Alexis Easley (ed.), ***British Writers, Popular Literature and New Media Innovation, 1820-45***, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2024, 336 pp. £24.99 (paperback). ISBN: 9781399514019

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The twelve chapters in *British Writers, Popular Literature and New Media Innovation, 1820-45* are a welcome effort to illuminate a period that was crucial for the development of British popular print culture. This period, falling across "Romantic" and "Victorian" periods, is understandably conceived by many of the contributors here as a transitional period in which Romantic legacies are integrated into a commercial print culture. Alexis Easley's introduction sets out the scope as exactly that: to "explore 1820-45 as a crucial era in the development of the modern press", with its "new media" and new ideas of "a mass reading public" (1-4). Each chapter is intended, Easley writes, as "a case study that models ways of entering into a vast field of study, drawing attention to the interactivity of readers, editors, publishers and print forms during a period of unprecedented change" (6). A second, perhaps inevitable feature of the chapters, Easley notes, is to highlight how twenty-first-century technologies have impacted the field, especially in terms of access and in identifying broad patterns across datasets. With this in mind, it is unsurprising that the chapters cover a fairly broad range of topics, nor is it a serious criticism to note that other topics are left out. Within the brief of adding to our understanding of the period and of providing "ways into" periodical studies, the collection is a resounding success. This review will focus on chapters themed around popular writers and celebrity culture, as a topic likely to be of interest to *VPFJ* readers.

Popular writers and celebrity culture are addressed by chapters on topics such as William Hazlitt's portraits of famous men in *The Spirit of the Age* (1825), memorialising Felicia Hemans in *The New Monthly Magazine*, Felicia Hemans and Letitia Elizabeth Landon as periodical poets, Mary Howitt's children's poetry, and Dinah Mulock Craik's early career as a periodical writer. While mainly about poetry not fiction, together these chapters show the increasing importance and changing nature of a writer's brand identity within a culture invested in celebrity figures. The practice of paying writers was increasingly common

and between 1810-20 most periodicals began evolving into "corporate" titles, carefully targeted at commercial markets and operated as profit-generating enterprises (Klancher 1987). Jennie Batchelor's chapter on *The Lady's Magazine* (1770-32) highlights exactly this process, noting the changes made in 1820 as the magazine launched a new series: the most significant of such changes was ending "its longstanding commitment to reader-submitted content in favour of excerpts from previously published works and submissions by paid contributors" (157). Such a move, mirrored in many other publications around this time, meant that poets associated with annuals like Hemans and Landon became popular figures whose work was widely recirculated in periodicals, as Caley Ehnes' chapter explains. Indeed, Ehnes argues, "Heman's and Landon's participation (both deliberate and unintended) in the new media of the 1820s and 1830s effectively positions periodical poetry as a key inheritor of the Romantic tradition" (177). In practice, poets could find paid work across titles and publishing houses, but for women writers especially, there were also gendered expectations about both the writing and about writers' popular persona. By the 1840s, Helena Goodwyn writes in her chapter on Mulock Craick, the professional route into periodicals had "the air of an established model" that "young, ambitious writers could adopt and adapt to suit their needs, talents and interests" (198).

Readers, for their part, expected to get to know writers, as Chris Haffenden suggests, partly as a way to reduce the alienation that might result from textual overload: "with an increasing abundance of texts now being produced by print capitalism, the challenge became one of prioritising scarce attention" (42). Celebrity culture was a way to focus attention and reduce alienation via strategies designed to create intimacy and a sense of proximity. The contributors don't use the term "attention economy", but we might think of it as such. And, as Mark W. Turner's excellent chapter on "extractive miscellaneity" makes clear, extractive practices – excerpting, reprinting, and recirculating – correlated with extractive reading practices such as scrapbooking. Turner draws a suggestive comparison between "extractive miscellaneity" and "extractive colonialism" (34-6), and it would be interesting to consider this more fully alongside reading practices like scrapbooking to see variations in how readers engaged with political and cultural narratives. Reading behaviours and politics reappear later in the volume in Sara L. Maurer's provocative and interesting account of texts associated with charitable visiting as part of a longer history of paperwork and social work. Again, attention is important: "the media system of visiting mitigated some of the most dehumanising effects of paperwork by associating this work with the practices of an intensive reader – a figure who carefully returned again and again to text, respectfully seeking what meaning might be pulled from it" (245). If, as these chapters suggest, attention is political, then Sofia Prado Huggins' close reading of paratextual features in *The Anti-Slavery Reporter* in chapter 10 is a good model for one way of studying it. Huggins analysis how footnotes, punctuation marks, font size, and page numbers direct readers through the text, working to the geographical, emotional, and conceptual gaps between reader and colony, but also to negotiate the British periodical's own central authority above colonial sources.

For scholars interested in popular fiction, this volume is likely to be of much interest. Chapters suggest interesting new ways of approaching popular writing and reading practices, and do much to explain how the models familiar later in the period first came about. Personally, I would have liked to have seen a wider range of writers discussed. Chapters like Linda K. Hughes on Mary Howitt's children's poetry and Brian Maidment's elucidation of 1830s humour give a sense of some of the popular forms that sometimes get overlooked, and I would have liked more on these less familiar forms that were so distinct to this period.

All in all, this volume is recommended to anyone interested in the development of popular writing in the nineteenth century.

Works Cited

Klancher, Jon P. 1987. *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790-1832.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.