Review of Alison Hedley, *Making Pictorial Print: Media Literacy and Mass Culture in British Magazines, 1885–1918*

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Reviews

Alison Hedley, *Making Pictorial Print: Media Literacy and Mass Culture in British Magazines, 1885–1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022). 248 pp. ISBN 9781487506735

Wilkie Collins's last novel, *Blind Love*, was serialized in the *Illustrated London News* from 6 July to 28 December 1889 and completed from the author's notes by editor Walter Besant after Collins died on 23 September 1889. Less formally interesting than *The Moonstone* (1868) and less suspenseful than *The Woman in White* (1859–60), it has always seemed to me like a tired coda in Collins's oeuvre — a novel that harks back to the sensational sixties rather than looking forward to the yellow nineties. Yet its publication format in the *ILN* perhaps compels more than its plot: it featured an astonishing 68 illustrations plus 26 chapter initials by Amédée Forestier, the illustrations including a fabulous portrait of its protagonist, Iris Henley, who stares directly out at the reader, hands behind her head, daring a response.

This image's bold invitation to readers to engage with Collins's heroine encapsulates the rich engagement between readers and late nineteenth-century illustrated periodicals that Alison Hedley analyses in *Making Pictorial Print: Media Literacy and Mass Culture in British Magazines, 1885–1918*. *Blind Love* does not feature in the book: Hedley eschews analysis of text-image relations in serial fiction, focusing instead on illustrated journalism, advertisements, data visualizations, scrapbooks, and photographs. Yet her analysis suggests interesting possibilities for re-assessing Collins's novel — and other late-Victorian illustrated fiction — in the light of the rapidly changing late-century mass media landscape that she so ably investigates.

Across a wide-ranging yet succinct introduction, five chapter-long case studies, and a conclusion, Hedley traces how popular illustrated periodicals managed to '[maintain] a central place in the media landscape at a time when mechanical communication technologies were rapidly displacing print' (p. 4). Hedley's focus on turn-of-the-century popular illustrated periodicals draws attention to this key genre in the nineteenth-century development of mass culture. Buttressed by careful archival research, rigorous theorization, and generous scholarly contextualization, *Making Pictorial Print* tells a fascinating story about readers' engagement with evolving design aesthetics — one that will interest not only scholars of periodical studies but also literary critics as well as book, art, media, and social historians.

For readers, like me, who came of intellectual age in the late twentieth century, the media shift that Hedley describes presaged the digital shift we have experienced: when I began university in 1989, I handwrote essays that I then typed on a roommate's electric typewriter; when I bought a desktop computer in 1993, the year my university library transitioned from a card catalogue to an online database, I could finally word process essays and correspond with friends on Pine email. As a system shift, our recent digital revolution is comparable to the Victorian print revolution, which Hedley outlines in her helpful introduction, when, as she notes, the *Illustrated London News* was born twice: first in 1842 and then again at the turn of the twentieth century, when 'it transitioned to a more deliberately multimodal aesthetic to participate in the late-Victorian new media milieu' (p. 22). This transition relied on changes that facilitated the growth of illustrated

journalism: tax repeals on stamps, advertisements, and paper from 1830 to 1861; the division of wood engravers' industrial labour; the advent of rotary presses, wood pulp paper, and linotype; and the development of photomechanical image reproduction.

Hedley identifies the technological advancements of the line block process (for reproducing black-and-white line drawings) and the halftone process (for reproducing paintings and greyscale photos) as key changes in the 1880s and 1890s that transformed the illustrated press, eliminating engravers, increasing the number and kind of printed images, and engaging readers in a new multimodal, self-conscious aesthetic. Her book thus focuses on images produced by these reproduction processes, using the concepts of *print media literacy* and the *print technological imagination* to guide analyses of illustrated journalism in the *ILN*, advertisements in the *ILN* and the *Graphic*, data visualizations in *Pearson's Magazine*, scrapbook media, and snapshots in the *Strand*.

Hedley runs up against the methodological challenge of reconstructing such engagements in the absence of specific readers' written responses. Instead of relying on diaries or letters, for example, from which Jonathan Rose gleaned readers' responses for his *Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (2001), Hedley suggests that print formats and modes of reproduction can themselves teach us about historical readers' responses. Indeed, she argues that popular illustrated periodicals intentionally drew attention to these formats and modes of reproduction, teaching readers how to read them. In a canny and enjoyable move, she also turns to scrapbooks for pictorial evidence of how specific readers engaged with popular illustrated periodicals, often subverting such periodicals' consumer culture ethos. In her final chapter, she unearths a little-known periodical feature in the *Strand* that published readers' own snapshot collages — effectively, an archive of published readers' responses.

Chapter One analyses how the *ILN* honed its 'guiding principle of illustrated journalism: the importance of pictorial representation as a way of documenting the world' (p. 28) at the fin de siècle, when new image reproduction technologies facilitated 'visually oriented, multimodal storytelling' (p. 28). At 'this pivotal point' (p. 29), 'news weeklies subverted print's established text-image hierarchy' (p. 29), with images squeezing out text on the page. Hedley's analysis combines close reading (the traditional tool of literary critics) and statistical surveys (that of social scientists) as it zooms in on how intermediality works in exemplary *ILN* content — the *Coronation and Procession* number (1902), 'Stories without Words' (1906), and 'Fairy Stories by Photography' (1907) — and zooms out on how the ratio of illustration to letterpress changed from 1842 to 1907. Supplementing work by Tom Gretton, Paul Fyfe, and Qian Ge, this chapter demonstrates how 'the ILN repositioned itself within the new media milieu, effectively ensuring that print remained essential to popular culture well into the twentieth century even as this culture's ecosystem continued to diversify' (p. 62). It also explains how the first *ILN* number of 1907 launched 'a new, more pictorial look' (p. 43) even as it silently heralded the end of fiction publication in the magazine.

Chapter Two considers how the changing aesthetic strategies of print advertisements impacted readers' engagement with the *ILN* and the *Graphic* between 1885 and 1906. Expanding beyond stock images and letterpress repetition, periodical advertisements mobilized new strategies such as 'headlines set in display type, copy set across column rules, large picture blocks, and full-page displays' (p. 68). Hedley identifies *kitsch* ('techniques of gaudy amplification' [p. 69]) and *mélange* ('produced from the contrasting discourses, images, and use of space within a single advertisement,

or within a cluster of advertisements sharing page space' [p. 72]) as key 'multimodal aesthetic strategies through which late-Victorian periodical advertisers sought to shape readers' understanding of consumer-oriented popular culture' (p. 68). She traces these strategies across a range of advertisements (for Pears' soap, Savory and Moore cocoa, and Hennessy's brandy, among other products), noting such advertisements' increasing aesthetic hybridity as one of many periodical 'strategies for grooming readers to participate in popular culture as statistical consumers' (p. 78). In analysing an anonymous scrapbook (a wonderful image from which is reproduced in this chapter), Hedley also suggests how readers pushed back against such interpellation, using tactics of 'curatorial poaching' and 'counter-interpretive hyper-reading' (p. 87) to ironize middle-class consumerism. Cutting out and re-assembling advertising images in scrapbooks or scanning advertisements and editorial content out of order allowed readers to produce new meanings that exceeded those of their periodical source material.

In Chapter Three, Hedley turns to what she calls *population journalism*, analysing this genre, which combines 'entertaining data graphics with narrative analyses of vital statistics about human populations' (p. 89), in *Pearson's Magazine* from 1896 to 1902. As she points out, scholarship on data visualization has focused on the nineteenth-century development of data graphics in specialized fields rather than for general readers. Yet, as her analysis of both abstract and photorealistic data visualizations in *Pearson's* makes clear, population journalism was popular among the periodical's wide range of readers.

Chapter Four examines scrapbooks as evidence of readers' cultivation of 'visual literacy and design proficiencies' (p. 116) and as models of their makers' cultural knowledge organization. Scrapbook makers' practice of cutting images and text from periodicals and pasting them into the new print form of a scrapbook resembled periodical editors' practice of borrowing materials from other periodicals in a process that Ellen Gruber Garvey dubs 'writing with scissors' (p. 120). Hedley examines scrapbooks held in three libraries (at the University of Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan University, and the Library of Birmingham), identifying organizational strategies such as chronology, local history, and visual juxtaposition. Extracting print materials from periodical sources and remediating them according to idiosyncratic aesthetic preferences, readers made something new out of the old form of the illustrated periodicals — even as these periodicals struggled to remake themselves in a new media landscape.

Chapter Five considers readers' comic photographic mash-ups — a form of 'Victorian Photoshopping' (p. 141) — that were contributed to the 'Curiosities' feature in the *Strand* from 1896 to 1918. Hedley draws attention to what she calls the *Strand*'s '*novelty journalism*' (p. 144), fluffy non-fiction journalism that appeared in each sixpence monthly issue: 'This genre capitalized on photomechanical technology's affordances and the magazine's highly visual layouts to create multimodal print exhibitions in which the everyday dovetailed with the fanciful' (p. 144). As this feature developed, it increasingly encouraged readers' participation, mingling uncredited editors' items and amateur contributors' submissions. The feature 'linked the entrepreneurial and populist mandates' (p. 150) of two famous Georges: George Newnes, founder of the *Strand*, and George Eastman, founder of Eastman Kodak, whose Pocket Kodak appeared in 1895 and facilitated the reader engagement that kept 'Curiosities' piquing readers' interest for over two decades. In a perceptive Conclusion, Hedley teases out how 'the Victorian legacy of digital media continues to shape user engagement' (p. 173).

Throughout the book, Hedley's analyses function like the scrapbooks

she describes in Chapters Two and Five, juxtaposing elements of turn-of-the-century print culture for current readers in new and lively ways. The effect of such juxtaposition is both enriching and estranging: enriching in offering new ways to think about popular illustrated periodicals and their multimodal engagement of readers at a moment when new media forms (the gramophone, film, the radio) made incursions on print's central cultural position; estranging in reminding us how much imagination and expertise are required to reconstruct the knowledges that late-Victorian readers took for granted. Such readers may have been 'equipped to recognize a halftone image as such and […] situate it as the product of recent innovations in photomechanical mass image reproduction' (p. 108), but are we? With Hedley's book in hand and in mind as we return to the archive of popular illustrated periodicals, we may well be better equipped to recognize not only such a halftone image but also its signifying function in this transitional period of mass culture when print did not disappear (like serial fiction in the *ILN*) but rather morphed into something new and modern: 'Having previously occupied a central role in Victorian popular culture, these magazines maintained a leading place within the turn-of-the-century milieu of mass-media culture through aesthetic interconnectivity with new media such as photography and film. In other words, thanks in large part to the magazines, print remained a major medium of a popular culture, despite the increasing prominence of non-print communication technologies' (p. 30).

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