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A New Beginning?

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PART X

ENDINGS

CHAPTER 33

THE NOVEL, ITS CRITICS, AND THE UNIVERSITY: A NEW BEGINNING?

ANNA VANINSKAYA

I

There is no doubt that the Victorian university made its mark on the Victorian novel, and it was but natural that *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857) should be followed by *Tom Brown at Oxford* (1861). But was the opposite also true: can one say that the Victorian novel made an equally important mark on the Victorian university? Few critics or historians have asked themselves this question, if only because the early incarnation of English studies is regarded in the history of the discipline as a kind of Dark Ages, when two now extinct species, the pedantic philologists and the dilettante belletrists, fumbled about trying to constitute a subject neither of them knew what to do with. But those who have asked, like Francis O'Gorman in *The Victorian Novel*, have assumed that the answer is no.¹ Was this indeed the case?

It is possible to make a persuasive argument that it was. The debates which accompanied the introduction of English literature into institutionalised higher education, though they at times spilled over into the periodical press and into the national consciousness, had little to do with the familiar questions of 19th-century literary history, so many of which centred on the novel. The Victorian novel was, by definition, 'contemporary' literature, and that it could furnish a serious object of study in the university was for many conceivable only in the context of satire. The following 1895 sketch from *Punch*, entitled 'A Novel Education' (pun intended), is worth quoting in full.²

[‘One of the latest of the new academic studies instituted in the United States is ‘a course of modern fiction.’ . . . The modern fiction class in Yale University numbers no fewer than 258 members.’—*Daily Telegraph*.]

The tutor of St. Mary’s, Cambridge, was sitting in his rooms after Hall interviewing a succession of undergraduates.

‘Sit down, please, Mr. Jones,’ he said to the last comer; ‘I wish to speak to you very seriously on the subject of your work. The College is not at all satisfied with your progress this term. For instance, Professor Kailyard tells me that your attendance at his lectures has been most irregular.’

‘Well, Sir,’ said Jones, fumbling with the tassel of his cap, ‘I didn’t think they were important—’

‘Not important? How do you expect to be able to get up difficult authors like Crockett and Maclaren unless you’ve attended a course of lectures on Scotch dialect? Do you know the meaning of “havers,” “gabby,” or “yammering”? I thought not. Then your last paper on “Elementary Besantics” was very weak. Have you really been giving your energies to your work, or have you been frittering away your time over other books?’

Jones looked guilty, but said nothing.

‘Ah,’ resumed the Don, ‘I see how it is. You’ve been wasting your time over light literature—Homer and Virgil, and trash of that sort. But you really must resist temptations of that kind if you wish to do creditably in the Tripos. Good evening.’

Jones departed, to be succeeded by another undergraduate.

‘I sent for you, Mr. Smith,’ said the Tutor, ‘because—though your work on the older writers is pretty good—your acquaintance with modern realism is quite insufficient. You will attend the course of anatomy lectures at the hospital, please. You can’t study your “keynotes” intelligently without them.’

A third student made his appearance in the doorway.

‘Mr. Robinson, I’m sorry to say that your work is unsatisfactory. On looking at your Mudie list, I find that you’ve only taken out ten novels in the last month. In order to see whether you can be permitted to take the Tripos this year, I’m going to give you a few questions, the answers to which must be brought me before Saturday. You will find pen and ink on that table. Kindly take down the following questions, as I dictate them.’

The tutor cleared his throat, and began:

‘*Question one.* Explain “P.W.D. accounts,” “a G.T.,” “G.B.T. shin-bones.” Trace the bearing of the history of Mowgli on the Darwinian theory.

‘*Question two.* “The truth shall make us free.” Give context, and comment on this statement. Conjugate, in accordance with the library catalogue, *The Woman who* —, noting which of the tenses are irregular.

‘*Question three.* “There were two *Trilbys*” (*Trilby*, Part VIII.). Explain this statement. What had Mr. Whistler to do with it?

‘*Question four.* Give the formulae for the employment of (a) the Mad Bull; (b) The Runaway Horse; (c) the Secret Marriage. What would you suggest as the modern equivalents of these?

‘*Question five. Rewrite the story of Jack and Jill,—(a) in Wessex dialect; (b) as a “Keynote”; (c) as a “Dolly Dialogue.”*

‘That will do for the present,’ concluded the tutor. And, as his pupil left the room, he seated himself at the writing-table and began Chapter XXIX of his “Prolegomena to *Three Men in a Boat.*”

The types of questions were perfectly realistic, the absurdity stemmed from the reversal of the roles of Classics and light literature, and from the devastating up-to-datedness of the references: the 1890s Kailyard school of Scottish sentimental fiction, Thomas Hardy’s regional Wessex novels, Grant Allen’s New Woman text *The Woman Who Did*, published in the Bodley Head Keynote series in 1895, George Du Maurier’s phenomenal best-seller *Trilby* of the previous year (and the best-selling Anthony Hope’s *The Dolly Dialogues*, also 1894), Jerome K. Jerome’s New Humour, Rudyard Kipling’s children’s books, Walter Besant’s East End romance, and so on. *This* was the contemporary novel, the butt of numerous jokes elsewhere in *Punch*’s pages, and the thought that it was comparable to Homer and Virgil provoked nothing but ridicule. To admit that the novels on Mudie’s list were material worthy of examination in the Tripos was, *Punch* seemed to imply, tantamount to cultural suicide.

Some university dons agreed. It was not coincidental that the *Punch* vignette took place in a (fictional) Cambridge college. The ancient university was the last bulwark to yield. G.C. Macaulay, one of the main movers behind the introduction of more modern literature into the Tripos, observed that Cambridge ‘came absolutely last in the field’ of all other universities in both Britain and the United States in providing a Professor of English Literature.³ When finally in 1910, none other than Harold Harmsworth, the king of New Journalism, had endowed the King Edward VII Professorship of English Literature in Cambridge, with the mandate ‘to deliver

courses of lectures on English Literature from the age of Chaucer onwards', voices were raised in protest.⁴ It 'would be simply a Professorship of English literature dating from the beginning of the latter half of the nineteenth century', objected Dr James Mayo, 'and the effect of that would be that the Professorship would be a Professorship of English fiction, and that of a light and comic character. For that reason ... [it was] unworthy of that university.'⁵ Dr Mayo—who in any case believed that students of English literature required no training except the ability to read—had earlier opposed the extension of the period covered by the 'Outlines of English Literature' exam paper to 1850, for it 'was perfectly sure to result in the inclusion of Dickens and Thackeray, an extension he most firmly believed to be detrimental to the studies of the University, and entirely below its dignity'.⁶ The would-be reformers gave in, and scaled back the scope of the paper to 1832.

The problem was not just modern fiction, but modern (i.e. post-medieval) English literature more generally. This was the ultimate late-Victorian 'soft' option, and if 'chatter about Shelley' was disparaged, it was obscene even to contemplate chatter about Mrs Humphry Ward.⁷ As the Oxford Regius Professor of Modern History, E.A. Freeman, famously argued (and so had numerous others before him), literature was something people read for pleasure, it was a matter of taste and fashion. If it were to be recognized as a subject fit for systematic and rigorous study, which could be examined like other subjects, it would need to be approached in a philological light, or risk being reduced to the worst species of cram. But we do not want it to be examined, replied his opponents, we do not wish to see literature escape the 'easy' label if that comes at the expense of burdening it with too much language and history in the attempt to make it 'hard' or 'solid'. 'I think it would do no irreparable harm to anyone if English Literature were never examined on from now to the crack of doom', announced Walter Raleigh, the future Oxford

Merton Professor of English Literature.⁸ ‘There is danger in submitting the delicate flowers of English literature to the methods of the lecture room, the schedules and tests of the examination room’, wrote Stanley Leathes, a Civil Service commissioner and former Cambridge lecturer responsible for the English papers in the Civil Service examination. ‘Examination, like mines and manufacture, is necessary; but to examine in English literature is like opening a coal mine in the Lake District.’⁹

But whether one was against the introduction of English literature or in favour of it, whether one wanted to preserve the pleasure from being ruined by the drudgery of the schoolwork—the novelist Grant Allen contemplated with horror the prospect of Oxford students being examined on ‘the nice question why Richard Feveril [sic] did not return to Lucy’—or to preserve the schoolwork from being ruined by the frivolity of the pleasure, the Victorian novel per se was rarely the apple of discord.¹⁰ For many, especially earlier in the century, it was outside the equation altogether. As the Earl of Harrowby put it to the Taunton Commission on the reform of middle-class education (1864–68): ‘How many of our higher classes there are who pass away from Eton and Harrow without having read any one English classic and who know nothing of English but Dickens and Thackeray? It is a scandal. English reading of the highest order ought to enter into every part of every English education’.¹¹ Novels obviously did not count as ‘reading of the highest order’. The Liberal Cambridge philosopher Henry Sidgwick was wholeheartedly in favour of teaching the English classics, but popular novels were no part of the English literature whose study he advocated, and he lamented the fate of those schoolboys ‘who temper small compulsory sips of Virgil, Sophocles, Tacitus, and Thucydides, with large voluntary draughts of [G.P.R.] James, Ainsworth, Lever, and the translated Dumas’. He even quoted the conservative *Quarterly Review* in support of his view that while great English literature was ‘still a

desideratum in nearly all our great places of education', 'the future gentry of the country are left to pick up their mother tongue from the periodical works of fiction which are the bane of our youth, and the dread of every conscientious schoolmaster'.¹² Ironically, by the 1890s, the baneful authors listed by Sidgwick would figure on a par with the worthiest names in the new literary histories.

Another closely related debate which had been rumbling on since at least the mid-century, and showed no signs of dying on the eve of the Great War, concerned the struggle between 'language' and 'literature', between the philologists and those implacably opposed to the privileging of 'narrow', 'pedantic', and 'specialized' language learning at the expense of the appreciation of literature for its own sake. The dismemberment of the classic literary texts of William Shakespeare, John Milton, or Daniel Defoe into mere gobbets for grammatical and etymological analysis, for 'parsing' of the most mechanical kind, was a feature of examinations at every level of the educational system. Elementary school pupils and teachers-in-training had to put up with it as much as Army commission and Civil Service candidates, or university students sitting matriculation and degree exams. The domination of the philologists at ancient seats of learning like Oxford and Cambridge in particular raised the ire of the literary camp. 'Is the interest of the average student who enters the English school principally philological, or is it literary, historical, humanistic? Is it archaeological or is it modern?' asked Leathes in 1913.¹³ He was echoing sentiments expressed many times before by teachers, school inspectors, syllabus reformers, and university professors, and most notoriously by John Churton Collins, the most vociferous campaigner on behalf of the introduction of English literature at Oxbridge in the late 19th century. Collins wrote hundreds of pages objecting to the treatment of literature as 'mere material for the study of words', 'mere pabulum for philology', and to the excessive

concentration on the ‘barbarous’ experiments of the ‘infancy of civilization’ and the ‘niceties of the various Romance and Teutonic dialects’.¹⁴

But while one would expect this debate to figure centrally in a discussion of the place of novels in the curriculum, this was not in fact the case. The proponents of ‘literature’ had, on the whole, as little interest in Victorian novels as the philologists. Even Collins failed to find a place for fiction in his scheme of what that literature consisted of, and he was merely following in the footsteps of those predecessors who bewailed the neglect of English in school and university education, but who would have been incredulous at the thought of studying the Victorian novel. Raleigh, who in his inaugural lecture at Glasgow (where he spent four years as Professor of English Literature and Rhetoric before moving to Oxford) railed against ‘minute antiquarian researches and historical grammar—[teaching] English, in short, as if it were a dead language’, did not think it was the purpose of a ‘literary class-room’ to teach someone to write novels like a Mr George Meredith either. The end of a university education was to produce good men of letters and readers of books, who preferred the classics to ‘the Novel of the Season’.¹⁵ Indeed, when he composed his own study of the English novel, he name-checked everyone from Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding to Fanny Burney, Jane Austen, and Maria Edgeworth, but stopped short at Walter Scott.¹⁶

The Scylla to the Charybdis of philology in these debates was ‘cram’. Literature could be reduced to language or to superficial lists of facts for memorization, and neither approach required a proper acquaintance with the primary texts. Frequently, the two went hand in hand: the teaching of literature, it was feared, would end in ‘the getting up of little annotated text-books, with their scraps of philology and ready-made criticism and antiquarianism, for purposes of examination, very often at the expense of neglecting the text’.¹⁷ The ‘masterpieces [of

literature] have been resolved into exercises in grammar, syntax, and etymology’, Collins complained, ‘Its history has been resolved into a barren catalogue of names, works, and dates. No faculty but the faculty of memory has been called into play in studying it’. The general history of English literature was a subject tailor made for cramming. If something were not done, the future would be grim:

An elaborate apparatus of mnemonic aids would be devised. Such works as Mr. Morley’s would be summarized into tables for facts, and such works as M. Taine’s would be reduced to epitomes for generalizations. Criticism as applied to particular authors would be got by heart from essays and monographs, and criticism on its theoretical side would be got by heart from the analyses of crammers.¹⁸

The number of times these fears recurred over the course of the second half of the 19th and the first decade of the 20th century is beyond count. ‘When I read in a syllabus that one subject is the outlines of English literature from 1350–1832, I do not see how a student can come before the examiners without cramming a text-book’, Leathes still complained in 1913.¹⁹ The syllabus he was reading must have been the Cambridge Modern and Medieval Languages (MML) one (under whose aegis English Literature appeared). The regulations made it clear that ‘connected outlines would be required rather than detailed knowledge’: the examiners obviously expected the students to cram.²⁰ Cambridge was not alone in this. Virtually every university’s syllabus featured ‘period’ and ‘outlines’ papers—like the University of London ‘History of English Literature, 1660–1850’ paper—whose coverage corresponded exactly to the subject-matter of the literary historical surveys which flooded the market. Handbook provision and exam design enjoyed a perfectly reciprocal relationship. The length of the handbook entry even matched the

length of the required response: it was difficult to envision any other way of replying to a question which asked the candidate to write ‘brief descriptive notes, in the manner of an entry in a dictionary, on each of the following . . . ’ than by memorizing the said dictionary.²¹ In fact, the inordinate and therefore superficial coverage necessitated by the cramming of English literary history was a subject of government inquiry, and the kinds of problems revealed by the testimony to the Taunton Commission with regard to the English section of the Civil Service exams were still being invoked in arguments against the introduction of a separate English School at Oxford in the late 19th century.²²

Cramming was not just something the students and their tutors bore responsibility for. It was the result of a whole culture which militated against first-hand engagement with literary texts, a culture embodied not just in the endless exam-oriented ‘manuals, primers, sketches, charts . . . designed to facilitate [their] study’, but in what Walter Raleigh called that ‘debased and debasing invention’, the ‘literary time-saving contrivance in the shape of “Elegant Extracts”’.²³ Although novelists professionally involved in education, like Charles Kingsley and E.A. Abbott, denounced them in no uncertain terms, in the academic study of English extracts were all the rage. Sir Henry Craik’s *English Prose: Selections* came out in five volumes from 1893 to 1896 (volume five was devoted to the 19th century), and it was merely the admired top of an enormous iceberg whose foundations rested in the literary extracts of the elementary school readers which sold in the millions. Edmund Gosse expressed the prevailing view when he insisted that the general reader did not have time to read all of English literature, and therefore needed useful selections. And if this was true of the general reader, how much more so of the student, feverishly preparing for his exams! That student could also turn to another product of a busy publishing industry dedicated to intervening between the ‘whole book’ and its reader: the

educational edition of the ‘English Classic with Notes and Introductions’, constructed on the model taken from Classical scholarship. The typical edition of a canonical author like Milton, Francis Bacon, or Samuel Johnson, adapted for the use of the pupil, came packaged with prose paraphrase, parsing, specimens of analysis, interpretation and commentary, annotations, and perhaps a book of examination questions. Adverts at the back of virtually every handbook listed not just etymological dictionaries and introductions to English composition, but texts like *Shakespeare’s Plays for Schools. With Introductions, Copious Notes, Examination Papers, and Plan of Preparation* or an *Outline of the History of the English Language and Literature, Showing Sources and Growth, with Roots and Derivatives, List of Principal Authors and Their Works, Figures of Speech, &c.*²⁴ The philologist W.W. Skeat’s recommendations for further reading in his selection of English exam papers set in various Cambridge colleges in the 1860s and early 1870s included literary historical surveys like the ubiquitous Robert Chambers, George Lillie Craik, Hippolyte Taine, and Henry Morley, as well as selections with notes and illustrative matter, and ‘modern’ prose-writers and poets ‘Edited for Middle-Class Examinations, with Notes on the Analysis and Parsing, and Explanatory Remarks’. Skeat consciously situated himself as part of the mid-Victorian campaign for breaking the monopoly of Classics in favour of the national language and literature—embodied in the oft-repeated rhetorical question: ‘Why should we not know our Shakespeare as the Greeks knew their Homer?’—but he saw no contradiction in simultaneously speaking out in favour of cramming.²⁵

It was no wonder if the Victorian novel got lost amid all the shouts and bickering about philology, cramming, and examining. And it certainly did not help that there was a glaring lacuna at the centre of power—the Victorian novel was not canonized in the English literature curricula of Oxford and Cambridge; it had to encroach from the margins and from below. Its

introduction at Oxbridge was but the capping stone, the end of the story, rather than the beginning it is so often taken to be.²⁷ In fact, the Oxbridge-attending male elite would have been exposed to the Victorian novel in absolutely tiny numbers, for even once lectures and examinations which mentioned it had been introduced, the numbers of students attending and sitting them could usually be counted upon the fingers of one hand (the same did not hold for the women's colleges, but an influx of male students finally took place only after the Great War). Only two entered for the newly instituted Final Honour School exam in Oxford in 1896, and neither succeeded. No more than ten, and frequently fewer candidates sat the MML Tripos in Cambridge from 1886 to 1891, and there were 'six Examiners . . . to an average of four examinees'.²⁹ Things were not much better in 1909, when there were still fewer than ten students sitting the exams. That year an advanced section A2 was introduced to give those who desired to specialize in literature rather than language (covered by section B) an alternative. But though the section included a paper on post-1500 literature, it was not eligible for the Ordinary B.A. degree, thus making it highly unlikely that anyone would bother with it. In fact, the reformers themselves acknowledged this: 'they did not expect [the candidates] to be many'.³⁰

But Oxford and Cambridge were not the whole educational system. English literature held 'a foremost place' in the Army, Civil Service, and India Civil Service exams, and the Oxford and Cambridge Local examinations, for which many hundreds of boys and girls answered questions on 'the Victorian novelists'.³¹ It had been taught and examined by professors of English at University College, King's College, and Queen's College, London, virtually since the institutions' inception, at Northern 'provincial' universities (the 'newer' universities as the Cambridge syllabus reformers called them), and Scottish universities such as Glasgow, Aberdeen, and Edinburgh, which had always been receptive to the novel.³³ In most of these

places, especially towards the end of the century, overworked lecturers had to deal with hundreds of students on a daily basis. ‘In the Extension Lectures’, aimed since the 1870s at ‘ladies’ and the lower middle class (they were generally too expensive for all but the upper echelons of the working class), literature ‘fill[ed] a wider space than either Science or History’, and Extension lecturers such as R. G. Moulton and J. A. Hobson specifically focused on the novel.³⁶ Collins, a professional Extension lecturer himself before he became an English professor at the University of Birmingham, claimed that the reason the leaders of the Extension Movement were always calling upon Oxbridge to teach literature was because demand for courses in their most popular subject was not being met by the teaching supply. English literature was central to women’s higher education: many more women candidates than men attended the lectures and sat the English exams at Oxbridge—whether the special examinations for women, the college papers, or the proper degree examinations once they were instituted. It was also central to colonial universities, to Mechanics’ Institutes and Working Men’s Colleges. Walter Raleigh started his career in India in 1885 as the first professor of English literature at the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College in Aligarh, and his trajectory from there to Liverpool, Glasgow, and finally Oxford embodied the slow movement of English itself from the colonies and the provinces to the ‘centre’.³⁷

The national literature, in particular the ‘English classics’, had long been considered suitable for those whose path in life did not necessitate a knowledge of Greek and Latin, and although this did not guarantee exposure to the contemporary novel so much as to Shakespeare and William Wordsworth, a middle-class female student’s chances of encountering the novel in an educational setting were much higher than those of her upper-class male peers. Advocates of English rarely failed to make the disclaimer that the subject was most suitable for the average

majority, rather than the exceptional few, for whom the Classical languages (or philology, if the context was syllabus reform at Oxbridge) were still the way to go. In his inaugural lecture at Queen's College in 1848, Charles Kingsley explicitly advocated the study of 'the recent and living authors', for 'the authors which really interest and influence the minds of the young are just the ones which have formed no part of their education, and therefore those for judging of which they have received no adequate rules'. He called for the establishment of 'a really entire course of English Literature . . . up to the latest of our modern authors', with lectures devoted to the criticism of the most influential in 'the last fifty years of English literature'.³⁸ Perhaps it helped that Kingsley himself was a modern novelist, but his insistence on guiding judgement is not surprising when one considers that the pupils in question were young women studying to be governesses.

Of course, the middle and upper classes always remained much more likely to encounter the Victorian novel in their leisure reading than in the classroom. It was the working class—by far the largest portion of the population, and the one which had the least say in the processes of canon-formation, as taste-makers, if not as customers—which benefited from the greatest educational exposure to the Victorian novel. Despite the fact that the Revised Code of 1862 only provided for the recitation of poetry, and English did not come into its own as a separate 'specific' subject until the very end of the century, by the 1890s selections from Victorian fiction were already established as an integral part of elementary school reading books, in both the state and voluntary sectors. Full-text and abridged versions of Victorian novels were also issued by educational publishers for school use alongside editions of the English 'classics'.³⁹ By the 1900s this was no longer just a school phenomenon. A.J. Wyatt's *The Tutorial History of English Literature*—a 'smaller text-book of literature' issued in the University Tutorial Series—came in

tandem with the publisher's English Classics series, which the student was recommended to read.⁴⁰ The series included not just the usual pre-Victorian staples but Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *The Pickwick Papers*, and *Dombey and Son*, W.M. Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, *The Newcomes*, and *Esmond*, George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, *Adam Bede*, and *Middlemarch*, and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*. The Victorian novel was finally taking its proper place among the literary historical handbooks and university-oriented classics editions: in other words, it was becoming as worthy of being crammed as Shakespeare. The development was due in no small part to the efforts of those new professors of English who, unlike Dr Mayo, did not think Dickens and Thackeray below the dignity of a university.

II

Few professors at London and the Red Bricks were specialists in the Victorian novel. In fact, the majority could best be described as generalists and comparatists. Oliver Elton, Professor of English Literature at the University of Liverpool, for instance, phrased his opposition to medievalist philology in terms of the importance of modern French and Italian literature, and in his consideration of George Meredith in *Modern Studies* contrasted him not just with Dickens, Thackeray, Eliot, Hardy, and Henry James, but with Honoré de Balzac, Émile Zola, Guy de Maupassant, Maxim Gorky, Gabriele D'Annunzio, and Leo Tolstoy.⁴¹ But specialist or not, the greatest champion of the Victorian novel at the turn of the century was George Saintsbury, Professor of Rhetoric and English Literature at the University of Edinburgh. The reason for his enthusiasm was not far to seek. Before he was appointed to his post in 1895, Saintsbury spent twenty years as a reviewer of contemporary literature for big periodicals such as the *Fortnightly*, *Macmillan's*, and the *Saturday Review*.⁴² His early critical and review work was dedicated to

French novels, and later he broadened his remit to include most contemporary European and American fiction, so Balzac, Gustave Flaubert, Zola, Tolstoy and James were as much on his radar as the English novelists. Although he conscientiously abandoned reviewing upon his appointment, thus taking his finger off the ‘pulse’ of modern literature, his interest in it did not wane. He was not unique in this respect: many of his professorial contemporaries were also journalists and men of letters, and the boundary between their activities in the two capacities was often blurred. Elton’s collection of *Modern Studies*, dedicated ‘to the makers of the University of Liverpool’, was composed of articles reprinted from periodicals and newspapers such as the *Quarterly*, the *Fortnightly*, and the *Manchester Guardian*, and so was Collins’s *Ephemera Critica, or Plain Truths About Current Literature*.⁴³ The third volume (‘Modern Criticism’) of Saintsbury’s *History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe* contained pronouncements not only on novelists like Dickens, Thackeray, and Walter Pater, but on journalist and professor critics of his own vintage such as William Minto: ‘A journalist for one-half of his working life, and a professor—partly—of literature for the other, [he] executed in both capacities a good deal of literary work: but his most noteworthy contribution to our subject consisted in the two remarkable manuals of English literary history which, as quite a young man, he drew up’.⁴⁴

Minto was not the only one: Elton produced two *Surveys of English Literature* of two volumes each (1780–1830 and 1830–1880); Raleigh published *The English Novel* in the University Extension Manuals series; and Saintsbury himself was a master of the genre.⁴⁵ Unlike the narrowly targeted cramming handbooks, the literary histories penned by the professors were often geared at both a student and a general audience. ‘Some have described these volumes as “school-books,” and others have been good enough to call them a “popular series”’, Saintsbury

wrote in the Preface to his survey of *The Later Nineteenth Century*.⁴⁶ Collins, in his attack on Saintsbury's *A Short History of English Literature*, confirmed that it was

evidently designed . . . for the ordinary reader who will naturally look to it for general instruction and guidance in the study of English Literature, and to whom it will serve as a book of reference; for students in schools and colleges, to many of whom it will, in all likelihood, be prescribed as a textbook; for teachers engaged in lecturing and in preparing pupils for examination.⁴⁷

Saintsbury's surveys were indeed assigned in universities: in the 1900s the recommended texts for the 'History of Criticism' exam paper in the School of English Literature at Liverpool included his *History of Literary Criticism* alongside the works of Pater and Matthew Arnold.

What had these histories to say of the novel? 'There are numerous monographs on parts of the subject: but nothing else that I know even attempting the whole', Saintsbury claimed in *The English Novel* of 1913:

Dunlop's *History of Fiction*, an excellent book, dealt with a much wider matter, and perforce ceased its dealing just at the beginning of the most abundant and brilliant development of the English division . . . The late Mr. Sidney Lanier's *English Novel and the Principle of its Development* is really nothing but a laudatory study of 'George Eliot,' with glances at other writers.

One of the reasons for this relative neglect, according to Saintsbury, was the lateness in Western literature of prose fiction, and its 'comparative absence' in Greek and Latin: not until the 19th century did it really come into its own.⁴⁸ Although Saintsbury did not say so, the Classical biases and affiliations of so many advocates of English literature as an academic study would not have helped. Fiction barely figures in Collins's polemics: his entire claim for the importance of

linking English to Classical studies—the fact that English literature is incomprehensible without the Classical models which influenced it—rests upon this wilful exclusion.⁴⁹ For these scholars English literature was constructed solely in terms of pre-Victorian genres: poetry, drama, and non-fiction prose (sermons, political and historical treatises, oratory, and so on). Saintsbury was saddled with no such prejudices, nor did he bemoan the fact that ‘there is a very large number of educated people to whom “reading” simply means reading novels . . . for whom the novel exhausts even the very meaning of the word “literature”’. On the contrary, he concluded his book with this typical peroration:

In the last fifty or sixty years of the nineteenth century [the novel] did, as it seems to me, very great things—so great that . . . there is no division of the world’s literature within a time at all comparable to its own which can much, if at all, excel it. . . . In the finest of its already existing examples [the novel] hardly yields in accomplishment even to poetry.⁵⁰

This was an opinion which had remained unaltered since the 1880s, when Saintsbury claimed in an article entitled ‘The Present State of the English Novel’ that it had ‘produced some of nearly the greatest things in literature’.⁵¹

In fact, Saintsbury’s critical judgements in the histories rarely went beyond the standard clichés of periodical literary criticism, though he had as much interest in book historical questions (periodical serialization, circulating libraries, the triple-decker) as in generic ones (the mid-Victorian ‘domestic’ novel, the return to romance, the fortunes of the historical novel, and numerous other subgenres from the Tractarian or Evangelical novel, to the naval, sporting, and school one). He placed the greatest flowering of the novel in the mid-Victorian period (1845–1870), seeing if not quite a falling-off, then a levelling out of the field in the last decades of the

century. In terms of particular favourites, he admitted to a life-long love of Dickens and proclaimed Fielding, Scott, Austen, and Thackeray ‘the Four Masters of the whole subject’. To get a feel for his style of criticism (and its roots in reviewing) one need only look at the following assessment of Charlotte Brontë:

Deprive Thackeray and Dickens of nearly all their humour and geniality, take a portion only of the remaining genius of each in the ratio of about 2 *Th.* to 1 *D.*, add a certain dash of the old terror-novel and the German fantastic tale, moisten with feminine spirit and water, and mix thoroughly: and you have something very like Charlotte Brontë’.⁵²

This is more outrageous than the general run of Saintsbury’s characterisations (his treatment of Brontë in his other surveys is more balanced), but it is also typical of the kind of statement one could encounter on opening any one of his many volumes.

But whatever his other failings, Saintsbury could not be accused of exclusivity, as even a partial list of the Victorian novelists he discusses shows: Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Benjamin Disraeli, W.H. Ainsworth, G.P.R. James, Frederick Marryat, G.W.M. Reynolds, Frances Trollope, George Borrow, Dickens, Thackeray, Wilkie Collins, Charles Lever, the Brontës, the Kingsleys, Charles Reade, Ouida, Charlotte Yonge, Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot, Anthony Trollope, R.D. Blackmore, Margaret Oliphant, Dinah Mulock Craik, George MacDonald, J.H. Shorthouse, Richard Jefferies, James Payn, Besant, Meredith, Hardy, R.L. Stevenson, William Morris, and scores of ‘minor’ names. Some of these receive but a few lines, others are dwelt on at length. Bulwer-Lytton, Dickens, Thackeray, Charlotte Brontë, Charles Kingsley, Reade, Eliot, Trollope, Stevenson, Morris, and a few others appear and reappear from book to book, not just in *The English Novel*, but in *The Later Nineteenth Century*, *A History of Nineteenth Century*

Literature (1780–1895) (published in 1896 in Macmillan's 'History of English Literature' series), *A History of English Prose Rhythm*, *A Short History of English Literature, Corrected Impressions*, as well as numerous periodical essays collected in other volumes. Some obvious names are missing, but Saintsbury took it as a matter of principle not to write on living authors: a position he defended in virtually every preface, and which accounted for the absence of the likes of Hardy and Meredith from the earlier monographs and surveys.

Although his assessments of the novelists were by no means always positive, this mere repetition, reflecting to a great extent the critical consensus on the figures in question, is probably the clearest instance of canon-formation in the 'literary history' genre that we have. All the stereotypes are there. Dickens is the popular master of humour and fantastic character drawing, of vulgar sentimentalism and theatrical melodrama, who failed at realism and was now falling out of fashion. Thackeray, one of the 'greatest novelists' of the century, is better at character creation than plot construction, and deserves to be remembered for *Esmond*, his brilliant foray into the historical novel. George Eliot ruined her reputation when she exchanged the admirable observation of her earlier rustic novels for the mechanically constructed plots of *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*, marred by scientific phraseology, elaborate and erudite but dead. Charlotte Brontë's classic status is due to a limited genius which only thrived on personal experience; Trollope is notable for his professional but commonplace circulating-library prolixity; Morris's prose romances are underappreciated . . .

None of this was particularly original stuff. Edmund Gosse's *Short History of Modern English Literature*, published in the *Short Histories of the Literatures of the World* series he himself edited, was practically a carbon copy of any Saintsbury volume, though Gosse had more of a theoretical commitment to applying the evolutionary ideas of Charles Darwin and Herbert

Spencer to literary criticism, viewing literary history as a growing organism, defined by adaptation, natural selection, and individual variation.⁵³ Gosse—a man of letters rather than a literature professor—was in close enough proximity to the academic world to be invited as a Clark lecturer to Trinity College, Cambridge, and to be published by university presses, but he prided himself on his awareness of the subjectivity of critical opinions, which was ‘patent to every one whose brains have not become ossified by vain and dictatorial processes of “teaching”’. Nevertheless, his chapters on ‘The Early Victorian Age (1840–1870)’ and ‘The Age of Tennyson’ (a typical formulation in many post-1892 books) peddled exactly the same versions of the same authors as the ossified teachers. He also endorsed the familiar trajectory of Victorian literary history in which fiction took a ‘new and brilliant turn’ at mid-century: ‘In the hands of three or four persons of great genius, it rose to such a prominent place in the serious life of the nation as it had not taken since the middle career of Scott. Among these new novelists who were also great writers, the first position was taken by William Makepeace Thackeray’. George Eliot—the most prominent novelist in England after the death of Dickens—was ‘an agreeable rustic writer, with a charming humour and very fine sympathetic nature, [who] found herself gradually uplifted until, about 1875, she sat enthroned on an educational tripod, an almost ludicrous pythoness’. Since then her reputation had quickly fallen, as readers reacted against the artificial mechanical construction and the abstruse philosophical and scientific pretension of her later work. Mrs Gaskell, on the other hand, was ‘technically faultless’ but undervalued.⁵⁴

In surveys of this sort, whether the author under consideration received a discursive essay to him or herself or a mere paragraph summary, the tone was always impressionistic and opinionated, and the aim was to offer an appreciation of particular works as well as a summary of the critical reactions. This kind of ‘appreciation’ did not call for extensive scholarship or

research: it belonged to and it had come from the world of the periodical. Although Saintsbury did not fall prey to the journalistic weakness of self-plagiarism, and each of his treatments of a particular Victorian novelist was a genuinely new piece of work, the overall shape of his critical opinions did not change from the *Fortnightly* essays of the 1880s to the surveys of the 1900s. Except in terms of scope, there was little to differentiate the supposedly more ‘academic’ works from the reviews which had appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette*. As he wrote in the Preface to the first volume of his *Collected Essays and Papers*, in reference to his reprinted lectures: they are ‘really spoken Essays and not in the least the sort of thing that I used to utter to my class in Edinburgh’.⁵⁵ Whatever he may have said in class, in his writings Saintsbury remained the periodical critic. On the rare occasions that he alluded to actual university work in his books and essays, it was not in its relation to the Victorian novel, but to rhetoric, in line with the first part of his professorial title. But even in his publications on prose style he found a place for the novelists: comparing Thackeray’s and Dickens’s mastery of ‘English prose-rhythm’ for instance, examining Kingsley’s Ruskinian prose and quasi-metrical rhythm, the ‘specially feminine crudity which accompanied all Charlotte’s unquestioned power and passion’, Eliot’s ‘later quasi-scientific jargon [which] was not so *arrhythmic* as it was in other ways inartistic’, the ‘fantastic’ and ‘elaborate’ prose of Meredith, or Morris’s ‘Wardour Street’ lingo (of which he was an all-out fan).⁵⁶

But if the academic literary history was simply an outgrowth of the periodical essay in the aspect directed at the general reader, when it faced the student it revealed that it was also a near cousin of the handbook. Collins’s criticism of Gosse’s *A Short History of Modern English Literature* was phrased in precisely these terms:

Described simply, the work is an ordinary manual of English Literature in which, with Mr. Humphry Ward's *English Poets*, Sir Henry Craik's *English Prose Writers*, Chambers' *Cyclopaedia of English Literature*, the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and the like before him, the writer tells again the not unfamiliar story of the course of our Literature from Chaucer to the present time.

Beyond the few areas that he knows first-hand, 'he is at the mercy of his handbooks'.⁵⁷ One of these handbooks, though Collins did not list it, was Stopford Brooke's famous primer of *English Literature*.⁵⁸ The original appeared in 1876, and stopped short before the Victorian period. The Victorian chapter dealing with 'Prose Literature from the Death of Scott to the Death of George Eliot, 1832–1881' was only added to the revised edition of 1900, and was written by an American from Columbia University. It gave the standard account, very much in the mode of a Saintsbury or an Andrew Lang periodical essay, of the Victorian battle between romance and realism: the novel of 'stirring incidents' and 'striking types' vs. the novel of 'observation of the facts of life'.⁵⁹ All the old truisms were out in force: on the continent the novel focused on vice and crime, while in England it was more fanciful and idealistic; and the last two decades of the century 'revived the novel of romantic adventure, returning to the field opened by Scott; and the public, perhaps a little weary of novels of society, reform, and ethics, has welcomed the change. Of the new writers of tales of adventure by sea and land the chief was Robert Louis Stevenson'. The resemblance of this passage to something Saintsbury could have written was absolutely uncanny. The chapter then cycled through the familiar list, from Marryat, Lever, Disraeli, Bulwer-Lytton, Borrow, Gaskell, Trollope, Reade, and Kingsley, to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*—the 'most typical English novel of the Romantic school'. Dickens—'one of the great English story-tellers'—received a hero-worshipping paragraph with the expected platitudes

about odd characters and dramatic qualities. Thackeray was, of course, equally good, while Meredith, who belonged to the class of Dickens and Thackeray, was not as popular because of his strange style. George Eliot was ‘a country girl of great power of mind and much learning’, though ‘less famous than Scott, Dickens, and Thackeray’.⁶⁰ Henry James was mentioned briefly together with W.D. Howells as an American realist, and the rest of the chapter was devoted to other traditional kinds of non-fiction prose.

A.J. Wyatt’s *The Tutorial History of English Literature* was a handbook of a different type, but its contents were barely distinguishable from Brooke’s. Wyatt himself was a Cambridge lecturer of the philological persuasion and examiner in English in the University of London, but as with Brooke’s primer, the chapter on Victorian literature (‘The Age of Tennyson’) was only added to the third edition of 1909 and was written by someone else (a Mr H. Clay, B.A. Oxon.). Like the supplementary material in Brooke, the chapter surveyed the whole Victorian age in retrospect, and read like nothing so much as a critical essay on the lines and of the quality of an article in one of the reviews. It also put the novel at the centre as ‘the most important section of Victorian literature’ and echoed the literary concerns of the previous decades: romance vs. realism, the growth of the uneducated reading public, and the rise of the ‘great mass of magazines and other serial publications’ to cater for its desire for popular fiction. Saintsbury’s voice could be heard throughout:

The novel is perhaps the most elastic and adaptable medium that the literary artist has discovered . . . the variety of subject it treats is so great that the works of, for example, Dickens and Thackeray give us a more complete picture of the England of their time than we could have got in any other way . . . Moreover, the novel

appeals to a wider audience than any other form of literature . . . since about 1860

the big audience has been for the novel and only the novel.⁶¹

The familiar judgements of the familiar authors followed in the familiar terms: Dickens's humour and mastery of the grotesque; his great contemporary Thackeray's cynicism; Charlotte Brontë's limited genius; Eliot's 'over-fondness for scientific and philosophical jargon. Her intellect was apt to get the better of her'. 'A much more powerful thinker and a greater novelist [was] George Meredith', whose difficult fiction inspired imitators in the new genre of the psychological novel.⁶²

The grand literary histories and the compact handbooks essentially replicated the same narrative on different scales, but though they may have authored them, few university-affiliated academics were satisfied with this status quo. Collins, Raleigh, and Elton had all called for something to replace the inadequate handbooks then in existence, something which offered a proper overview of English literary history, and many believed that their prayer would be answered by the new *Cambridge History of English Literature*. 'The great syndicate-history of English literature, which we have delayed so long to make, is now promised from Cambridge', Elton wrote, and scholars would no longer have to be 'coerced . . . by the market rage for manuals'.⁶³ But was the *Cambridge History* itself anything more than a glorified manual, the crowning achievement of the Victorian literary history handbook genre? The volumes of the *History*, edited by A.W. Ward (Master of Peterhouse and major contributor to the Cambridge English syllabus reform debates) and A.R. Waller, began appearing from the Cambridge University Press in 1907. The two parts of the 'Victorian Age' finally came out in 1916, although the preceding volume on the 'Romantic Revival' also contained relevant sections—the 'Lesser Novelists' included names (G.P.R. James, Ainsworth, and Marryat) which often figured

in the literary histories under the Victorian rubric. Saintsbury contributed chapters on Dickens and ‘The Prosody of the Nineteenth Century’, A. Hamilton Thompson on Thackeray, and Ward himself on ‘The Political and Social Novel: Disraeli, Charles Kingsley, Mrs. Gaskell, “George Eliot”’. A.A. Jack, Professor of English Literature in the University of Aberdeen, wrote on the Brontës, and W.T. Young, lecturer in English Language and Literature at Goldsmiths’ College, University of London, on the ‘Lesser Novelists’, including Bulwer-Lytton, Trollope, Reade, Mrs Henry [Ellen] Wood, Oliphant, Blackmore, Wilkie Collins, MacDonald, Du Maurier, Ouida, Mark Rutherford, and several others—all staples of the ‘Short History’ genre. Young also contributed the final chapter of the volume on Meredith, Samuel Butler, and George Gissing. Du Maurier, Butler and Gissing were the only new names on the list; in all other respects this could have been a product of the 1890s, the kind of thing Saintsbury had been churning out single-handedly for over twenty years previously. But the editors thought they were being original. This was not a handbook of ‘great’ literature limited to poetry, drama, and non-fiction prose, they insisted, it was a genuine ‘history’. As they explained to the contributors, their aim was to give ‘a connected account . . . of the successive movements of English literature, both main and subsidiary Note was to be taken of the influence of foreign literatures upon English and (though in a less degree) of that of English upon foreign literatures’. In neither of these respects were they actually breaking new ground. Although the editors acknowledged the ‘cooperation of many scholars’, not just British and American, but continental, ‘whose labours in the field of our national literature entitle them to the gratitude of Englishmen’, the home-grown literary survey—from Chambers’s *Cyclopaedia of English Literature* to the works of Brooke and Morley—was equally prominent among the listed sources.⁶⁴ The line of descent from the older handbooks was quite straightforward.

In one respect, however, the editors were not exaggerating. It was indeed the case that among the lower reaches of instructional literature—the pupil-teacher manuals or Civil Service exam cram-books—the novel barely ever figured.⁶⁵ Yet even here progress was evident. By 1905, the regulations for the Board of Education’s compulsory exam paper on English Language and Literature for pupil-teachers stipulated Scott and Dickens (*David Copperfield*) for general reading. In 1907 the novel component was made even more explicit: ‘All candidates should have undertaken as wide a course as possible of general reading, which should include, amongst other books, one or two of Shakespeare’s plays, some historical novels, and an anthology of verse’.⁶⁶ This was quite an advance over the qualifications required of pupil-teachers in the 1880s, when ‘To read with fluency, ease, and just expression, and to recite 100 lines of Shakespeare or Milton, with clearness and force, and knowledge of meanings and allusions’ was the official limit.⁶⁷ But novels had sometimes appeared in the suggestions for course material even then. *Moffatt’s Pupil Teachers’ Course* was particularly exemplary in this regard. The section on English Language and Literature, besides going quite deeply into comparative philology, offered a literary history-style survey of the main authors of each period. ‘One of the most remarkable features in modern literature, both in England and other civilized countries, is the novel . . . In England this species of composition has been developed to an extraordinary degree. Many of our best writers have devoted their talents to it’. There were no surprises among the Victorians—this was squarely the territory that Saintsbury and other professors would tread to smoothness at the turn of the century: Marryat and Bulwer-Lytton, Disraeli and Dickens (still a wonder of popularity rather than a battleground for critical factions), Thackeray and the Brontës, George Eliot (‘one of the greatest writers of fiction of the present century’, though even here her intellectuality was remarked upon), Gaskell, Kingsley, Trollope, Reade, Oliphant, Elizabeth

Braddon, 'authoress' of sensational tales, and Charlotte Yonge, 'authoress' of novels of 'quiet, domestic English life'. The only unexpected inclusion was Braddon, a name usually omitted from the more extended surveys. The historical novel received particular attention, and the aspiring pupil-teacher was warned of the 'erroneous impression of historical persons and events' it could produce. 'Low, worthless novels should especially be avoided . . . There are, however, many excellent works of fiction which the pupil teacher may read with great advantage'. The author of the manual also wished to 'impress on young students [that] . . . the object of acquiring knowledge is not simply to pass examinations. Such a view of learning is nothing less than a desecration of it'.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, when it came to offering sample questions selected from previous examination papers, there was no sense of combating the desecration: questions were mainly of the factual and grammar type based on gobbets, and Shakespeare and Milton readers full of annotated extracts were recommended in place of the general reading alluded to before.

III

The road from cramming manual to exam was a short one, and both were characterized by a certain uniformity. At all levels the types of questions and the types of things tested were the same. The Rev. Thomas Stantial's *Test-Book for Students . . . Preparing for the Universities or for Appointments in the Army and Civil Service* from the 1850s included several questions on novelists ('Write also a list of writers of fiction, and their works, who have flourished since Sir Walter Scott') which were absolutely typical of the cramming style picked apart by Collins in his articles.⁶⁹ To what extent did this style still prevail at the other end of the educational and chronological spectrum: in the Oxford and Cambridge degree examinations over half a century later?

Cambridge offered two relevant examinations in which an unwary candidate could meet with a novel: the Special Examination in Modern Languages for the Ordinary B.A. Degree and the Examination for the Medieval and Modern Languages Tripos. During the period from 1908 to 1914 (when the ‘literary’ A2 section was introduced), Victorian novels did indeed make a showing, but not in the English literature papers as one would expect. These were just as limited and philologically focused as Collins’s complaints had made out—the novels appeared, instead, in the foreign language sections of the exam. The French, German, Russian, and Spanish papers were, comparatively speaking, broader, more literary and more focused on modern writing: the student encountered Special Period topics like ‘The History of the Romantic Movement in France (1820–1850)’, and questions like ‘Outline the history of the modern Spanish novel’, or ‘why is Tolstoy considered the greatest Russian writer?’⁷⁰ But in addition to questions on European 19th-century novelists (Stendhal, Balzac, Victor Hugo, Flaubert, Nikolai Gogol, Mikhail Saltikov-Schedrin, Ivan Turgenev, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Gorky) there were the Composition papers, which called for the translation of English passages into a given language, and it was here that Victorian novels came to the fore. The sources of selected passages ranged from Bulwer-Lytton to Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette* and *The Professor*, Thackeray’s *Pendennis*, *The Newcomes*, *The Virginians*, and *Esmond*, Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities*, Borrow’s *Lavengro*, Gaskell’s *Wives and Daughters*, George Eliot’s *Romola*, Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, Henry James’s *The American*, W.H. Mallock’s *A Human Document: A Novel*, J.M. Barrie’s *When a Man’s Single: A Tale of Literary Life*, Joseph Conrad’s *Under Western Eyes*, as well as Stevenson’s essays, G.B. Shaw’s plays, and Kipling’s children’s book *Puck of Pook’s Hill*. *Three Men in a Boat*, as the *Punch* satire had it, would not have looked much out of place in this list. The English literature section, by contrast, only stretched to questions of the

‘Give some account of the following novels’ type, dealing mainly with the standard 18th-century novelists and genres, as well as Austen and Scott. Special Period papers did not go beyond 1830 (nor, of course, did ‘The History of English Literature (1500–1832)’ paper which was the occasion for so much debate during the syllabus reform attempts of 1909). The Victorian novel only entered once or twice as a topic for essays, with prompts like ‘Thackeray’, ‘The genius of Meredith’, and ‘What has Criticism to say on the present vogue of the Novel?’

It did not leave much of a footprint in the Cambridge English lecture list either: the General Course of English Literature officially ended at 1832. The sole exception was one lecture course scheduled for Michaelmas Term, 1914 on ‘Romance and Realism, with illustrative lectures on Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot’, by A.C. Benson (an ally of Arthur Quiller-Couch), who also lectured on Robert Browning, John Ruskin, Thomas Carlyle, and William Morris. In the event, even this was ‘postponed until further notice’ (perhaps due to the outbreak of the war).⁷¹ The foreign language lectures, on the other hand, addressed ‘Modern Period’ literature in greater detail. French lectures featured Hugo, Alexandre Dumas *films*, the Romantic Movement, and ‘Outlines of French Literature 1800–1850’, as did German lectures, including even German literature after 1848. When Arthur Quiller-Couch began his course of lectures in 1913 as the newly appointed Edward VII Professor of English Literature, he dealt with topics such as ‘The Lineage of English Literature’, ‘Literature in the Universities’, ‘The Colonisation of English Literature’, ‘Patriotism in English Literature’, ‘On the terms “Classical” and “Romantic”’, as well as canonical authors such as Thomas More and Shakespeare. Dr Mayo’s fears about the Professor holding forth on Dickens and Thackeray did not come to pass.

The Oxford Final Honour School of English Language and Literature exam was, at least as far as the Victorian novel was concerned, much more advanced. The School itself was only

established in 1894, and was intended for candidates (not counting women) who had already taken Classical Honour Moderations or another Honours course. The first exam was offered in 1896 (lectures had begun in 1895 with Ernest de Selincourt's 'English Literature from 1789'), and from that year until 1914, the same authors and questions reappeared again and again, though shunted at times from paper to paper.⁷² The questions required the student to comment on gobbets, trace the growth, origins or development, assess the influence, estimate the part played, define the position occupied, give a short sketch, list with dates, and illustrate x by analysing y. Their phrasing often presupposed agreement with accepted critical judgements—an author's greatness, originality, or novelty, or the fact that a book or character occupied 'the highest place in the living world of literature', were taken for granted. But though conventional in this respect (as the crammers' opponents had predicted), the exam was more wide-ranging than its Cambridge equivalent when it came to modern literature, especially in its historical and comparative contexts. Here Victorian novels made a relatively strong showing. Over the years, the Special Subject paper on 'Wordsworth and his Contemporaries (1797–1850)' included the following:

'Show from the earlier novels of Dickens his sympathy with social reforms'
(1896)

'Distinguish between the "realism" of Jane Austen and of Dickens' (1898)

'How far can the working of "realism" be traced in the literature of this period?'
(1900)

'Contrast, as students of Human Nature, Charlotte Brontë and Jane Austen'
(1907)

The 'History of English Literature' paper asked the student to

‘Compare the dominant ideals of the novel represented by English and French literature respectively’ (1899)

‘Discuss the influence of Sterne upon Carlyle and Dickens’ (1901)

‘Compare *Tom Jones* and *Vanity Fair*. How far is a general comparison of Fielding and Thackeray possible?’ (1903)

‘Characterize the art and style of any *one* of the following novelists: Richardson, Goldsmith, Dickens’ (1904)

‘Discuss the relation of Thackeray with the chief novelists of the eighteenth century’ (1905)

‘Discuss the treatment of life and nature to be found in the poems or novels of George Meredith’ (1905)

The successor to this paper was the ‘Outlines of English Literature’ paper introduced in 1908 (its name changed slightly from year to year), when the syllabus was revised by Walter Raleigh. But though Raleigh was an implacable enemy of handbooks, the questions requested the examinee to reproduce exactly the kind of thing that was liable to be crammed from them:

‘Trace briefly the growth of the English novel during the first half of the nineteenth century’ (1908)

‘Sketch in outline the history of the novel from *Castle Rackrent* to *Pickwick*’ (1912)

‘Consider Tennyson as the poet of Victorian England, *or* Thackeray as its critic’ (1914)

A ‘History of English Literature After 1700’ paper (known by different names thereafter, such as ‘History of English Literature III’) was also introduced in 1908; questions included:

‘Describe the main features of the English novel since the time of Thackeray and Dickens, and indicate what you consider to be its present tendencies’ (1908)

‘How far are the works of Dickens or Tennyson representative of the Victorian age?’ (1909)

‘Trace the influence of *Don Quixote* on the English literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries’ (1909)

‘In what principal ways was the English literature of the nineteenth century affected by the progress of scientific discovery?’ (1909)

‘Mention any works in prose or verse that were in high esteem during the first half of the nineteenth century, but are now scarcely, or not at all, read, and account for their loss of popularity’ (1911)

‘Indicate the chief models or sources drawn upon by any one of the following:- Defoe, Sir Walter Scott, R. L. Stevenson’ (1913)

A Special Subject paper on ‘Literary Relations of England and France, 1789–1850’, first offered in 1909, asked the student to ‘Trace the growth of “realism” in England and in France, and discuss the connexion between the two movements’.

It would be possible to undertake a similar survey of the examination papers of every university that offered a degree in English literature, going back to the University of London exams of the mid-19th century. One could also study the syllabi of colonial institutions, or look at the lecture courses of the Extension Movement, or the topics of postgraduate theses like the Oxford B.Litt. The list of potential sources one could scour for appearances of the Victorian novel is long, but in all likelihood such sources would yield similar results. By the 1900s, in relation to the entire sweep (chronological and generic) of English literary history covered by the

surveys, and tested in the various exams, the Victorian novel still did not occupy more than a tiny section. Although this chapter has not dealt with them, the 18th-century novelists along with Jane Austen were more prominent, while the novelist who received the most attention by far was Walter Scott. But within its own circumscribed realm—a realm which champions like Saintsbury were helping to enlarge—a Victorian canon was quickly established, and perpetuated until at least the Great War. Dickens and Thackeray emerged as the undoubted favourites, followed at some distance by Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot, and occasionally George Meredith, whose cult was at its height at the turn of the century. This was a canon initially constructed outside the walls of the university, for the direction of influence was from the wider literary world (whence so many of the professors came) to the educational institution, rather than the other way around. The late-Victorian and Edwardian university did not initiate literary trends: it co-opted them, often belatedly. If an *Oxford Handbook of the Victorian Novel* had appeared at the beginning of the 20th, rather than the 21st century, it would have looked very different indeed, but it too would have touched on 18th-century influences, serialization, gender, communication networks, scientific disciplines, Classical literature, international cross-currents, style, and new reading publics, as the existing handbooks had actually done. Such issues had been debated for decades in the literary culture at large, and they were duly reflected in the student manuals and surveys of 19th-century literature. A hundred years ago the Victorian novel was just beginning its long journey to the heart of university English study, but it already came equipped with the cultural baggage of the Victorians who created it.

Notes

¹ Francis O’Gorman, ed., *The Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

² ‘A Novel Education,’ *Punch* (30 November, 1895), 255. The parody mocks W. L. Phelps’s groundbreaking Modern Novels course at Yale (thanks to Alexandra Lawrie for the information).

³ ‘Discussions of Reports. On the Report of the Council of the Senate on the Establishment of the King Edward VII Professorship of English Literature,’ *Cambridge University Reporter* (13 December, 1910), 407.

⁴ ‘Report of the Council of the Senate on the Establishment of the King Edward VII Professorship of English Literature,’ *Cambridge University Reporter* (1 December, 1910), 327.

⁵ ‘On the Report of the Council of the Senate’, 407.

⁶ ‘Discussions of Reports. On the Report, Dated 13 October 1909, of the Special Board for Medieval and Modern Languages on the Regulations for the Medieval and Modern Languages Tripos,’ *Cambridge University Reporter* (30 November, 1909), 316. Others objected that 1832 was a ‘natural break, with the death of Scott’, whereas ‘1850 brought them to the middle of the productive career of almost every active name in the Victorian era. That was not a good place at which to stop’, though instead of going forward it was assumed that the solution was to go back (314).

⁷ Victorian and Edwardian critics habitually referred to women writers as ‘Miss’ or ‘Mrs’.

⁸ Not to be confused with the Merton Professorship of English Language and Literature which was created in 1885, and to which a philologist was appointed. See Alan Bacon, ‘Attempts to Introduce a School of English Literature at Oxford: the National Debate of 1886 and 1887,’ *History of Education* 9, no. 4 (1980): 303–13.

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- ⁹ Walter Raleigh, *The Study of English Literature: Being the Inaugural Lecture Delivered at the University of Glasgow on Thursday, October 18th, 1900* (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1900), 16; Stanley Leathes, *The Teaching of English at the Universities, With a Note by Professor W.P. Ker* (Oxford: Horace Hart, 1913), 9, 12.
- ¹⁰ Repr. in Alan Bacon, ed., *The Nineteenth-Century History of English Studies* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 273. The reference is to George Meredith's *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* (1859).
- ¹¹ Repr. in Alan Bacon, ed., *The Nineteenth-Century History of English Studies*, 119.
- ¹² Henry Sidgwick, 'The Theory of Classical Education,' in *Essays on a Liberal Education*, ed. Rev. F.W. Farrar (London: Macmillan, 1867), 108, 110. Sidgwick was also an influential promoter of women's higher education.
- ¹³ Leathes, 10.
- ¹⁴ John Churton Collins, *The Study of English Literature: A Plea for its Recognition and Organization at the Universities* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1891), 22, 8.
- ¹⁵ Raleigh, *Study of English Literature*, 6–7, 10.
- ¹⁶ Walter Raleigh, *The English Novel: A Short Sketch of Its History from the Earliest Times to the Appearance of Waverley* (London: John Murray, 1894).
- ¹⁷ The Head-Master of Clifton College quoted in Collins, *Study of English Literature*, 102.
- ¹⁸ Collins, *Study of English Literature*, 22, 27.
- ¹⁹ Leathes, 11.
- ²⁰ 'Report of the Special Board for Medieval and Modern Languages on the Regulations for the Medieval and Modern Languages Tripos,' *Cambridge University Reporter* (2 November, 1909), 181.

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- ²¹ Question from the ‘History of English Literature, 1600–1700’ paper in the 1914 Oxford University Final Honour School exam in English Language and Literature. See John Dixon, *A Schooling in ‘English’: Critical Episodes in the Struggle to Shape Literary and Cultural Studies* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991), 67, for another example of the correspondence between exam questions and Austin Dobson’s *Handbook of English Literature* (rev. ed. 1897).
- ²² For the cramming debate see the documents reproduced in Bacon’s *History of English Studies* as well as Collins *passim*.
- ²³ Collins, *Study of English Literature*, 17; Raleigh, *Study of English Literature*, 14. Ironically enough, given his views, Collins served as a general editor of the publisher Edward Arnold’s Shakespeare and British Classics for Schools series. See Fred Hunter, ‘Collins, John Churton (1848–1908),’ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32504>> (accessed 9 December 2009).
- ²⁴ See, e.g. Thomas Page, ed., *Moffatt’s Pupil Teachers’ Course, Fourth Year*, New Edition, Revised and Enlarged (London: Moffatt and Paige, 1883), as well as Collins’s intemperate reviews of the Clarendon editions.
- ²⁵ Rev. Walter W. Skeat, *Questions For Examination in English Literature, Chiefly Selected from College-Papers Set in Cambridge, With an Introduction on the Study of English* (London: Bell and Daldy, 1873), vii. The authors (usually headmasters) of other cram books had something to say for themselves as well. For extensive treatments of cramming from their point of view see, for example, Rev. Thomas Stantial, *A Test-Book for Students; Comprising Sets of Examination Papers Upon Language and Literature, History and*

Geography, and Mathematical and Physical Science; Designed for Students Preparing for the Universities or for Appointments in the Army and Civil Service, and Arranged for General Use in Schools, Part II. Language and Literature (London: Bell and Daldy, 1858), and Rev. Robert Demaus, *English Literature and Composition: A Guide to Candidates in those Departments in the Indian Civil Service. With Examination-Papers and Specimens of Answers* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1866) and *The Prose and Prose Writers of Britain from Chaucer to Ruskin, with Biographical Notices, Explanatory Notes, and Introductory Sketches of the History of English Literature* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1860). Demaus was a fellow of the Educational Institute of Scotland, and the latter work was a literary historical anthology of illustrative extracts from the best authors, aimed at the general public. Bulwer Lytton and Dickens were the two Victorians who made the cut, and the usual mixture of critical and laudatory opinion rounded out the sketches of their life and works. With regard to Dickens in particular, the clichés of the later university critics were already in place.

²⁷ All such statements, of course, need to be qualified. Colleges set their own papers in literature and offered English prizes for decades before the English Schools were formed, or any professorships of English were established, and Victorian poets like Tennyson were co-opted for this purpose almost instantaneously, though the intercollegiate examinations in Cambridge did not go beyond 1815 as late as 1910 (*Cambridge University Reporter*, 1340). In Oxford, English was one of the subjects that could be taken for the lesser pass examination from 1873, and a special exam for women was instituted in 1881.

²⁹ Collins, *Study of English Literature*, 25.

³⁰ ‘On the Report, Dated 13 October 1909,’ 312.

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- ³¹ See the ‘Fifty-first Annual Report of the Local Examinations and Lectures Syndicate,’ *Cambridge University Reporter* (15 March, 1909): 668–9.
- ³³ See Franklin E. Court, *Institutionalizing English Literature: The Culture and Politics of Literary Study, 1750–1900* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992) and Alan Bacon, ‘English Literature Becomes a University Subject: King’s College, London as Pioneer,’ *Victorian Studies* 29, no. 4 (Summer 1986): 591–612.
- ³⁶ Collins, *Study of English Literature*, 16. See Dixon, *A Schooling in ‘English’* and Lawrence Goldman, *Dons and Workers: Oxford and Adult Education Since 1850* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995). Thanks to Alexandra Lawrie for the information on Moulton and Hobson.
- ³⁷ See D.N. Smith, ‘Raleigh, Sir Walter Alexander (1861–1922),’ rev. Donald Hawes, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35656>> (accessed 9 December 2009).
- ³⁸ Charles Kingsley, ‘On English Literature,’ repr. in Bacon, ed., *History of English Studies*, 90–1.
- ³⁹ The teaching of English (and the novel) in elementary schools is a huge subject in itself. See Anna Vaninskaya, Christopher Stray, Alice Jenkins, James A. Secord, and Leslie Howsam, ‘What the Victorians Learned: Perspectives on Nineteenth-Century Schoolbooks,’ *Journal of Victorian Culture* 12, no. 2 (Autumn 2007): 262–85; J.M. Goldstrom, *The Social Content of Education 1808–1870: A Study of the Working Class School Reader in England and Ireland* (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1972); Christopher Stray and Gillian Sutherland, ‘Mass Markets: Education,’ in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, 1830–1914*, Vol. VI, ed. David McKitterick (Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press, 2009), 359–81; David Shayer, *The Teaching of English in Schools 1900–1970* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972); Robin Peel, Annette Patterson, and Jeanne Gerlach, *Questions of English: Ethics, Aesthetics, Rhetoric and the Formation of the Subject in England, Australia and the United States* (London: Routledge Falmer, 2000).

⁴⁰ A.J. Wyatt, *The Tutorial History of English Literature*, 3rd ed. (1900; London: University Tutorial Press Ltd., 1910), v.

⁴¹ Oliver Elton, *Modern Studies* (London: Edward Arnold, 1907), 129.

⁴² George Saintsbury, *The English Novel* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1913), 273: ‘In regard to a large part of the subject of the present chapter [“The Fiction of Yesterday—Conclusion”] the present writer possesses the knowledge of a reviewer, week by week and almost day by day, of contemporary fiction between 1873 and 1895’. See also his essay ‘Twenty Years of Reviewing (1873–1895)’ in *The Collected Essays and Papers of George Saintsbury, 1875–1920*, 4 vols (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1923–1924). *The English Novel* was part of a series called ‘The Channels of English Literature’, whose contributors were mostly professors from Scottish, American, or new English universities.

⁴³ Elton, v; John Churton Collins, *Ephemera Critica, or Plain Truths About Current Literature* (Westminster: Archibald, Constable and Co., Ltd, 1901).

⁴⁴ George Saintsbury, *A History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe: From the Earliest Texts to the Present Day*, Vol. III (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1904), 553.

⁴⁵ For a discussion of the literary history genre see Lynne Walhout Hinojosa, ‘Shakespeare and (Anti-German) Nationalism in the Writing of English Literary History, 1880–1923’,

English Literature in Transition 46, no. 3 (2003): 227–49, as well as Stefan Collini, ‘The Whig Interpretation of English Literature, Literary History and National Identity,’ in *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 342–73 on Brooke, Henry Morley, the ‘English Men of Letters’ series, and other canon-formation exercises.

⁴⁶ George Saintsbury, *The Later Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1907), xiii. The volume appeared in the ‘Periods of European Literature’ series that Saintsbury edited for Blackwood.

⁴⁷ Collins, *Ephemera Critica*, 93.

⁴⁸ Saintsbury, *English Novel*, v, 1.

⁴⁹ ‘Some of our most distinguished Professors of English literature have been trained in a Classical School’, wrote Leathes in 1913 (9). Ironically, given Collins’s fierce opposition to philology, it was precisely the wish to model the study of English on the Classics that resulted in English books being studied as ‘pretexts for philological pedantry’ rather than literature: ‘the plays of Shakespeare are subjected to the method of instruction habitually applied to the plays of Aeschylus or Euripides, that is to say, they are treated not as literature, but as exercises in grammar and philology’ (Lord Lytton quoted in Collins, *Study of English Literature*, 114). Classics were Janus-faced: they could be invoked as a bad example of meaningless philological learning, or the national classics’ worthier counterparts.

⁵⁰ Saintsbury, *English Novel*, 299, 312–13.

⁵¹ Saintsbury, *Collected Essays*, iii, 149.

⁵² Saintsbury, *English Novel*, 299, 243.

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- ⁵³ Edmund Gosse, *A Short History of Modern English Literature* (1897; London: Heinemann, 1903). It was reproduced verbatim, though with additional anthology-style biographies, illustrations, and selections of primary texts for each writer, in Richard Garnett and Edmund Gosse, *English Literature: An Illustrated Record in Four Volumes* (London: Heinemann 1903).
- ⁵⁴ Gosse, *A Short History*, 386, 352, 370, 355.
- ⁵⁵ Saintsbury, *Collected Essays*, i, vi.
- ⁵⁶ George Saintsbury, *A History of English Prose Rhythm* (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1912), 382, 406–7, 408–9, 437.
- ⁵⁷ Collins, *Ephemera Critica*, 111.
- ⁵⁸ Stopford A. Brooke, *English Literature, With Chapters on English Literature (1832–1892) and on American Literature by George R. Carpenter* (1900; London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1906).
- ⁵⁹ Brooke, 257–8. See Anna Vaninskaya, ‘The Late-Victorian Romance Revival: A Generic Excursus,’ *English Literature in Transition* 51, no. 1 (January 2008), 57–79.
- ⁶⁰ Brooke, 266, 260, 262–4.
- ⁶¹ Wyatt, 226.
- ⁶² Wyatt, 250–1, 255–8.
- ⁶³ Elton, ‘The Meaning of Literary History,’ in *Modern Studies*, 137–8.
- ⁶⁴ A.W. Ward and A.R. Waller, eds, *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, Vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907), v, viii.
- ⁶⁵ See, e.g. Rev. Henry Lewis, *The English Language, Its Grammar and History: Together with a Treatise on English Composition, and Sets of Exercises and Examination Papers for the*

Assistance of Teachers and Students, 3rd ed. (London: Edward Stanford, 1872); W.J. Dickinson, *Hughes's Pupil Teachers' Examination Manuals. A Complete Set of Pupil Teachers' Government Examination Questions in English Grammar, Paraphrasing, Parsing, Analysis, Composition, and Notes of Lessons, To September 1879 (Inclusive)* (London: Joseph Hughes, 1879) (Joseph Hughes's Educational List was 'Specially recommended by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools'); James Beveridge, *Guide-book for Pupil-Teachers: Two Years' Papers for Candidates and Pupil-Teachers Embracing All the Questions Set, With Numerous Additions, Solutions, and All the Answers to the Arithmetic* (Edinburgh: W. & R. Chambers, 1885). The authors were usually school headmasters or lecturers in teacher training colleges.

⁶⁶ Board of Education, *Regulations for the Instruction and Training of Pupil-Teachers (From 1st August, 1905, to 31st July, 1906)* (London: Wyman and Sons, Limited, 1905), 5–6, 47.

⁶⁷ See the 'New Code—Schedule V,' in Page's *Moffatt's Pupil Teachers' Course*, 1.

⁶⁸ Page's *Moffatt's Pupil Teachers' Course*, 295, 298, 301, 300.

⁶⁹ Stantial, 29.

⁷⁰ All information is quoted from the Cambridge University Special Examinations in Modern Languages for the Ordinary B.A. Degree and the Examinations for the Medieval and Modern Languages Tripos for the years 1908–14.

⁷¹ 'Lectures proposed by the Special Board for Medieval and Modern Languages, 1914–1915,' *Cambridge University Reporter* (21 April, 1915): 778.

⁷² All information is quoted from the Oxford University Final Honour School examinations in English Language and Literature for the years 1896–1914.

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