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Making a debut

In *Calamities of Authors* (1812), Isaac Disraeli writes, “Of all the sorrows in which the female character may participate, there are few more affecting than that of an Authoress.”¹ Throughout the century, it was challenging for women to find success in a male-dominated literary marketplace. Women who chose the literary life often faced social censure, received substandard pay, and fell subject to a critical double standard. As a result of separate spheres ideology, it was difficult for women to gain access to masculine social and professional networks. Yet by the end of the nineteenth century, women’s opportunities in the literary marketplace seemed to have improved. Between 1871 and 1891, the number of women listing themselves as authors on the census increased from 255 to 660.² As a writer for *All the Year Round* put it in 1889,

Do but think how, with the spread of elementary education, and the growth of the press, the field for writers has been enlarged since Isaac Disraeli’s time. . . . And in no particular is the revolution more strongly foreshadowed than in the prevailing multitude of women who, by means of their pens, disseminate the influence of their minds over all the civilised parts of the globe.³

Many Victorian women writers began their careers by publishing a novel or poetry collection in book form. Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806–61), for example, began her literary career at age eleven by writing a Homeric epic, *The Battle of Marathon*, a poem privately printed by her father three years later. Likewise, Christina Rossetti (1830–94) wrote her first poem at age twelve, and her first collection, *Verses: Dedicated to Her Mother*, was privately published by her grandfather when she was just seventeen. Both poets’ entry into the literary field was made possible by their precocious, exceptional talent, which was then authorized and enabled by patriarchal authority. Supportive family contexts enabled both writers to define themselves as writers during a time when few middle-class women were encouraged to pursue work beyond the domestic sphere.

The publication of privately printed collections had the effect of nurturing youthful talent, but it did not provide an opportunity for either poet to write for a public audience. As Margaret Forster puts it, Barrett Browning at age twenty-one found herself “stuck in Hope End in out-of-the-way Herefordshire [where] she had no chance of coming into contact with any poets of her generation. . . . It was through publication in London literary magazines and newspapers that she knew she could catch the eye of other poets and those appreciative of ‘true’ poetry.”⁴ The appearance of her first poems in the *New Monthly Magazine* in 1821 provided much-needed affirmation. Likewise, Rossetti found a public voice as a contributor to the Pre-Raphaelite journal the *Germ*, founded by her brother Gabriel and his artistic collaborators. Although Barrett Browning published her first poems anonymously and Rossetti adopted a pseudonym, their entry into the public world of print represented an important first step in their careers as writers, leading ultimately, in both cases, to their high-profile status as celebrity poets.

Margaret Oliphant (1828–97) also began writing at a young age, composing her first novel *Christian Melville* at age sixteen. Unlike Barrett Browning and Rossetti, she claimed to have fallen into writing almost by accident, taking up the craft merely because she “had no liking then for needlework” and had to “secure some amusement and occupation” while tending her mother during an illness.⁵ Such a self-effacing explanation does not square with the facts of Oliphant’s early career, which demonstrate her seriousness and ambition as a writer. At age twenty-one, she published her first novel, *Passages in the Life of Margaret Maitland* (1849); after placing several additional novels with London publishers, she sold *Katie Stewart* (1852), a serial novel, to *Blackwood’s Magazine*. This eventually led to her influential role as a regular reviewer for the magazine, a career that spanned forty-five years. For Oliphant, as for many other women writers, networking was essential for gaining a foothold in the literary marketplace.

Elizabeth Gaskell’s (1810–65) entry into the world of print vividly illustrates the benefit of networking for a novice woman writer. In 1838, Gaskell sent an unsolicited travel sketch, “Clopton Hall,” to William and Mary Howitt, who accepted it for publication in *Visits to Remarkable Places* (1840). Seven years later, the Howitts published Gaskell’s first work of fiction, “Life in Manchester: Libby Marsh’s Three Eras,” in *Howitt’s Journal*. Once the manuscript of *Mary Barton*, Gaskell’s first novel, was complete, she submitted it to a variety of publishers without success. The manuscript finally found a home when William Howitt presented it to John Forster, a reader for Chapman and Hall. Such intermediaries performed an important function for women writers, especially those, like Gaskell, who lived outside of London publishing networks.

Women who were single or otherwise free to relocate often moved to London to seek literary opportunities. For example, in 1845 Eliza Lynn Linton (1822–98), age twenty-three, persuaded her father to provide her with the funds necessary to spend a year in London writing her first novel. Later reflecting on her departure from home, Linton remarked,

My choice was made. Selfish, or only self-respecting, I took my place with Mr. Loaden in the coach which was to carry us to the railway station; and thus and for ever broke down my dependence on the old home and set my face towards the Promised Land—the land where I was to find work, fame, liberty, and happiness.⁶

Before departing, Linton had published two poems in *Ainsworth's Magazine*, but in the city she was able to give her literary ambitions full reign. She wrote *Azeth, the Egyptian* (1847) and arranged to have the book published by Thomas Newby at her own expense. “London,” she later wrote, “is my Home, and there are all my best friends, my work, my Ambition, my surrounding.”⁷ At the termination of her year in the city, she returned home but soon made her way back to the capital, where she wrote a second novel, *Amygone: A Romance in the Days of Pericles* (1848), which she sold to Bentley for £100.⁸

As these examples illustrate, publication in periodicals and newspapers played an important role in many women’s literary careers. The expansion of the press during the nineteenth century – brought about by the spread of literacy, advances in printing technology, and the gradual elimination of taxes on print – provided a host of new venues for women writers that were often more accessible than the conventional book trade. Periodicals aimed at women and children provided particularly welcoming outlets for women’s writing. Kathryn Ledbetter notes that “while many titles confirm stereotypical domestic roles . . . they also aggressively examined topics such as women’s work, philanthropy, education, equality, and social issues.”⁹ Women further expanded their literary range by contributing to other niche-market periodicals, such as religious, philanthropic, family, and juvenile magazines.

During the early and mid-Victorian era, the convention of anonymous or pseudonymous publication adopted by most periodicals enabled many women to begin their writing careers without having to assume “feminine” identities. By contributing their work anonymously to major quarterlies and monthlies – for example, the *Westminster Review*, the *Quarterly Review*, or *Blackwood's Magazine* – women could write on politics, economics, and other conventionally masculine topics, thereby extending their scope beyond traditional domains of feminine writing. George Eliot’s first prose

publications, for example, appeared in a local paper, the *Coventry Herald and Observer*. As Fionnuala Dillane points out, writing anonymously for a newspaper owned by mentor Charles Bray provided Eliot (then Marian Evans) with a “comfortable first entry into the world of publishing” where she could experiment with narrative styles and negotiate the “relationship with her audience and her editor through her journalistic personae.”¹⁰

Anonymous publication was also useful for women novelists because it enabled them to situate their work outside a narrowly defined feminine literary tradition. In her essay “Silly Novels by Lady Novelists” (1856), Eliot draws attention to the critical double standard faced by women writers: “By a peculiar thermometric adjustment, when a woman’s talent is at zero, journalistic approbation is at the boiling pitch; when she attains mediocrity, it is already at no more than summer heat; and if ever she reaches excellence, critical enthusiasm drops to the freezing point.”¹¹ Eliot’s awareness of this double standard partly explains why she chose to assume a pseudonym when negotiating publication of her first stories in *Blackwood’s Magazine* and why she maintained this persona even after her identity as Marian Evans was revealed to the public.

Even though women writers employed pseudonyms defensively as a means of avoiding stereotypes associated with female authorship, some did so with a degree of playfulness. For example, when seeking a publisher for their poetry collection in 1846, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë assumed gender-neutral names – Curren, Ellis, and Acton Bell – so that they could negotiate with publishers without fear of falling subject to a critical double standard. They maintained these pseudonyms when placing their novel manuscripts with publishers Thomas Newby and Smith, Elder. After the appearance of *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Agnes Grey* in 1847, there was some speculation in the press that the novels had been written by a single author. To correct this mistaken assumption, Charlotte and Anne traveled to London where they presented themselves to George Smith, publisher of *Jane Eyre*. In a letter to her friend Mary Taylor, Charlotte recounts the exchange that unfolded. Smith walked into the waiting room, asking,

“Did you wish to see me, Ma’am?”

“Is it Mr. Smith?” I said, looking up through my spectacles at a young, tall, gentlemanly man.

“It is.”

I then put his own letter into his hand directed to “Curren Bell.” He looked at it—then at me—again—yet again—I laughed at his queer perplexity—A recognition took place—

I gave my real name—“Miss Brontë—.”¹²

Such lighthearted accounts of having passed as a man but being acknowledged privately as a woman pervade many women's autobiographical writings. In her *Autobiography* (1877), Harriet Martineau similarly recounts the moment when she revealed her authorial identity to her brother. In 1829, she published her first article in the *Monthly Repository* signed only with the letter "V." Her elder brother soon came across the essay, reading it aloud to her and exclaiming over the work of a "new hand." When Martineau finally admitted that she was the author of the article, her brother put his hand on her shoulder, saying, "Now, dear, leave it to other women to make shirts and darn stockings; and do you devote yourself to this." Martineau later remembered how she "went home in a sort of dream, so that the squares of the pavement seemed to float before my eyes. That evening made me an authoress."¹³ The sense of triumph – of being recognized as a talented author and being endorsed by benign patriarchal authority – characterizes many women's accounts of the genesis of their writing careers.

Working-class women writers

Because working-class women writers lacked the networking opportunities available to middle- and upper-class women, they were often forced to rely on middle- and upper-class editors and patrons. As Martha Vicinus has shown, they also formed clubs and nurtured friendships with fellow working-class authors.¹⁴ Women writers benefited from the rapid expansion of cheap periodicals and newspapers aimed at a working-class audience. Magazines of popular progress such as the *People's Journal* (1846–49), *Howitt's Journal* (1847–49), *Eliza Cook's Journal* (1849–54), and the *Working-Man's Friend and Family Instructor* (1850–53) were important early outlets for working-class women writers. As Brian Maidment notes, these periodicals were "essentially literary magazines with interests in the intellectual and social progress of 'the people,' and in humanitarian and progressive causes." The editors of these magazines, he adds, "saw themselves as patrons and cultural entrepreneurs of artisan literary values" yet published examples of working-class poetry and prose that "favoured the literary traditions of middle-class writing."¹⁵

Even though magazines of popular progress may have played a censoring role, they nevertheless served as significant venues for amateur working-class writing. For example, in her mid-fifties Scottish poet Janet Hamilton (1795–1873), wife of a shoemaker, published her first essay, "Counteracting Influences" (1850), in the *Working-Man's Friend*, published by John Cassell. She had originally submitted this pro-temperance essay to a competition sponsored by the magazine, which offered prizes to working-class

entrants whose works were selected for publication. However, as an editorial note appended to the essay made clear, the contribution “from a Working Man’s Wife, was intended to have been inserted in our Supplementary Number; but our communications for that number were so numerous from WORKING MEN themselves, that in conformity with our design, were compelled to make it give way.”¹⁶ Clearly, the magazine’s essay competition privileged male over female compositions. Nevertheless, Cassell “found a place” for Hamilton’s essay in the April issue.¹⁷ As Florence Boos points out, six of Hamilton’s essays were subsequently published in Cassell’s *Literature of Working Men*, making her the most frequent contributor to the series.¹⁸ Cassell also published her poems and essays in the *Working-Man’s Friend* and the *Quiver*.¹⁹ She went on to publish three volumes of poetry and prose, including *Poems and Essays of a Miscellaneous Character* (1863).

As Hamilton’s example illustrates, working-class women writers depended on the sponsorship of editors dedicated to the “improvement” of the working classes. Cassell, like many other editors of popular education periodicals, believed that creative writing was a healthy intellectual pursuit for working-class operatives. When introducing his “Literature of Working Men” competition, Cassell noted that an “opportunity will thus be afforded to the working classes for furnishing hints and suggestions as to the improvement of their own order, whether physically, socially, or morally.”²⁰ Unlike Cassell, who came from humble roots, most sponsors of working-class poetry were middle class. For example, in 1837 middle-class editor Christian Johnstone instituted an annual anthology of working-class poetry in *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine* (1832–61) called the “Feast of the Poets.” In her introduction to the series, Johnstone asserted that her aim was to provide space for the “modest Muse,” where the poet “may niche herself, and sing at freedom”; although most poems published in the series were signed with initials, the inclusion of the occasional female pen name – “Inez” or “Lavinia” – suggests that Johnstone’s “unpatronized genius” was sometimes a woman.²¹ *The People’s Journal* (later the *People’s and Howitt’s Journal*) also became an important venue for amateur working-class women poets. For example, “Marie,” a factory dye-worker, published twenty-six poems in the journal from 1846 to 1850.²² In addition, as Kirstie Blair has shown, the *People’s Journal* (1858–1986) and other Scottish weeklies published poetry correspondence columns that offered advice to working-class poets. These columns “functioned as a venue for the discussion of poetry submissions, regularly proffering advice on the appropriate subject matter, language, form, and style that poets should adopt if they wished their poems to be published.”²³

Newspapers, like magazines of popular progress, were particularly accessible venues for aspiring working-class writers. Eliza Cook published a book of poems, *Lays of a Wild Harp*, in 1835, but it was not until she published her work in the *Weekly Dispatch* that her poetry began to receive notice. Beginning in 1836, her poems regularly appeared in the newspaper's "Facts and Scraps" column under the initial "C" and later under the moniker "E. C." The popularity of poems such as "The Old Armchair" led to demands for her identity to be revealed. In 1837, the "Answers to Correspondents" column released Eliza Cook's name "in reply to a great many inquiries" and pronounced that she was a poet "destined to occupy a distinguished station among the metrical writers of our country."²⁴ As a contemporary biographer put it, this praise provided a catalyst for her career as a poet, giving purpose to her "burning desire to pour out [her] soul's measure of music."²⁵ The fact that Cook's poems were initially published in the "Facts and Scraps" column of the *Weekly Dispatch* suggests the low status often afforded to working-class poetry in newspapers; indeed, the work of most amateur poets was viewed more as filler than as valuable literary content. However, the broad circulation of newspapers like the *Weekly Dispatch*, which achieved a circulation of more than sixty thousand by 1840, sometimes made it possible for a poet to break out of the anonymous ranks and establish herself as a literary celebrity. Indeed, after her successful run in the *Weekly Dispatch*, Cook went on to produce two popular volumes, *Melaia and Other Poems* (1838) and *Poems, Second Series* (1845). After she founded her own periodical in 1849, she became a mentor to other working-class women poets such as "Marie," who published nine poems in *Eliza Cook's Journal* from 1850 to 1852.

Women and social reform

Magazines of popular progress were not only important venues for working-class women writers but for middle-class women writers as well. Three of the most significant of these periodicals – *Howitt's Journal*, *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, and *Eliza Cook's Journal* – were edited by women and regularly included female contributors. During the early to mid-Victorian period, magazines of popular progress were thus vitally important in opening up the literary field to women. They not only incorporated conventionally feminine content such as sentimental poetry and domestic fiction but also featured articles describing women's activism on behalf of the poor, thus providing opportunities for middle-class women to translate their philanthropic work into print. For example, the first volume of *Howitt's Journal* featured "Life in Manchester: Libbie Marsh's Three Eras" by Elizabeth

Gaskell, signed poems by Mary Howitt and Anne Bartholomew, an article on working-class housing by Mary Gillies, and a short story by Mrs. Hodgson.

Eliza Meteyard (1816–79) got her start writing for magazines of popular progress. Her first publication was a novel, *Scenes in the Life of an Authoress*, which was serialized in *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* in 1843–44. After her father died in 1842, Meteyard relocated from Shrewsbury to London, where she met Douglas Jerrold, who suggested her pseudonym “Silverpen.” By 1845, she was publishing her work in *Jerrold's Weekly Newspaper* and was an active member of the Whittington Club, a self-improvement society founded in 1846 that offered educational and social opportunities to a largely lower-middle-class constituency. One of the most striking features of the club was its active incorporation of women among its membership; this provided Meteyard with valuable opportunities to network with prominent women writers such as Mary Howitt and Eliza Cook.²⁶

Meteyard would go on to publish several books and a variety of short stories and essays, but in these early days of her career, Mary Howitt remembered her as a “poor dear soul,” who struggled to support her family by her pen:

She is sitting by me at this moment with her lips compressed, a look of abstraction in her clever but singular face, and her hair pushed back from her forehead, while she is busy over a story . . . Indeed, she is both father and mother to her family; yet she is only seven-and-twenty, and a fragile and delicate woman, who in ordinary circumstances would require brothers and friends to help her. How many instances one sees almost daily of the marvelous energy and high principle and self-sacrifice of woman! I am always thankful to see it, for it is in this way that women will emancipate themselves.²⁷

For Meteyard, as for many women writers who came of age at mid-century, writing was a form of self-expression and a means of financial support. Authorship was one of very few fields of employment open to middle-class women, yet the vagaries of the literary life made it a difficult profession for women who had no other source of funding. Nevertheless, Meteyard, like many other middle-class radicals, was fueled by a passion for social reform. Magazines of popular progress thus provided both the motivation and the means for many women to enter the literary profession.

Making a debut after 1860

Beginning in the 1860s, the movement toward signed publication in the periodical press to some extent constrained the range of topics women could pursue, yet it also provided opportunities for women to engage in

strategic self-marketing. For example, while early on in her career Christina Rossetti used a pseudonym or initials when publishing her work, it was not until 1861 when she began publishing signed poetry in *Macmillan's Magazine* that she was able to achieve literary fame. As Jennifer Phegley has shown, *Macmillan's* and other literary magazines founded in the late 1850s and 1860s were particularly supportive venues for women's writing. These periodicals located women "firmly in the center of the nineteenth-century literary marketplace as participants in a cultural debate rather than as subjects to be debated."²⁸ Even though women made great strides as periodical journalists, men still outnumbered women throughout the final decades of the century. The *Cornhill Magazine* was particularly welcoming to women writers, yet, as Janice Harris has shown, from 1860 to 1900 women contributed only about 20 percent of its content.²⁹ The rates of pay for journalists also tended to be lower for women than for men. Indeed, in 1891 editor W. T. Stead created a stir when he announced that the female staff of his weekly periodical, the *Review of Reviews*, would be paid at the same rate as male journalists.

In the later decades of the nineteenth century, women were increasingly defined as important consumers of novels, periodicals, and newspapers as well as the commercial goods featured in advertising pages. As a result, women writers were recruited in increasing numbers as producers of "feminine" content. Yet, through strategic networking, some women journalists were able to enter into traditional masculine domains. For example, with the encouragement of John Ruskin, Flora Shaw (1852–1929) began her career as a fiction writer; in the 1880s, another male mentor, George Meredith, introduced her to W. T. Stead, who employed her as a staff writer for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, a position that eventually led to a prestigious assignment as colonial editor of the *Times*, a position she held from 1893 to 1900. For the lucky few, an initiation into the workaday world of journalism sometimes led to a long-lasting and successful career.

Even though by the second half of the nineteenth century the literary field seemed more open to women than ever before, it presented a host of new challenges, especially for women novelists. As Gaye Tuchman and Nina Fortin demonstrate in their analysis of the Macmillan publishing archive, from 1867 to 1917 women were "edged out" of the high-culture marketplace for fiction, with men enjoying higher acceptance rates and securing more advantageous publishing contracts. They further reveal that "by the 1880s Macmillan paid men more than women—even for novels that sold as well and, within the confines of the critical double standard, were as well received."³⁰ When pursuing book publication, amateur women novelists first had to get past readers who provided advice to publishers on manuscript

submissions. Through an analysis of publishers' archives, John Sutherland has shown that the odds of making it beyond this first hurdle were poor. Between 1868 and 1870, Macmillan received 143 unsolicited novel manuscripts, eighty of which were explicitly known to have been written by women.³¹ Out of this slush pile, only six novel manuscripts were selected for publication: terrible odds indeed. Unsolicited manuscripts were the most difficult to place; women with contacts in the literary world had a much better chance of success.

On one hand, the literary marketplace at century's end promised financial and creative freedom. As novelist Marie Corelli (1855–1924) put it, “Chiefest among the joys of the Life Literary are its splendid independence, its right of free opinion, and its ability to express that opinion.”³² On the otherhand, the publishing world was a fiercely competitive marketplace where only the most talented and stalwart could survive. Corelli warned the young woman writer to expect to “fight like the rest, unless she prefers to lie down and be walked over.”³³ In the early years of her career, Corelli certainly demonstrated her willingness to fight for a place in the literary marketplace. Born Mary Mackay, in 1883 she assumed the stage name “Marie Corelli” and moved to London intent on pursuing a career as a concert pianist. She soon turned to journalism, publishing her first signed article, “One of the World’s Wonders,” in *Temple Bar* in 1885. As Annette Federico points out, Corelli consciously invented a fictional persona, presenting herself to George Bentley as a “Venetian” lady temporarily residing with the Mackays who “could trace her lineage back to Arcangelo Corelli.”³⁴ Just two months after Bentley published this novel, *A Romance of Two Worlds*, she urged him to place an advertisement “prominently before the public, with a judicious selection of one line from the press notices.”³⁵ As Federico demonstrates, this advanced form of self-marketing was made possible by the widespread celebrity culture at the *fin de siècle*, which relied on women as print consumers and as sensationalized objects of public interest.

Of course, most women writers at the *fin de siècle* had more difficulty finding their way in the literary marketplace. Marian Yule, a character in George Gissing’s *New Grub Street* (1891), expresses the angst felt by many women writers of the period. As she sits in the British Museum Reading Room,

Such profound discouragement possessed her that she could not even maintain the pretence of study. . . . She kept asking herself what was the use and purpose of such a life as she was condemned to lead. When already there was more good literature in the world than any mortal could cope with in his lifetime, here was

she exhausting herself in the manufacture of printed stuff which no one even pretended to be more than a commodity for the day's market. What unspeakable folly!³⁶

Gissing depicts the reading room as an oppressive atmosphere where literary work is both solitary and ineffectual. Such cynicism was to be expected during a time when mass-market publishing was viewed as being both grossly commercial and increasingly feminine. Yet, as Susan David Bernstein has shown, the British Library Reading Room was a vitally important location for women writers “to experience kinds of exteriority that proved absolutely crucial to their writing.” Here “they met and created networks of friendship, found mentors and publishers, [and] inspired and encouraged one another in their literary careers.”³⁷ From 1875 to 1884, women made up approximately 10 to 20 percent of library users.³⁸

Women's literary clubs and associations provided even more structured occasions for professional development. At the *fin de siècle*, women were admitted as members of the Society of Authors, the Institute of Journalists, and the Society of Women Journalists, founded in 1884, 1890, and 1894, respectively. By 1888, the number of clubs for women had increased so significantly that Amy Levy pronounced, “The female club must be regarded as no isolated and ludicrous phenomenon, but as the natural outcome of the spirit of an age which demands excellence in work from women no less than from men, and as one of the many steps towards the attainment of that excellence.”³⁹ The formation of the Literary Ladies dining club in 1889 brought together prominent women writers of the day, including L. T. Meade, Matilde Blind, and Sarah Grand. As Linda Hughes has shown, the “founding of the Literary Ladies was on one hand a claim to equal status and privileges enjoyed by male authors, and on the other part of the larger entrance of women into the public spaces of London.”⁴⁰

In addition to networking in libraries and clubs, aspiring women writers sought advice on how to succeed in the literary marketplace through print sources. With the expansion of employment opportunity during the 1880s, “how-to” employment guides proliferated along with periodical essays providing advice to novice authors. Literary careers were featured in vocational guidebooks such as Phillis Browne's *What Girls Can Do* (1880) and Mercy Grogan's *How Women May Earn a Living* (1883). Such guides offered encouragement and practical advice but also admonished women not to set their literary sights too high. For example, in *Press Work for Women* (1904), Frances Low introduces the writing profession in sobering terms:

If, then, I were asked to sum up my advice to the beginner, it would be as follows: Take up one or more expert subjects. Dress, employments, complexion, what

you will (so long as it is *in demand*), and make your name known as an authority thereon; but, at the same time, *refuse nothing* which you can do without dishonour. I do not pretend that this is consistent with elevated taste and culture; but I am here addressing the woman who must make a fair income if she is to live in any degree of comfort and refinement, and who sensibly acknowledges to herself, maybe not without a pang, that she cannot *afford* to reform the “journalistic stable.”⁴¹

Following on this dose of practical advice, Low provides tips on proof correction, the locations and membership fees of various literary clubs, and rates of remuneration offered by major periodicals in Britain and the United States. Periodicals also published articles offering practical advice on entering the literary profession and held contests for novice writers. For example, Holden Pike, writing for the *Girl's Own Paper* in 1891, provides some encouragement to women interested in pursuing a career in journalism, noting that a “great deal of the most effective work on our newspapers has been done by women”; however, he emphasizes that “journalism is an arena in which the disappointments greatly outnumber the successes.”⁴² A year later, W. T. Stead writes in the *Young Woman* that a woman journalist can “go about her business at all hours in English-speaking countries, without serious risk either of safety or reputation,” but he adds that women should not expect to “be judged more leniently than if [they] were only a man,” which includes being “admonished as freely as their male comrades.”⁴³ This combination of encouragement and caution characterized much of the advice literature for women writers at the *fin de siècle*.

Regardless of the discouragement women sometimes received, they continued to write. As novelist Eliza Humphreys (1850–1938) put it,

I began to write . . . when I was fourteen years of age, and for the one and only reason that is possible—namely, because I felt I *had* to write. The first thing to be accepted and published was a newspaper article. Oh, the excitement and ecstasy of that first acceptance! I feel the thrill to this day, and no subsequent success that I had ever *quite* equaled that moment.”⁴⁴

For Humphreys, as for so many other women writers, making a debut in the literary world was not only about seeking financial independence but also about the “excitement and ecstasy” of finding a public voice.

NOTES

1. Isaac Disraeli, *Calamities of Authors* (London: John Murray, 1812), p. 297.
2. Sally Mitchell, “Careers for Girls: Writing Trash,” *Victorian Periodicals Review* 25:3 (1992), 109.

3. "Authorship: Past and Present," *All the Year Round* 1 n.s. (March 23, 1889), 273, 276.
4. Margaret Forster, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: A Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), p. 35.
5. Margaret Oliphant, *Autobiography*, ed. Laurie Langbauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 16.
6. Quoted in George Somes Layard, *Mrs. Lynn Linton: Her Life, Letters, and Opinions* (London: Methuen, 1901), p. 49.
7. Eliza Lynn Linton to Mrs. Cooper, September 15, 1869, qtd. in Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets, and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 77.
8. Layard, *Mrs. Lynn Linton*, p. 56.
9. Kathryn Ledbetter, "Periodicals for Women," in *The Ashgate Companion to Victorian Periodicals and Newspapers*, ed. Alexis Easley, Andrew King, and John Morton (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2015).
10. Fionnuala Dillane, *Before George Eliot: Marian Evans and the Periodical Press* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 74, 73.
11. [George Eliot], "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," *Westminster Review* 66 (October 1856), 460.
12. Charlotte Brontë to Mary Taylor, September 4, 1848, in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Margaret Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), vol. 2, p. 112.
13. Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography* (1877; rpt. London: Virago, 1983), vol. 1, pp. 119–20.
14. Martha Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), pp. 158–60.
15. Brian Maidment, "Magazines of Popular Progress & the Artisans," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 17:3 (1984), 83, 90.
16. Editorial note to "Counteracting Influences," *Working-Man's Friend and Family Instructor* 2 (April 6, 1850), 24.
17. *Ibid.*
18. Florence Boos, "The 'Homely Muse' in Her Diurnal Setting: The Periodical Poems of 'Marie,' Janet Hamilton, and Fanny Forrester," *Victorian Poetry* 39:2 (2001), 265.
19. See Florence Boos, *Working-Class Women Poets in Victorian Britain* (Peterborough, ONT: Broadview, 2008), p. 43.
20. "The Literature of Working Men," *Working Man's Friend* 1:3 (February 9, 1850), 192.
21. [Christian Johnstone], "Our Feast of the Poets for September," *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* 4 (September 1837), 566.
22. See Boos, "The 'Homely Muse' in Her Diurnal Setting," 281.
23. Kirstie Blair, "'Let the Nightingales Alone': Correspondence Columns, the Scottish Press, and the Making of the Working-Class Poet," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 47:2 (2014), 188–89.
24. Quoted in *Notable Women of Our Own Times* (London: Ward, Lock, 1883), p. 142.
25. *Ibid.*

26. See Christopher Kent, "The Whittington Club: A Bohemian Experiment in Middle-Class Social Reform," *Victorian Studies* 18:1 (1974), 46, 37.
27. Mary Howitt, *Autobiography* (1889; rpt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), vol. 2, pp. 61–62.
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