion, in: Osiris 1, 1985, pp. 59–80; Colin A. Russell: The Conflict of Science and Religion, in: Gary B. Ferngren (ed.): Science and Religion. A Historical Introduction, Baltimore 2002, pp. 3–12 or David Sloan Wilson: Darwin's Cathedral. Evolution, Religion, and the Nature of Society, Chicago 2010.

47 Quoted in Rubery: Journalism, p. 181.

48 This complexity of life and diversification of views is also reflected in the variety of journals on the market at the time which provided publications for every possible political, religious or ideological orientation and a vast range of special interests.

49 Quoted in Walter Houghton: Periodical Literature and the Articulate Classes, in: Joanne Shattock (ed.): The Victorian Periodical Press. Samplings and Soundings, Leicester/Toronto 1982, p. 9.

50 Cf. King / Plunkett: Print Media, p. 14.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

space for reading; steam print and stereotype plates made production in larger quantities possible and products less expensive; and the telegraph link between Dover and Calais in 1851 considerably enlarged the region from which news could be reported. With telegraph links between Europe and India in 1865 and the transatlantic cable in 1866, business deals could be made more easily on a larger scale. Furthermore, the content of periodicals was enriched, since, for example, news from the colonies would reach the reader much faster.[51]

As this short overview has shown, the relation between publications, their publishers and readers is quite complex and it is not easy to determine what was decisive in the creation of demand and supply. It has become clear that the success and importance of the periodical press in Victorian Britain was due to the interplay of various factors: The technicalisation and urbanisation of city life gave rise to the possibility to produce print products fast and relatively cheaply, especially after the abolition of the 'Taxes on Knowledge', effectively turning periodicals into a mass medium for a mass audience. At a time of transition, transformation and growing fragmentation of everyday life, readers sought entertainment as well as information and guidance, which the publications could provide, employing some of the best and most prominent representatives of many fields of interest as contributors. The weekly and monthly periodicals, other than the daily newspapers, appealed to people from all kinds of social backgrounds and also included children or adults with poorer reading skills in the consumption process. As a form, the medium was both open and closed, since it on the one hand always was a "self-contained text"[52] and on the other hand always already implied the following issues. Also, it was open in regard to audience participation. As Beetham puts it, the periodical

> engages with its readers across time. This means it involves them not just in the production of their own individual readings, but actually in the development of the text. [...] Reader response is fed back to the producers by sales figures but in addition many periodicals invite readers to intervene directly, by writing letters, comments and contributions. This may help to account at once for the immense resilience and popularity of the form and for its intractability in terms of theories which think of texts as results simply of authorial activity.[53]

---

[51] For information on communication technologies in Victorian Britain and their cultural importance see for instance Asa Briggs: Victorian Things, London 1988; Charles Frederick Briggs / August Maverick: The Story of the Telegraph and a History of the Great Atlantic Cable, Ann Arbor 2006 [1958]; Anthony Burton: The Railway Empire, London 1994; Jack Simmons / Gordon Biddle: The Oxford Companion to British Railway History. From 1603 to the 1990s, Oxford/New York 1997; Tom Standage: The Victorian Internet. The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century's Online Pioneers, London 1999 or Roland Wenzlhuemer: Connecting the Nineteenth-Century World. The Telegraph and Globalization, Cambridge 2015.

[52] Beetham: Magazine, p. 29.

[53] Ibid.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – [cc BY] - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

Thus, there developed a periodical culture from which all actors involved profited: the readers were provided with entertainment, education and information, many writers had found a relatively easy way to publish their work and earn their living, and publishers had found a mass market in which the readership and thus sales were predictable and stable.[54]

As the emphasis above on the political, technological and economic backdrop to publishing a periodical already suggests, an analysis of Victorian periodicals has to be strongly contextualised; production and consumption have to be kept in mind as well as general societal and political influences. A study of the heroic in British periodicals thus cannot be conducted by only looking at the representation of heroes, heroines and heroic deeds, but necessarily also has to include the constructedness of these persons and acts. Thus, this study intends to approach its material with regards to both representation with its literary and medial aspects as well as the field within which it is constructed and produced.

Assuming that all publications, whether books, periodicals, ephemera or pamphlets, are cultural products which are produced and received within a cultural process, the *circuit of culture* seems an appropriate tool for analysis. The model,[55] developed by Paul du Gay together with Stuart Hall, Linda Janes, Hugh Mackay and Keith Negus, does not focus on specific product stages such as the printing or manufacturing of a book, but identifies *cultural* processes which, due to their level of abstraction, can be applied to all cultural artefacts, to all products which produce or bear meaning.[56] For them, cultural artefacts develop

> a distinct set of meanings and practices. […] We talk, think about and imagine it. It is also 'cultural' because it connects with a distinct set of social practices […] which are specific to our culture or way of life It is cultural because it is associated with certain kinds of people […]; with certain places […] – because it has been given or acquired a social profile or identity.[57]

---

54 For further reading on the Victorian print market and the rise of the periodical see for example Anderson: Printed Image; Bösch: Printmedien; Eliot: British Publishing; Feather: British Publishing; Haywood: Revolution; Hewitt: Cheap Press; John O. Jordan / Robert L. Platten (eds.): Literature in the Marketplace. Nineteenth-Century British Publishing and Reading Practices, Cambridge 1995 or Beth Palmer / Adelene Buckland (eds.): A Return to the Common Reader. Print Culture and the Novel 1850–1900, Farnham 2011.

55 Cf. Paul du Gay et. al.: Doing Cultural Studies. The Story of the Sony Walkman, London 1997.

56 In contrast to traditional book history approaches, the circuit of culture accounts better for the complexity of cultural processes and the cultural significance of specific products. Robert Darnton's *Communications Circuit* is rather production-centred and provides a "model for analysing the way books came into being and spread through society" (Robert Darnton: What Is the History of Books, in: Daedalus 111.3, 1982, p. 65) and Adams and Barker in an already more context-oriented approach place the production within "the whole socio-economic conjuncture". Thomas R. Adams/Nicolas Barker: A New Model for the Study of the Book, in: Nicolas Barker (ed.): A Potencie of Life. Books in Society, London 1993, pp. 5–43.

57 Du Gay: Circuit, p. 10, emphases mine.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

When relating this to the Victorian periodical, it becomes clear that the periodical also has its distinct culture, its own set of practices around it. This is already apparent from the name; 'periodical' instantly invokes regularity, it will appear in periodic intervals and thus has an element of stability, reliability, even companionship to it. Therefore, the term itself has a cultural practice inscribed into it: the periodical is understood to be consumed in regular intervals. Thus, the periodical is cultural in du Gay's sense; it is not only a meaningful object which can and could be talked about, but it is also clearly rooted within the Victorian "culture or way of life".[58] "Meaning-making lies at the interface between cultural and technology"[59] and the periodical's identity and its meaning become apparent with changing technology. As the previous chapters have shown, the rise of periodical publication was closely interconnected with technological, scientific and social developments of the time and can be seen as a sign for the industrialised, urbanised and increasingly educated British society. Considering the "kinds of people" and "places" mentioned in the above quote, however, also shows how multi-layered an analysis of cultural practices necessarily is. Since there is not, of course, 'the Periodical' with a capital p, these "certain kinds of people" and "places" cannot be fixed in relation to a nonspecific periodical. For the readership, one would have to look at specific periodicals and at which groups they would have been targeted; as for the "places" one needs to not only look at specific periodicals, but also at the periodical market in the course of the Victorian age. Where periodicals, in terms of production and immediate accessibility for readers, had been associated with an urban environment, especially London and maybe Edinburgh as well, this would have changed with acceleration of travel, which would have made periodicals more easily available in rural areas and would have lessened their association with specific urban capitals.

With the circuit's focus on influences and relationships, it offers a possibility to analyse Victorian periodicals, their materiality, production and consumption within their network of power-structures. Thus, its five poles – representation, identity, production, consumption and regulation – will guide the analysis of the heroic in *Chambers's Journal*, *Leisure Hour* and *Fraser's Magazine* throughout this study.

58 Ibid.
59 Ibid., p. 23.



https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783956507243-11, am 19.07.2024, 07:32:48
Open Access – (cc) BY - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb