Will Tattersdill, *Science, Fiction, and the Fin-de-Siècle Periodical Press*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016, pp. x + 220, £67.99 cloth, £29.99 paper.
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Given the barriers and the competition that institutions can place around and between academic disciplines (a subject on which Will Tattersdill has some wise and well-chosen words in the final section of this volume), English literature specialists are often understandably reticent to admit the pleasure that can be had from some of the kinds of reading that are part of our professional practice. Courageously, Will Tattersdill opens his excellent monograph with the declaration that “Reading the general magazines of the *fin-de-siècle* is enormously good fun” (1).

Genre is key to the analysis Tattersdill provides of *The Strand*, *Pearson’s Magazine*, *The Fortnightly Review*, and other periodicals. He sees the “Standard Illustrated Popular Magazine” as both a genre itself and a mix of genres, hence the pleasure that can be derived from reading the late-Victorian press: one contribution finished, “virtually anything could be over the page” (1). The physical “page” is crucial here. The author acknowledges and celebrates the transformational effect of digitization on the study of periodicals, but also notes what might be lost when one is reading fractionally for the article, via an online index, rather than the whole number. Advertisements, and other material considered by digital publishers to be ephemeral, and the happy combination of different kinds of writing and subject matter co-existing in the same textual space are lost when reading under such conditions. (Cambridge University Press are to be thanked that this book is generously illustrated, and every single illustration makes or reinforces a point of the argument – on the significance of cropping, for example, or in demonstrating a very early kind of data visualisation). Bruno Latour is a crucial if unobtrusive presence in Tattersdill’s argument about the public making of different kinds of scientific “truth.” Reading through an issue of

one of these popular magazines is to revisit the essentially multidisciplinary nature of the Victorian mind; wisely, Tattersdill does not seek to proclaim (1990s-style) the vanquishing of the binary in the organisation of human knowledge. Rather he asks thoughtfully how setting aside presentist dyadic models of, say, fiction and non-fiction or scientific and non-scientific writing, might produce richer readings of these periodical issues and of Victorian culture more broadly.

The periodical, and one periodical in particular, Hugo Gernsback's *Amazing Stories* (briefly and anachronistically but rightly considered) has a key part to play in the formation of an important twentieth-century genre: science fiction. Tattersdill calls attention to the significance of the comma in his book's title between "science" and "fiction." Kipling's "By the Night Mail" (1905) or Francis Galton's extended consideration of hypothetical telegraph signalling between Mars and Earth contain fantastical elements that might be considered science fiction in the twentieth or twenty-first centuries, but would not carry such a designation on their first publication. "Like all genres, S[cience] F[iction] exists *because* we assume it does" (14). Reading across an issue and a journal run produces a different model of genre, or even of objective reality, in which an interview with Wilhelm Röntgen and a story by George Griffith or L. T. Meade are seen to reinforce or speak to, as much as contradict, each other.

Such a mode of reading produces the further effect of interruption, of the punctuation of a novel (or even a non-fictional text: I have never seen H. G. Wells's *Anticipations* (1901) read as a serial before, which Tattersdill does to great effect) by material of many different subjects, tones of address, or even quality. Periodicity is key to the reading of Wells's *The Time Machine*, first published in different versions in both the *New Review* and the *National Observer* before its appearance in book form in 1895. Tattersdill argues that the Time Traveller's professional, multi-disciplinary, and ultimately disagreeing audience are representative of the Victorian magazine. "People," after all, "are as multiple and conflicted as periodicals" (61). Reading a story like *The Time Machine* serially and in its first physical medium is a truly fourth-dimensional reading experience. The reader is given a vivid sense of how, in Wells's words from his 1894 essay for *Nature* "Popularising Science," the "ingenious unraveling of evidence" (38) is common to the popular science narrative and to fictional genres such as science fiction and the detective story. As Tattersdill puts it, "Science and suspense are continuously bedfellows" (87). Wells imagines a dystopian future in which both the perception of time and material culture have ceased to exist, and Tattersdill's reading demonstrates an impressively sophisticated synthesis of periodical, narrative, and different models of scientific time. His observation that "there is no branch of science to which grammatical tenses bring more anxiety than astronomy" (73) is a convincing claim and also a nerd-joke of the highest order.

The book is organised around four key topics of Martian communication, future prediction, X-ray photography, and polar exploration, with Norwegian polar explorer Fridtjof Nansen heroically rubbing shoulders with Sherlock Holmes and Wells's first men in the

moon within the pages of the *Strand*. Like the objects Tattersdill discusses, *Science, Fiction, and the Fin-de-Siècle Periodical Press* is full of good things and teeming with interest. The sections close with reflections on contemporary issues, such as the geopolitics of human presence in the Antarctic or the dangers of what Ben Goldacre has dubbed Bad Science, in ways which feel pertinent and wholly unforced. Tattersdill unashamedly looks to reinvigorate the dead metaphor of the “wide-ranging enthusiasm” – neither width nor enthusiasm are anything to be ashamed of among our peers, students, or in public life.

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