

Gale Primary Sources

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The Illustrated London News and Literature

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Introduction

When the *Illustrated London News* began in 1842, its editors declared in “Our Address” that the newspaper was unique for employing illustration in its reporting of politics, foreign policy, and arts and entertainment—categories of news that regularly appear in newspapers today. Like other nineteenth-century periodicals, however, the *ILN* did not confine its coverage to current events. Literature, which the editors cited as notable among “every subject which attracts the attention of mankind,” was specifically mentioned as benefitting from its inclusion in an illustrated newspaper. The editors stated, “In literature, a truly beautiful arena will be entered upon; for we shall not only [...] have the opportunity of illustrating our own reviews, but of borrowing selections from the illustrations of the numerous works which the press is daily pouring forth, so elaborately embellished with woodcuts in the highest style of art.” As the paper continued to develop its own purpose and identity, it soon began publishing original illustrated fiction within its pages as well.

In fact, although the periodical’s opening address did not foreground the presence of fiction, its inclusion constitutes the *ILN*’s most notable contribution to literature. The newspaper counts a remarkable number of distinguished nineteenth- and twentieth-century authors among its contributors. J.M. Barrie, Joseph Conrad, Rudyard Kipling, W. Somerset Maugham, Anthony Trollope, and H.G. Wells each contributed at least one short story. Other authors, including Wilkie Collins, H. Rider Haggard, Thomas Hardy, Henry James, and Robert Louis Stevenson, published longer works that were serialized over several issues. Women writers, although less prominent, also found a home for

their work within the *ILN*, among them Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Eliza Lynn Linton, Edith Nesbit, Margaret Oliphant, and Flora Annie Steel. And, although it was a British periodical, the *ILN* published work of American authors, such as Stephen Crane, Bret Harte, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and William Dean Howells. In fact, literature came to hold such an important place in the newspaper that upon its centenary in 1942, the *ILN* included an article called “A Literary Centenary”, which honoured the “great writers who have contributed to ‘The Illustrated London News’ during 100 years.”

The Literary Marketplace

In addition to carrying significance for their literary value, the works of literature published in the *ILN* also reveal important aspects of the historical literary marketplace. The inclusion of American authors, for example, offers a reminder that instead of remaining limited to one particular geographic region, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century texts circulated widely. In addition, authors did not always confine their literary output to one genre of writing. Joseph Conrad, for example, published the fictional “Amy Foster”, in three parts in 1901, and then later went on to publish the journalistic piece “The Lesson of the Collision” in 1914. G.K. Chesterton, who is best known today as a novelist, philosopher, and theologian, contributed to the “Our Note Book” column for over thirty years – a column that revealed him to be “a shrewd and lively commentator on public affairs and social and religious questions.” In addition, the *ILN* demonstrates how publishing literature serially carried with it certain dangers, particularly the threat of an author’s illness or death in the middle of a run. As a case in point, Wilkie

Collins became ill in 1889 while his novel *Blind Love* was being published in parts. A notice appeared assuring Collins's "troops of friends" on 20 July 1889, that "there is a steady improvement of his condition." Three months later, however, the periodical published an article called "The Late Mr. Wilkie Collins", which contradicted the earlier optimism. Author Walter Besant stepped in to complete the manuscript, using Collins's detailed scenario as a guide. Finally, articles about authorship – such as those by Andrew Lang, which include "Authors and Publishers", "The Duties of Authors" and "The Wrongs of Authors" – provide further insights into writing and publishing practices of the past.

Readers of the *ILN*

The *ILN* is also valuable for what it reveals about those people on the other side of the page: readers. Articles such as "Reading Aloud" and "Some Arguments against Reading" reveal some of the varied perspectives towards reading, with the former regretting that the "art of reading" has been "totally neglected," and the latter objecting that "books are not essential to wisdom." Other articles show some of the interesting uses to which reading was put. "The Cigar-Makers' Romance": Reading to Workers in Havana", for example, provides an illustration of a professional reader who, perched on a pulpit above workers' heads, read newspapers and novels to hundreds of cigar rollers in order to distract them from the drudgery of their work. Articles and advertisements also provide insights about the technologies of reading. A 1911 advertisement offers the adjustable "'Literary Machine' Reading Stand", which allows a person to read without the inconvenience of an "arm-ache or cramped

fingers." "Reading by Ear for the Blind", describes and provides a detailed illustration of a type-reading optophone. This invention creates musical tones to correspond with type-written letters, thereby allowing blind people to "read" by ear. When we view these articles with an eye towards the history of reading, such pieces challenge us to reconsider the contemporary conception of reading as an internal process, noting instead the intimate relationship historically between the reading mind and the reading body.

Literary Critics

Although authors, publishers, and readers influenced attitudes towards literature, so too did critics, whose voices also are audible within the *ILN*'s pages. These evaluations can help contemporary readers understand what specific texts and authors were valued in the past, and may be especially interesting to those who want to consider past literary standards in association with the current canon. The reviewer of "The Voyages of Captain James Cook", for example, boldly counted the book among "the standard works of English literature," which will preserve readers' interest "as long as English literature exists." In contrast, articles such as "Forgotten Authors", reflect on writers like Hannah More and John Foster, who were popular in their day but now gather dust on the shelves. The *ILN*'s commentators also offer reminders that literature cannot be divorced from its historical context. In an April 1851 "Town Talk and Table Talk" column, for example, the author notes, "The literary world is in a state of almost unexampled stagnation." The columnist adds that The Great Exhibition, a nearly six-month display of industry and culture held in London's Hyde Park, "has overlaid and smothered every rival subject

of interest." Regardless of whether the claim accurately reflects literary history, it does suggest that literature and culture were closely intertwined.

Popular Culture and Literature

Indeed, a further set of articles demonstrates how literature both influenced popular culture and was appropriated by it. In "The Debt of the Police to Detective Fiction", H. Ashton-Wolfe notes the way that works of detective fiction have affected the period's approaches to crime investigation. In addition to emphasizing the importance of imagination, observation, and deduction, characters such as Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, according to Ashton-Wolfe, have prompted greater study of "poisons, handwriting, stains, dust, footprints, traces of wheels, [and] the shape and positions of wounds." As well as learning from literature, popular culture sometimes placed its own creative stamp upon it. Many fictional works were reincarnated as popular plays, ballets, or films; some revealing article titles include "Sherlock Holmes Inspires a Ballet", "Musical Dickens" and "Joseph Conrad's 'Lord Jim' as an Epic Film." Because the retellings of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* were particularly plentiful, the *ILN*'s articles on the subject may be especially interesting for researchers who want to explore the relationship between image and text (admittedly a rich source of study throughout the *ILN*). In addition to publishing Carroll's own illustrations of the novel, the periodical includes reproduced images of *Alice* in print, on stage, and in multiple film versions. The book's popularity even triggered Guinness beer advertisements. In one ad entitled "Maddening!" the March Hare declares that he and the Hatter are mad

"because we can't get any Guinness," adding, "That's enough to make anyone mad."

The Private Lives of Authors

The title of yet another beer advertisement – "Guinness Time in Dickens' Time" – anecdotally illustrates a related point: within the *ILN*, popular authors received as much attention as their characters. The writer of an 1885 article about "George Eliot" indicates that "there is a reasonable curiosity to know how she lived her own life, what she thought, what she did, what she suffered, how she took her part in the common affairs of every day, and whether there was a harmony between the imaginative life of the novelist and the prosaic life of the woman." This statement seems to encapsulate the periodical's attitude towards most authors, providing detailed coverage of their personal lives and treating them as celebrities. In 1927, for example, the *ILN* published an illustration of the view from Jane Austen's drawing room, allowing readers to look through the same window as that "through which the keenest eyes in English literature looked upon the outside world." As yet another example, to honour George Bernard Shaw's 90th birthday, the periodical published on 27 July 1946 over half a dozen photographs of the author in various poses around his home. Too many authors to list received substantial articles upon their deaths, usually accompanied by their portraits and sometimes with illustrations of their burial sites.

The End of Serialisation in the *ILN*

As the *ILN* recorded authors' demises, so too did it note the departure of literature from its pages. By 1942,

when the newspaper celebrated its centenary issue, it no longer published serial fiction. In "A Literary Centenary", Sir John Squire explains, "People, perhaps, are in too much of a hurry. To wait a week for the 'next installment' is too trying for a speed-governed world which has forgotten the relish which comes from long consideration and delay." With the availability of the *ILN* database, scholars can return to the newspaper with the kind of unhurried examination and reflection that is fitting for such a rich source of study. As they further explore the texts and authors featured in its pages, so too can researchers glean insights about historical reading, writing, and publishing practices, as well as about nineteenth- and twentieth-century culture more broadly.

Highlights

Uma; or the Beach of Falesá. Robert Louis Stevenson, Saturday, July 02, 1892

This work of Robert Louis Stevenson's fiction was published in six parts from July-August 1892. Because it is set in the South Seas, its illustrations convey not only the story's plot, but also one example of nineteenth-century attitudes towards foreign people and places. *Uma; or the Beach of Falesá* also has an interesting publishing history, since the *ILN* editors chose to excise some details related to a marriage certificate that were perceived as objectionable to readers. See Barry Harold Menikoff's *Robert Louis Stevenson and 'The Beach of Falesa': A Study in Victorian Publishing* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1984) for more information.

A Literary Centenary, Saturday, May 16, 1942

This retrospect was published in the *ILN* as part of the periodical's celebration of its hundredth anniversary. (The other topical article published in the centenary issue was "The Great World War: One Hundred Years of Warfare.") The article celebrates the "great writers" who have contributed to the periodical over its first 100 years, accompanied by portraits of seventeen authors.

Thomas Hardy. G. K. Chesterton, Saturday, January 21, 1928

While the *ILN* frequently published notices upon esteemed authors' deaths, this article is notable for also being written by a distinguished writer. G.K. Chesterton, who wrote a column for the newspaper for over thirty years, describes Thomas Hardy in this article as "the maker of great tragedies." He locates the source of Hardy's pessimism in "the subconscious sorrow of the dying fields and the old heathen sense of doom," which are his phrases for the neglect of English agriculture and the theological view of Calvinism.

Maddening! Saturday, December 02, 1933

and Guinness Time in Dickens' Time, Saturday, November 07, 1936

These two Guinness beer advertisements demonstrate the extent to which nineteenth-century texts and authors became incorporated into popular culture. The ad featuring *Alice in Wonderland* includes an illustration of the Mad Tea Party, in which the March Hare declares that he and the Hatter are mad because they "can't get any Guinness." The ad centered on Charles Dickens declares that the association between the author and

the beer is natural: "both are unique, both recall the bright and happy side of life."

Reading by Ear for the Blind, Saturday, September 07, 1918

This article and accompanying illustration of the optophone brings to light a product that "enables blind people to read any ordinary book or newspaper by ear, instead of relying on the use of raised type." The feature is interesting for what it reveals about the confluence of science and literature. It also serves as a great example of how detailed illustrations worked together with letterpress to convey complex information in the *ILN*.

Tips for Searching within the topic of "Literature and the ILN"

Author Names

Searching by specific authors often recalls some of the most intriguing combinations of articles. When searching by name, however, make sure to enter a variety of possibilities (for example, Robert Louis Stevenson and R.L. Stevenson). This becomes especially important for women writers, who often published by names other than what they are known as today (such as Margaret Oliphant, who published as Mrs. Oliphant). Sometimes it is also worthwhile to enter only the author's last name.

Specific Books

When looking for discussion of specific works of literature within the *ILN*, search for the title within the

full text instead of as a keyword. Book reviews were often published under simple headings like Literature, Books of the Day, or New Books. Texts and authors were also mentioned in running columns such as Town Talk and Table Talk and Our Note Book. Searching within the full text will return results that otherwise would not appear in keyword searches.

Combine Search Terms

In the realm of literature, many of the terms that would seem most likely choices carry alternative meanings that skew the search results. Reading, for example, is a large town in England in addition to an activity undertaken with books, and novel refers to anything that is new in addition to long prose narratives. Sometimes using a combination of search terms can eliminate the unwanted results.

Use Professional Titles

Terms referring to people within the business of literature—such as **author**, **writer**, **poet**, and **publisher**—tend to return more focused and less unwieldy results than terms referring to the literary products, such as **literature**, **books**, **novels** or **drama**.

Vary Endings

When entering search terms, try a variety of words that have the same stem. **Literary**, for example, brings up different results than **literature**. Even making a word plural can affect the results, so it is worth your time to try multiple variations on a given term.

Consult Reference Materials

Graham Law's *Indexes to Fiction in the Illustrated London News, 1842-1901, and the Graphic, 1869-1901* (University of Queensland, 2001) is a valuable supplementary resource for researchers specifically examining the fiction that was published in the periodical.

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