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# “Contributing to Most Things”: Richard Marsh, Literary Production, and the Fin de Siècle Periodicals Market

MINNA VUOHELAINEN

In an interview published posthumously in the *Strand Magazine* in November 1915, Richard Marsh (1857-1915) recounts how he “Broke into Print”: “I doubt if there was a time when I did not write—beginning, I do believe, with my first pair of knickerbockers. I used to lie awake at night telling myself stories; the following day I would write them down.”<sup>1</sup> Marsh’s humorous account emphasises the importance of imagination and entertainment above artistic achievement and indicates that storytelling, for him, was first and foremost a pleasurable if compulsive activity. However, when discussing his first publication, a serial story published in a boys’ paper when he was but the “merest child,” Marsh soon reveals a second consideration driving him to write.<sup>2</sup> He distinctly remembers being paid the princely sum of “thirty shillings” for the story and recalls the money as “quite a burden” because he did not know how to cash in a post-office order and dared not consult his relatives for fear of having the sum “taken from [him] altogether, or else doled out in instalments of, say, twopence a time.”<sup>3</sup> Describing himself as “obsessed by the anxiety to get that thirty shillings,” Marsh confesses that the sum “in those days represented to [him] fabulous wealth,” and he “set [his] heart on having it for [his] very own!”<sup>4</sup> Finally, he recalls, he was “able to convert it into coin of the realm—and then that thirty shillings flew!”<sup>5</sup> As Marsh acknowledges, his writing career was driven not only by his love of storytelling but also by financial and professional incentives, which led to a determined effort to supply leisure reading for the widest possible audience. Now best known for his gothic novel *The Beetle: A Mystery* (1897), which rivalled and indeed outsold Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* well into the twentieth century, Marsh was also a skilful manipulator of the short story format, building his reputation in the fin de siècle literary marketplace by publishing in a

variety of popular periodicals. As he acknowledged in 1915, he had “contributed to most things to which one can contribute.”<sup>6</sup>

In *The Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction*, John Sutherland laments the narrowness of the academic world when it comes to the Victorian novel.<sup>7</sup> In *Victorian Fiction: Writers, Publishers, Readers*, he attempts to establish the identity of the average, rather than the canonical, Victorian author. While Sutherland’s findings are problematic because of his focus on writers who published in volume form rather than in serial instalments, they do tell us something about Victorian authorship. Of Sutherland’s sample of 878 writers, almost two-thirds were men. Sutherland’s average author produced seventeen novels in a career lasting thirty-two years, but there were significant differences between the sexes. Women were more prolific and had longer life expectancies and writing careers than their male colleagues; men, by comparison, usually had careers before taking up fiction, most commonly in law, journalism, business, civil service, and the church.<sup>8</sup> Pseudonymity and anonymity were widely employed because writing was not considered a respectable career path for either sex; however, for women, the self-advertisement associated with authorship was considered particularly unacceptable.<sup>9</sup> Logically enough, Sutherland also found that while there were a great many authors with a novel or two to their name, a small group of particularly prolific writers was responsible for a large proportion of fiction produced in the nineteenth century: while 45.5 percent of Sutherland’s sample produced ten novels or more, they were responsible for 86 percent of all novels within the sample. This ratio becomes more dramatic with a writer’s increased productivity: writers with sixty novels or more accounted for 5 percent of authors but 30.7 percent of novels sampled; the 2.7 percent of the sample who had produced over eighty novels were responsible for 21.5 percent of all titles; and while just 2 percent of authors had a hundred or more titles to their name, they accounted for 18 percent of the fiction titles in Sutherland’s sample.<sup>10</sup>

In many respects, Richard Marsh’s career approximates that of the average professional novelist as defined by Sutherland. He began his career as a journalist but published his first novel at the early age of twenty-four. Since he died prematurely at fifty-seven, his career as a published novelist covered the near-average period of thirty-four years; however, for five of those years he may not have written any fiction, and for a decade he did not publish novels in volume form. Writing under his real name (Bernard Hellmann) as well as anonymously and under a pseudonym, Marsh published eighty-three fiction titles, placing him among the most prolific 2.7 percent of novelists. Marsh also published a host of articles in periodicals throughout his career and thus was just as much a journalist as he was a novelist.

Sutherland’s studies of Victorian authors fail to index Marsh, whose literary output makes him simultaneously exceptional (because of his

unusually high production rates) and representative (because authors like him were responsible for the bulk of nineteenth-century fiction). In this article, I develop Sutherland's statistical insights into professional authorship by presenting a case study of Marsh's professional practice—the hard literary labour required to provide readers with literature tailored to suit their need for leisure reading. In “Conjectures on World Literature,” Franco Moretti calls for a “distant reading” which “focus[es] on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes—or genres and systems.”<sup>11</sup> For Moretti, “distant reading” involves a “process of deliberate reduction and abstraction,” focusing on “artificial constructs—graphs, maps, trees.”<sup>12</sup> After situating Marsh's career in the publishing context of the *fin de siècle*, I offer a “distant reading” within the microcosm of Marsh's career: a statistical analysis of his production rates, generic choices, and writing patterns, drawing on an examination of Marsh's volume-form fiction, periodical production, and the Richard Marsh manuscript collection at the University of Reading.<sup>13</sup> As Moretti notes, “distant reading” produces “*a specific form of knowledge*” which is often contrary to “traditional” close readings of canonical literature.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, while the resulting graphs indicate patterns and trends in the career of one professional writer, their abstract nature also suggests ways in which we might approach the work of other authors, indeed authorship itself, through statistical analysis. What kind of writing practices might enable an author to produce eighty novels in a career lasting approximately thirty years? What kind of creative fluctuations might such a writing career contain? To what extent did periodical and volume-form publication complement each other?

### The Publishing Industry at the *Fin de Siècle*

The turn of the century was potentially a “golden age” for the popular novelist due to important developments in the publishing industry.<sup>15</sup> These included cheaper and quicker printing methods, advances in distribution and communication, increasingly aggressive marketing, cheaper first editions, magazines specialising in fiction, and perhaps most importantly, near-universal literacy resulting from the introduction of state primary education. The newly literate lower-middle classes gathered in the cities, where the employment market produced unprecedented opportunities for white-collar workers with basic skills in literacy and numeracy, in turn creating a growing demand for reading material, especially cheap fiction and light journalism.<sup>16</sup>

The introduction of the six-shilling, one-volume first edition was a key innovation of the period; perhaps more important, however, was the popular press—penny weeklies such as *Tit-Bits*, *Answers*, and *Pearson's*

*Weekly* as well as illustrated 6d. monthlies such as the *Strand*, *Windsor*, and *Idler* magazines.<sup>17</sup> While novels remained popular, the financial and leisure patterns of the newly literate classes were particularly suited to the consumption of weekly papers and monthly fiction magazines, which were inexpensive, easy to carry on public transport, and, due to the limited length of the features they printed, well suited to restricted reading opportunities. In his 1899 guide to would-be authors, *The Pen and the Book*, Walter Besant noted that “there are at this moment in the country hundreds of papers and journals and magazines, weekly and monthly. [. . .] The circulation of some is enormous, far beyond the wildest dreams of twenty years ago: they are the favourite reading of millions who until the last few years never read anything: they are the outcome of the School Board, which pours out every year by thousands, by the hundred thousand, boys and girls into whom they have instilled [. . .] a love of reading.”<sup>18</sup>

Good money could be made in this market by a skilful writer: according to Besant, the “monthly magazine of the better class pays as a rule a guinea a page.”<sup>19</sup> The weeklies offered a larger audience, if also poorer pay: “The weekly periodicals, the penny papers, call aloud continually for stories—stories—stories—[but] their scale of pay to writers is in most cases humble. Some of them, however, have an enormous circulation, and pay very well. [. . .] A story-teller with a fairly wide connection among editors may take in this way from £50 to £150 a year.”<sup>20</sup> Besant’s advice to a beginning author was to “try to get known to as many editors as possible. Every magazine means a different set of readers.”<sup>21</sup> Fifteen years later, a pseudonymous writer named “Free-Lance” agreed that the “pay to the hard-working and skilful craftsman is good,” but “broad sensationalism, broader humour, still broader sentimentalism” were required of the writers catering for this market.<sup>22</sup> “Free-Lance” further notes that any “man or woman who can supply enough of it is sure of a steady and a large income” and that the “astute business-author naturally enough decides that he must purvey that style of fiction for which there is the greatest demand.”<sup>23</sup>

In 1899, Besant had estimated the size of the reading audience at 120 million, taking into account colonial readers of English literature: “Reading, which has always been the amusement of the cultivated class, has now become the principal amusement of every class: all along the line from peer to chimney sweep we are reading. Some of us are said to be reading rubbish. That may be: but it is certainly less mischievous to be reading rubbish than to be drinking at bars or playing with street rowdies.”<sup>24</sup> For Besant, this expansion of the reading public was an overwhelmingly positive development which provided professional authors with unprecedented opportunities. The turn of the century witnessed the emergence of the image of the “workaday professional” author who commanded a proper income and was supported by professional literary agents and the

Society of Authors, established in 1884 to advise its members on the business side to literature and to win them professional recognition, financial security, and improved social status.<sup>25</sup> Besant noted that the 1891 England and Wales Census listed some 5,800 professional authors, editors, and journalists.<sup>26</sup> However, he was certain that countless others, while not professional writers, were engaged in literary work and thus further estimated that some 20,000 people were involved in the literature industry at the end of century.<sup>27</sup> Establishing that of these writers some 1,300 novelists were currently in demand, Besant estimated that only 330 to 340 authors earned enough to break even while less than one hundred made money from their fiction.<sup>28</sup>

Existing accounts of Richard Marsh portray him as something of a scapegrace. The author's grandson Robert Aickman states that Marsh had been expelled from Eton and Oxford "owing to incidents with women" and implies that his lifestyle was unconventional and flashy—noting, for example, that he travelled abroad for a quarter of each year and was seldom seen at home because of frequent parties at Covent Garden theatres and days spent watching cricket at Lord's.<sup>29</sup> We also now know that in 1884–85 he served eighteen months' hard labour after obtaining money under false pretences by issuing cheques against a defunct bank account.<sup>30</sup> Yet by his own definition Marsh was a professional author, maintaining a large family and a comfortable lifestyle on the proceeds of his written work. Marsh's census returns and his children's birth certificates consistently list his status as an "author," a "professional author," or an "author (professional)."<sup>31</sup> He was also a member of the Society of Authors, acting as a steward at the society's annual dinners alongside such now canonical authors as Thomas Hardy, George Meredith, and George Bernard Shaw.<sup>32</sup> As a popular writer, Marsh most likely agreed with Besant's insistence that literary quality and financial profit did not need to go hand in hand and that authors, readers, and critics should "most carefully keep quite separate and distinct in [their] minds the literary value of a work and the commercial value of a work. There need not be any connection at all between the two."<sup>33</sup> Yet Marsh's considerable commercial success perhaps disguises the long-standing habits of hard work and persistent networking required to produce up-to-date, marketable popular fiction on an annual basis during a long career.

### Marsh and the Periodicals Market

An examination of Marsh's early publication patterns in selected fiction papers reveals that from 1888, Marsh quickly began to supplement his existing income from journalism by writing short stories for a number of fiction papers. Figure 1 charts Marsh's contributions to periodical literature, excluding newspaper contributions, 1888–1916.

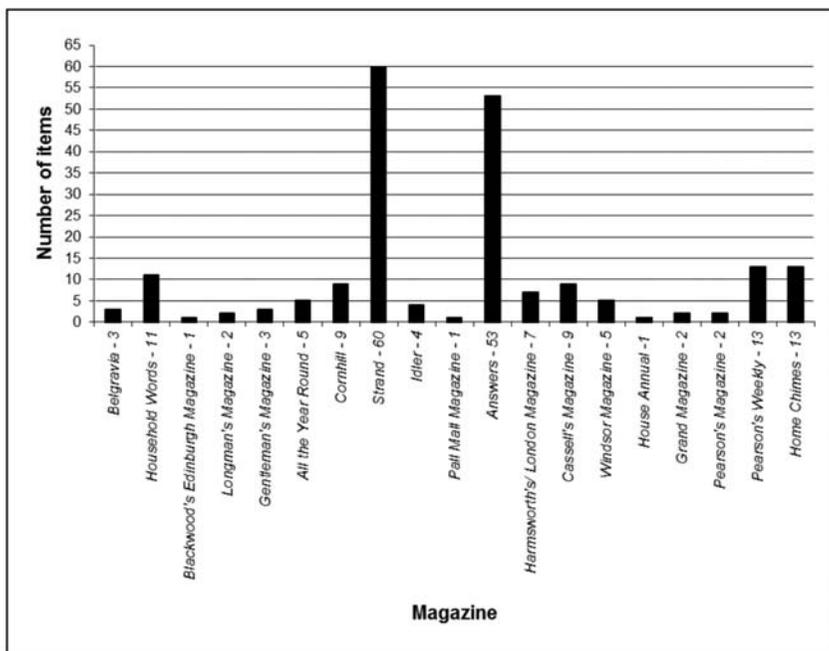


Figure 1. Richard Marsh and the periodicals market, 1888–1916.

Even at this stage of his career, Marsh showed an awareness of the need to build publishing networks. His earliest writings under his pseudonym were in the form of short stories in a number of fiction magazines from the late 1880s. The first signed Marsh story that I have been able to locate was “Payment for a Life,” published in the summer holiday number of *Belgravia* in 1888. In 1889, Marsh published at least five additional short stories, two in *Belgravia* and three anonymously in *Household Words*. In 1890, as many as ten stories appeared: anonymous contributions included two stories in *Household Words*, three in the *Cornhill Magazine*, and one in *All the Year Round*; and signed contributions included one story in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, one in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, and two in *Longman's Magazine*. In 1891, six stories appeared in the magazines sampled: anonymous items in the *Cornhill* and *All the Year Round*, a signed contribution in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and three signed stories in *Home Chimes*. In 1892, the year preceding the publication of Marsh's first novels, ten further stories appeared in the magazines sampled, including “The Mystery of Philip Bennion's Death,” a five-part serial in *Household Words*, which was reissued in 1897 as a shilling shocker. Further anonymous contributions included single stories in *Household Words*, the *Cornhill*, and *All the Year Round* as well as signed items in *Home Chimes*, the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and the *Strand Magazine*. Indeed, by the time “A

Vision of the Night,” often cited as the first signed Marsh story, appeared in the *Strand* in December 1892, Marsh in fact had over two dozen stories in his portfolio, many of them signed.<sup>34</sup> It is likely that additional, possibly anonymous, material remains yet to be identified.

From 1893 to 1897, the years preceding the publication of his bestselling gothic novel *The Beetle: A Mystery*, Marsh continued to publish in the same magazines, with the exception of *Belgravia*, which he abandoned in 1889, and the *Gentleman's Magazine*, which he dropped in 1892. His most regular publishing venues were the *Cornhill*, where he published a story annually until the magazine ceased to publish light fiction in 1896, and *All the Year Round*, where he also published annually until the magazine was absorbed into *Household Words* in 1895. He maintained his intermittent association with the *Strand*, which printed one of his stories in 1896. He also appeared in two notable new venues. His extensive collaboration with Alfred Harmsworth's *Answers*, which issued four Marsh shorts and three serials between 1896 and 1903, was a double-edged sword: while Marsh was able to improve his earnings and enlarge his readership through *Answers*, the paper also placed him towards the bottom end of the market for popular fiction. However, all his material in *Answers* was signed, perhaps making this venue more preferable for his work than other weeklies. Jerome K. Jerome's *Idler Magazine*, a “mixture of irreverence, facetiousness, and knowledge,” published four Marsh items between 1893 and 1896.<sup>35</sup> The magazine's lively appearance, plentiful illustrations, and promotion of short fiction by well-known and entertaining authors anticipated Marsh's gradual navigation towards illustrated monthlies.

From 1888 Marsh issued seven items per year in these magazines before the success of *The Beetle* changed his fortunes in 1897. Allowing for Besant's guinea a page, such a rate of publication would have earned Marsh approximately £70 per annum. It is unlikely to have been much more than this: of the monthlies, *Belgravia*, the *Cornhill*, *Longman's*, the *Gentleman's*, and *Home Chimes* were all struggling with low circulation figures and publishing non-illustrated light fiction by little-known writers in this period.<sup>36</sup> Of the weeklies, *All the Year Round* and *Household Words* had large circulations but also offered lower pay and hectic publication schedules.<sup>37</sup> Only illustrated magazines (the *Strand* and *Idler*) and the old-fashioned but respectable *Blackwood's* could be regarded as fully desirable publishing venues.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, much of Marsh's early periodical production was unsigned. Such work, though earning him money and most likely entertaining many readers, did not contribute to his reputation except among editors. At the beginning of his career, then, Marsh was able to break into print by producing short fiction for a respectable set of magazines, but he was not always able to sign his work and was probably not paid well for it.

Marsh's periodical patterns altered in the years following publication of *The Beetle*. From 1897, all of his magazine contributions were signed. With the exception of the *Strand* and *Answers*, he severed contact with all of his previous publishers. It must be assumed that after publication of *The Beetle* Marsh was able to command a higher price and that his name had become an asset worth advertising. He was now moving towards the illustrated 6d. monthlies, including the *Harmsworth Monthly Pictorial Magazine*, the *Windsor Magazine*, *Pearson's Magazine*, and *Cassell's Magazine*, all powerful commercial enterprises with print runs from 100,000 to a million monthly copies.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, these monthlies all varied slightly in tone and target audience, offering Marsh access to a wide and diverse reading public.

Of greater importance to Marsh than these mainstream monthlies, however, was the *Strand Magazine*, the periodical that had inspired them all.<sup>40</sup> Founded by George Newnes in 1891, the *Strand* was supported by a powerful newspaper empire.<sup>41</sup> Newnes, who famously claimed to be *the* "average man" and thus to know his audience's tastes, promised his readers a "picture on every page."<sup>42</sup> Apart from its plentiful illustrations, the *Strand* was designed to sell by its lively contents, typically a mixture of short fiction and topical articles. Commercially, it was a resounding success, providing its authors with access to an audience of 300,000 in Britain and three million worldwide.<sup>43</sup> More crucially, it promised prompt editorial decisions and fair pay. For example, in 1891, Arthur Conan Doyle earned a generous £4 per thousand words, or approximately £35 per story, from the *Strand*; from the mid-1890s, he never received less than £100 per thousand words.<sup>44</sup> This was excellent remuneration indeed, and although Doyle's was an exceptional case, the *Strand* could afford to pay its favourite authors better rates than its rivals.

Marsh first contributed to the *Strand* in December 1892, but it was only from 1900 that it became his primary magazine publisher. While he continued to write for other magazines, from 1900 he made at least one annual appearance in the *Strand*. Between 1900 and 1909, Marsh published twenty stories there, compared to twenty-two stories and three serial novels in the other magazines sampled. From 1910, the *Strand* became his sole magazine contact until his death in 1915, with a further thirty-eight stories appearing by the end of 1916. In the magazine market, the *Strand* was overwhelmingly Marsh's chief publisher, issuing sixty of his stories from 1892 to 1916. Figure 2 shows the increasing importance of the *Strand* to Marsh's career. It is no wonder that the monthly felt itself obliged to announce in 1915 that Marsh's "death [would] be regretted by none more than by readers of this magazine."<sup>45</sup>

On average, the periodicals sampled printed approximately seven Marsh stories per year in the period 1898–1916. While the remuneration Marsh

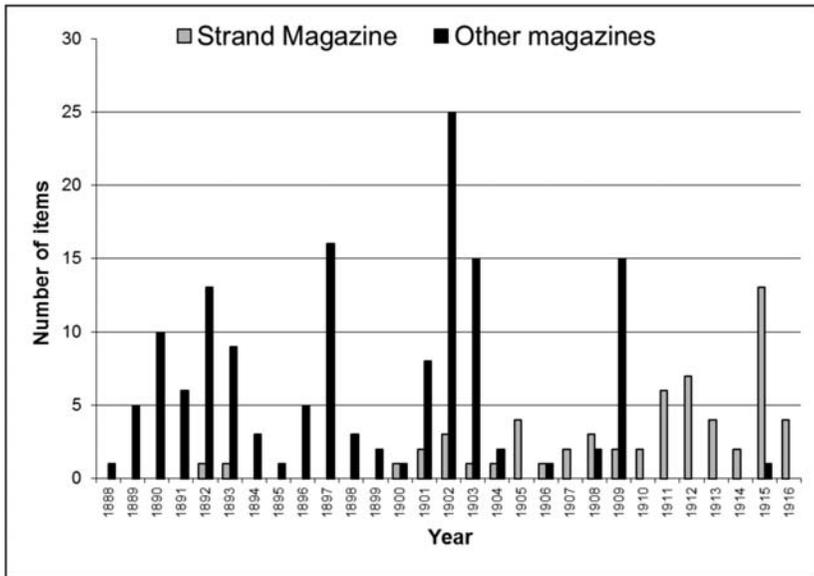


Figure 2. Richard Marsh's contributions to the *Strand* and other magazines, 1888–1916.

had received at the beginning of his career may have been low, after publication of *The Beetle* he would have received at least average pay for his work, and he may have received significantly more as his reputation grew. Using Doyle's lowest remuneration of £4 per thousand words from the *Strand* would have added up to over £200 per annum, a significant addition to any household budget. Furthermore, short fiction could be produced relatively quickly to ease financial pressure, and the fluctuations in Marsh's periodical publication, noted in figure 3, do indeed show a pattern of highs and lows. Finally, the magazine market was a means for Marsh to make himself known to different audiences. While his main contacts were mainstream monthlies, they all catered to a slightly different readership. Considered together, they represent as wide an audience as a popular author could well aspire to. "Few authors," the *Strand* acknowledged, "had a wider public than Mr Richard Marsh."<sup>46</sup>

### Short Genre Fiction and Audience

Apart from publishing extensively in periodicals, Marsh also issued his short stories in twenty-two collections which account for 29 percent of his published volumes. In the second half of his career, Marsh's publication pattern, represented by figures 4 and 5, settled to a stable three volumes per year, usually including one collection of short stories previously pub-

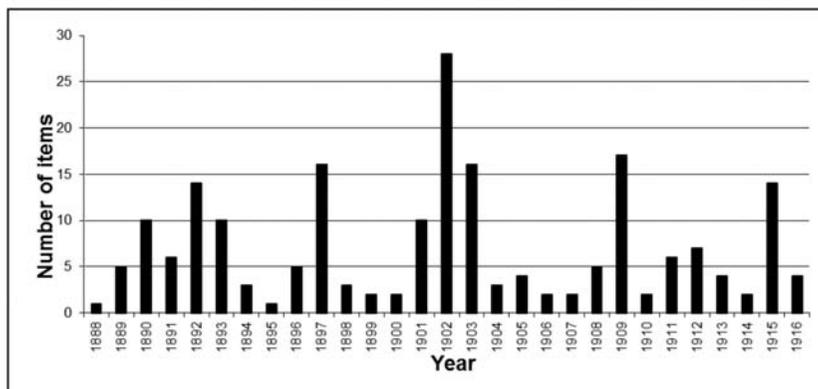


Figure 3. Fluctuations in Richard Marsh's periodical publication, 1888–1916.

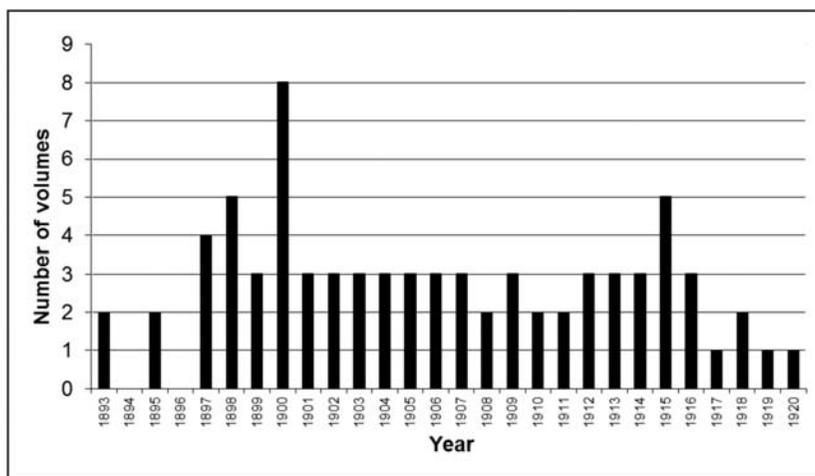


Figure 4. Richard Marsh's volume-form publication, 1893–1920.

lished in magazines. Some interesting conclusions regarding Marsh's working practices can be drawn from a comparison of the dates of the original magazine publication and the subsequent reissue in volume form. Early stories, dating from before 1895 and often unsigned, took up to twelve years to be published in volumes. From 1896, as Marsh began to sign his stories and navigate towards illustrated monthlies, the period from original periodical issue to reissue in volume form was considerably shortened, with most items collected within five, and often within two, years of their original periodical publication. It may, of course, be that the increasing commercial viability of the short story was reflected in publishers' growing

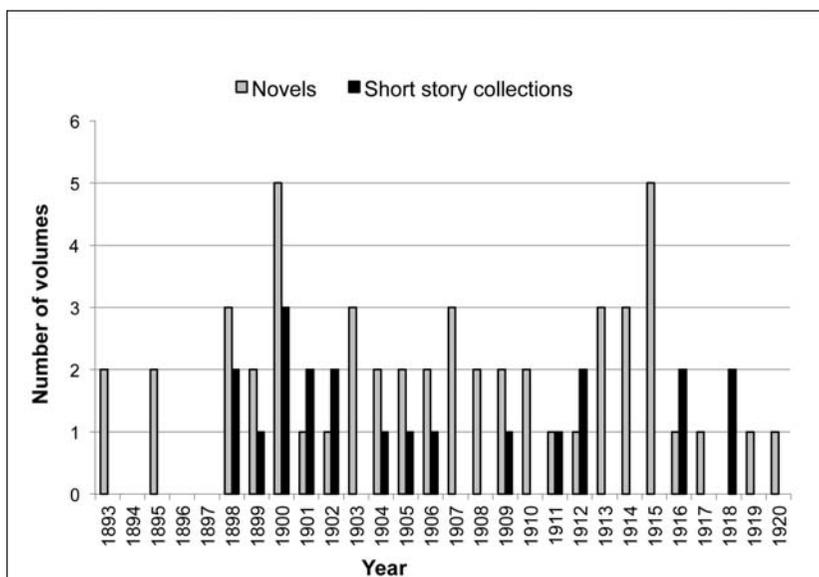


Figure 5. Richard Marsh's novels and short story collections, 1893–1920.

eagerness to issue them in volume format; however, it can also be inferred that as Marsh grew canner, he took full advantage of his periodical work by issuing short story collections on an annual basis, cashing in on pre-existing material quickly after its original conception and easing the pressure to produce more copy.

The short story was an attractive vehicle for the fin de siècle popular author. In an increasingly diversified environment, it became imperative for writers to be able to target particular readerships. Texts had to be tailored to suit potential audiences with very different reading needs, such as educated men, middle-class women, teenage boys, lower-middle-class office workers, and the semi-literate working classes.<sup>47</sup> As Ian Small recognises, “commercial success depended not upon the understanding of the *individual* consumer and the insatiability of his or her wants, but rather upon identifying a *community* of taste. And, importantly, a community of taste presupposes certain *social relations* which underlie and define it—a class or gender identity, for example.”<sup>48</sup> Marsh targeted a number of such communities through genre fiction, never relying solely on the support of a solitary, potentially fickle, niche audience. Whereas his novels can be divided according to genre into three general categories—crime, romance, and horror—short fiction offered him greater flexibility, as evidenced by figures 6 and 7.

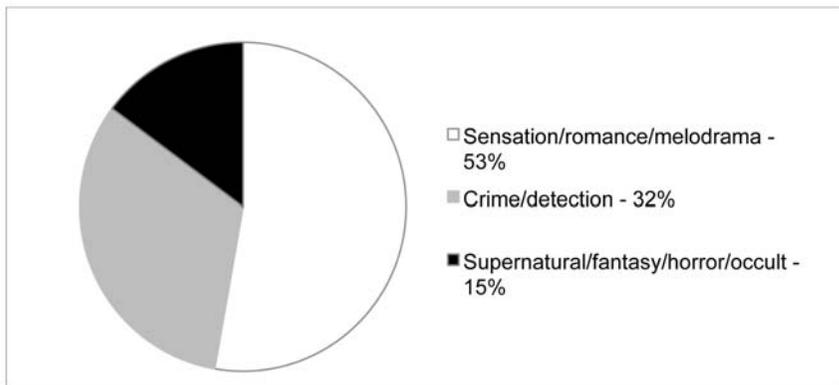


Figure 6. The predominant genre of Richard Marsh's novels, 1893–1920.

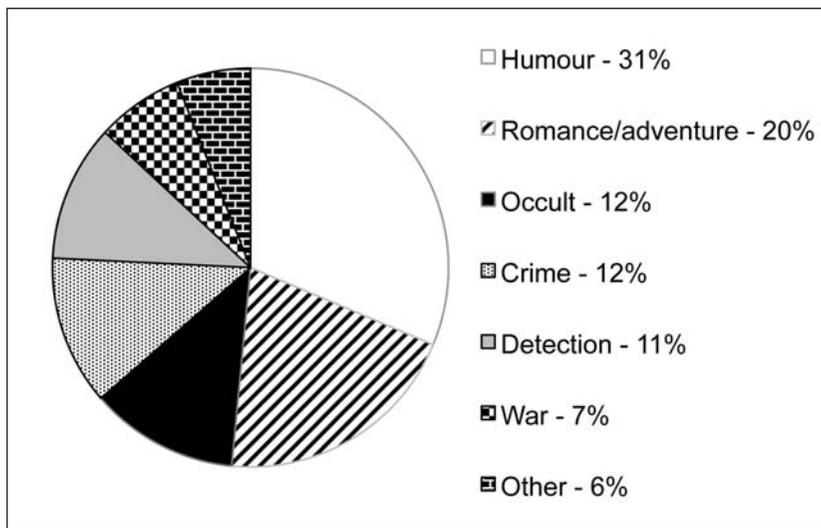


Figure 7. The predominant genre of Richard Marsh's collected short stories, 1898–1918.

Marsh's forays into short crime and comic fiction for the magazine market are of particular interest. His connection with the *Strand* in many ways defined his efforts in short fiction, particularly crime and humour. Initially designed as a short story magazine “organically complete each month,”<sup>49</sup> the *Strand* was instrumental in ushering in the golden age of the short story in Britain and, due in part to Doyle's phenomenally successful Sherlock Holmes series, it pioneered the serial short story format that became a staple of the magazine market of the period. Halfway between the serial

novel or novella (which required the reader to purchase each instalment of the serial) and the self-contained short story (which was complete in itself and thus neither required nor encouraged the regular reading of a particular magazine), the serial short story introduced a recurring character whose adventures could be followed from month to month while each story was complete in itself. The serial short story thus simultaneously created continuity and produced a self-contained reading experience that could be completed in one sitting, even on public transport. Busy readers could miss an instalment without losing the plot. Marsh, like many other professional authors of the period, exploited the format fully in his *Strand* short story series featuring the lower-middle-class clerk Sam Briggs (1904–15) and the lip-reading female detective Judith Lee (1911–16).

In keeping with his magazine publications, some of Marsh's short story collections were centred on recurring characters. *Sam Briggs: His Book* (1912), *Sam Briggs, V.C.* (1916), *Judith Lee: Some Pages from her Life* (1912), and *The Adventures of Judith Lee* (1916) all feature connected but self-contained stories with a central character on the model established by Doyle. Other collections use their title to indicate the kind of subject matter the reader should expect: humour with *Frivolities: Especially Addressed to Those Who Are Tired of Being Serious* (1899) or the supernatural with *Marvels and Mysteries* (1900), *The Seen and the Unseen* (1900), and *Both Sides of the Veil* (1901). However, such generic markers could also be misleading: while these latter three collections do, as their titles and covers suggest, include supernatural and occult stories, they also incorporate crime as well as romantic and comic sketches. Marsh may have been selling a collection of miscellaneous material on the strength of a popular genre; the purchaser could not know that only part of the content matched the title of the collection. Alternatively, Marsh simply may have collected all of his recent stories into one volume regardless of any generic consistency. During Marsh's later career, the quick reissue of the stories may have led to an inability to produce thematically unified collections except where his periodical work had been in the form of a series, as with the Sam Briggs and Judith Lee stories. Thus, while Marsh's growing professionalism led to quicker profits from his periodical work, it also resulted in less satisfactory short story collections.

### The Habit of Writing

Marsh's surviving manuscripts provide us with an understanding of how he was able to maintain high production levels. They give the impression of a thoroughly organised professional writer who had established an effective set of working habits and conscientiously followed them in his professional practice. Remarkably uniform in appearance, the manuscript pages

are numbered, written in ink on uniform heavy sheets of paper measuring just under 17 x 21 centimetres, and fastened together with a pin in order to avoid mix-ups and losses. The manuscripts are remarkable for the strict regularity of Marsh's handwriting, although its size changes a little as his career progresses. Whereas early manuscripts such as *The Beetle* were written in a slightly larger hand, the ones that can be dated to the twentieth century were written in a very neat hand that is so small as to be barely legible. While the entire 125,000-word manuscript of *The Beetle* extended to approximately 150 pages with emendations, in later years Marsh would fit an entire novel into the space of about fifty sheets of very close, even writing containing few corrections, each page containing some 1,500 words. This, of course, saved him paper, ink, and postage.

More importantly, writing a small, neat hand on standard-size paper also made it possible for Marsh to calculate exactly how much he had written in a day. In his posthumously published *Autobiography* (1883), Anthony Trollope famously described using similar methods:

I have allotted myself so many pages a week. The average number has been about 40. It has been placed as low as 20, and has risen to 112. And as a page is an ambiguous term, my page has been made to contain 250 words; and as words, if not watched, will have a tendency to straggle, I have had every word counted as I went. [. . .] I have prided myself on completing my work exactly within the proposed dimensions. But I have prided myself especially on completing it within the proposed time.<sup>50</sup>

It is likely that similar reasons lay behind Marsh's tiny, regular handwriting. Like Trollope, Marsh was able to write with few alterations and in regular script that allowed him to estimate length. This was, of course, crucial for a writer who had deadlines and stated word quotas to bear in mind. It was only later in his career that Marsh began to have his manuscripts typed. Robert Aickman mentions Marsh's typist, "a Miss Davis, of whom there were tales," and implies that Marsh's production levels fell as a result of his preoccupation with her.<sup>51</sup>

It can be argued from the approximate length of Marsh's volumes that he became better at controlling his writing as his career progressed. While his volumes vary in length from approximately 45,000 to 160,000 words, figure 8 shows that the greatest extremes can be located in the first half of his career. In its second half, his volumes vary in length from 70,000 to 115,000 words, but the great majority of them measure 80,000 to 90,000 words. Just as in the second half of his career Marsh's publication pattern settled to a stable three volumes per year, his annual production of copy also stabilised. Again, his first years as a published novelist were characterised by great instability, ranging from lean periods, when he produced

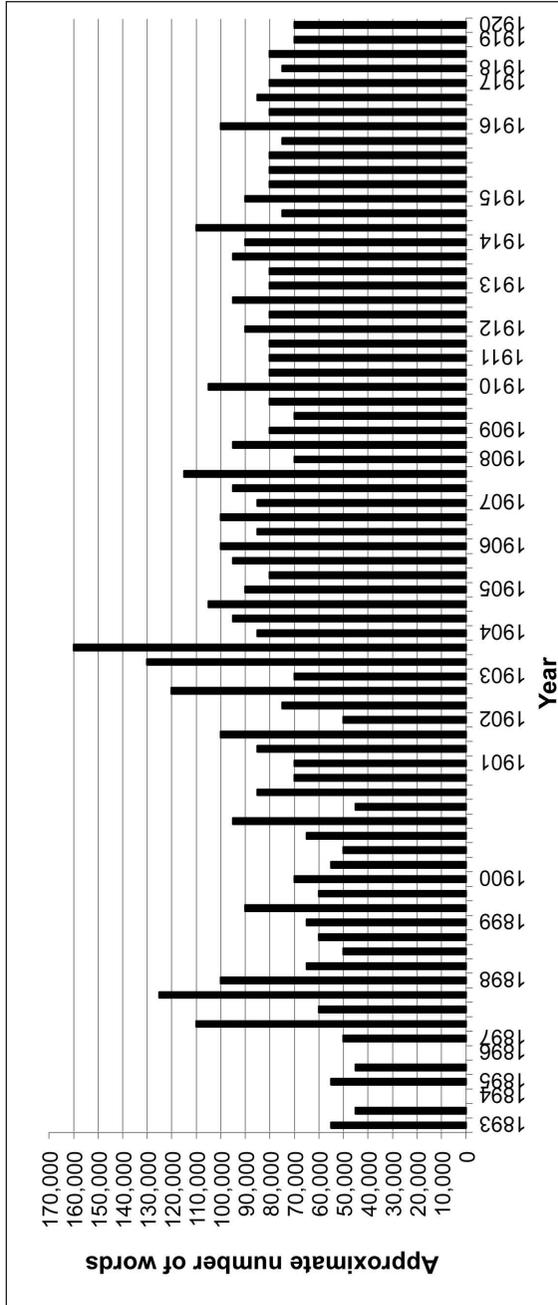


Figure 8. The approximate word count of Richard Marsh's volumes, 1893–1920.

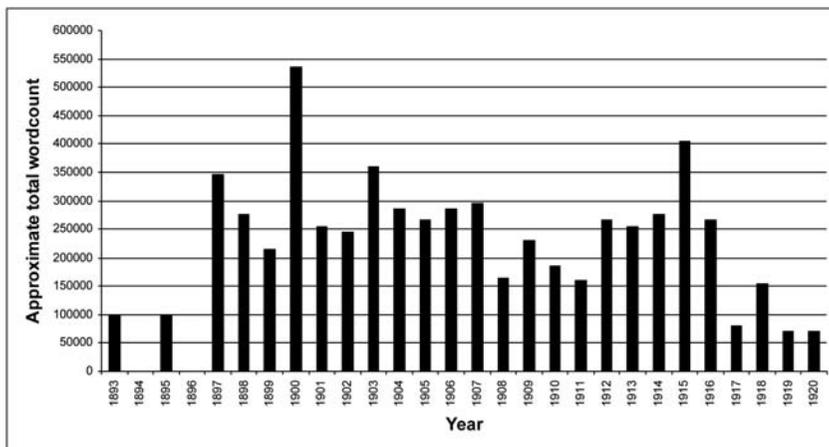


Figure 9. The approximate total annual word count of Richard Marsh's volumes, 1893–1920.

no words in volume form, to prolific periods, such as in 1900, when his volume-form writing exceeded half a million words. In the second half of his career, his total annual volume-form word count settled at 250,000 to 300,000 words, a more manageable but still taxing pace. Considering that Marsh is said to have travelled abroad for at least three months a year, this rate of production would have required him to write approximately 7,000 to 8,000 words every week while at home.<sup>52</sup> In fact, this pace closely corresponds with Trollope's forty weekly pages of 250 words each, or 10,000 words per week, which, according to Trollope, was a manageable task that required self-discipline. For all his supposed "insouciance" and "popular magnetism," Marsh was a hard-working and disciplined writer, and the routine of manuscript composition was crucially important to his continued productivity.<sup>53</sup>

The periodical market and the increasing importance of the short story at the fin de siècle offered unprecedented opportunities, and Marsh took full advantage of them. The short story was a powerful commercial vehicle that allowed him to top up his profits, reach out to new niche audiences, and try out new ideas in a volatile market. His success was built upon an understanding of a diverse market, an appreciation of the importance of networking within the publishing industry, and well-established working habits which allowed him to deliver work as agreed with editors. Marsh died at the age of fifty-seven in 1915 of "dilatation and degeneration of heart" and "dropsy and heart failure," probably indicating a combination of overweight and overwork.<sup>54</sup> In various obituaries, he was briefly but not unfondly remembered as the provider of pleasurable reading experiences—"an artist in titles" as the *Daily Mail* put it.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, Marsh's work contin-

ued to resonate with readers after his death: at least nine of his fiction titles were published posthumously, and his short fiction continued to appear in the *Strand* until 1916. It is likely that he had been working at full speed up to his death, as is demonstrated by the administration of his estate, which was valued at just £453 14s., not a great sum after a long and successful career.<sup>56</sup> While Marsh had lived well, it is also evident that he had been unable to save money in preparation for a retirement that never came: until the end of his life, he had to keep producing copy according to the practices he had developed throughout his career.

The graphs which accompany this article provide neither a sympathetic reading of the plight of the professional author nor a condemnation of the writer who produced fiction for a living. Instead, they represent one way in which we might begin to quantify and analyse professional authorship objectively. On the one hand, the graphs illuminate networks by allowing us to view Marsh's contacts within the periodicals industry and their relative importance to his career. By quantifying fluctuations in Marsh's production patterns, graphs identify pressure points at times of under- or over-production of copy, as clearly seen during the early years of Marsh's career when his publication rates varied wildly. Finally, statistical analysis can help us analyse Marsh's increasing professionalisation by visualising the gradual emergence of a balance between financial pressures and manageable production rates as his career progressed and he became better able to control his work. The "distant reading" of Marsh's professional practices I offer here has indeed resulted in "*a specific form of knowledge*" quite distinct from more traditional close analyses of a writer's stylistic or thematic concerns.<sup>57</sup>

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## NOTES

1. Marsh, "How I 'Broke into Print,'" 573.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, 573–74.
5. *Ibid.*, 573.
6. *Ibid.*, 573–74.
7. Sutherland, *The Longman Companion*, 1.
8. Sutherland, *Victorian Fiction*, 160–61. The average life expectancy was sixty-six for men and just over sixty-eight for women, while the average length of career was just under thirty years for men and just over thirty-five for women. Men published their first novel at the age of thirty-six, while women began publishing at thirty-three. On average, men produced sixteen novels, while women wrote twenty-one.

9. Sutherland, *Victorian Fiction*, 156.
10. *Ibid.*, 161.
11. Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," 57.
12. Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, 1.
13. Research for this article involved the extensive consultation of prominent fiction papers, either in hard-copy or digital form. However, it is unlikely that I have been able to locate all of Marsh's periodical work.
14. Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, 1. Emphasis in the original.
15. Eliot, *Some Patterns and Trends*, 14.
16. Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 306–17; McAleer, *Popular Reading*, 14.
17. Brantlinger, *The Reading Lesson*, 184; McAleer, *Popular Reading*, 27.
18. Besant, *The Pen and the Book*, 54–55.
19. *Ibid.*, 135. See also Cross, *The Common Writer*, 210.
20. Besant, *The Pen and the Book*, 136.
21. *Ibid.*, 314.
22. "Free-Lance," "The Popular Fiction Market," 174.
23. *Ibid.*, 176, 175.
24. Besant, *The Pen and the Book*, 29, 30.
25. Cross, *The Common Writer*, 212; Eliot, *Some Patterns and Trends*, 14. For background on the Society of Authors, see Bonham-Carter, *Authors by Profession*, 1:119–61.
26. Besant, *The Pen and the Book*, 1.
27. *Ibid.*, 2.
28. *Ibid.*, 59.
29. Aickman, *The Attempted Rescue*, 11. Baker claims that there is no evidence of any member of the family attending either institution. "Introduction," vii. The 1871 census shows young Bernard residing at home, where he may have been tutored by his father. 1871 England Census, St. Paul, Hammer-smith, Kensington, London, RG10/64/21/35/62/338.
30. *West Kent Quarter Sessions*, April 9, 1884, 72; *County of Kent: Criminal Register: England and Wales*, 1884, 284; *Maidstone Prison Nominal Roll*, November 1883–November 1884, no. 2100: "Hildmann, Bernard."
31. 1891 England Census, Worthing, East Preston, RG 12/835/5/105/16/61; 1901 England Census, Worth, East Grinstead, RG 13/906/3/51/24/166. Birth certificates, Bertram Max Heldmann, January 9, 1895, Worth, East Grinstead, Surrey, March 1895, 2b, 155/118; Conrad Heldmann, October 12, 1892, Worth, East Grinstead, Sussex, December 1892, 2b, 143/301; Madge Heldmann, August 5, 1891, Worth, East Grinstead, Sussex, September 1891, 2b, 156/134.
32. *The Author* frequently mentions Marsh in his capacity as a member of the society. Interestingly, his membership was registered under the pseudonym "Richard Marsh." While pseudonyms were often placed in quotation marks in the *Author*, the name "Richard Marsh" always appears without them.

- See, for example, "Annual Dinner," April 1, 1899; June 1, 1899; April 1, 1903; April 1, 1904. See also "Books Published by Members."
33. Besant, *The Pen and the Book*, 3.
  34. Dalby, "Richard Marsh," 81, and "Unappreciated Authors," 138; Baker, "Introduction," vii.
  35. Dunlap, "Idler," 178; North and Nelson, *The Waterloo Directory*, 6:6–7.
  36. For background on *Belgravia*, see Law, *Serializing Fiction in the Victorian Press*, 32; Scheuerle, "Belgravia," 31–34; North and Nelson, *Waterloo Directory*, 2:121–24. For background on the *Cornhill*, see Vann, "Cornhill Magazine," 83; Schmidt, "Cornhill Magazine," 103–10; North and Nelson, *Waterloo Directory*, 3:698–703. For background on *Longman's*, see Primeau, "Longman's Magazine," 209; North and Nelson, *Waterloo Directory*, 6:1019–20. For background on the *Gentleman's Magazine*, see Darcy, "Gentleman's Magazine," 139; North and Nelson, *Waterloo Directory*, 5:314–17.
  37. For background on *All the Year Round*, see Vann, "All the Year Round," 11–14; North and Nelson, *Waterloo Directory*, 1:123–25. For background on *Household Words*, see North and Nelson, *Waterloo Directory*, 5:788–89.
  38. For background on *Blackwood's*, see Mackenzie, "Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine," 58–61; North and Nelson, *Waterloo Directory*, 4:408–12.
  39. For background on *Pearson's Magazine*, see Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 396; North and Nelson, *Waterloo Directory*, 9:96–97; Schmidt, "Pearson's Magazine," 310–13. For background on the *Windsor Magazine*, see Schmidt, "Windsor Magazine," 450–53. For background on *Cassell's*, see Nowell-Smith, *The House of Cassell*; Anderson, "Cassell and Company Limited," 72–82. For background on *Harmsworth's*, see Bourne, *Lords of Fleet Street*.
  40. Pound, *The Strand Magazine*, 53. See also North and Nelson, *Waterloo Directory*, 10:515–18.
  41. For more information about Newnes, see Parry, "George Newnes Limited," 226–32.
  42. Pound, *The Strand Magazine*, 25, 30.
  43. McDonald, *British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice*, 156. Pound estimates the circulation at half a million and Altick at 392,000. Pound, *The Strand Magazine*, 53; Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 396. See also Savory, "Strand Magazine," 397–402.
  44. McDonald, *British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice*, 140–42; Pound, *The Strand Magazine*, 74.
  45. Marsh, "How I 'Broke into Print,'" 573.
  46. *Ibid.*, 573.
  47. Brantlinger, *The Reading Lesson*, 187; Keating, *The Haunted Study*, 340; McAleer, *Popular Reading*, 24.
  48. Small, "The Economies of Taste," 14. Emphasis in the original.

49. Pound, *The Strand Magazine*, 30.
50. Trollope, *An Autobiography*, 119.
51. Aickman, *The Attempted Rescue*, 11–12. A number of the items in the Richard Marsh collection at Reading are typescripts, and MS 2051/57 names a Miss Davis.
52. *Ibid.*, 14.
53. *Ibid.*, 17.
54. Death certificate. Richard Bernard Heldmann, August 9, 1915, Cuckfield, East Sussex, September 1915, 2b, 165/27.
55. “Death of Mr Richard Marsh,” 9; “Artist in Titles,” 3.
56. Administration, Richard Bernard Heldmann, January 5, 1916, *Calendar of the Grants of Probate and Letters of Administration . . . during the Year 1916*, Vol. H-K, Hastings, H.M.S.O., 1916, 104.
57. Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, 1. Emphasis in the original.

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