Seriality

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IMAGINE it is January 1847 and I am an avid, middle-class novel reader living in London. I have been following Charles Dickens's huge best-seller, *Dombey and Son*, a novel I have been buying in serial installments at a railway bookseller's stall just as soon as it comes out each month, since October of 1846. Everybody is talking about *Dombey*; as many as 40,000 copies of each month's part issue are sold, more than any of Dickens's earlier works. True, there are over three million people in London at this time, but each of those 40,000 copies circulates through and far beyond its purchaser: read aloud in parlors and pubs, passed down from the parents to the children to the servants in a household, given to friends or left behind in public places, each monthly pamphlet—with the sea-green covers that signify Dickens's brand—is well thumbed before the next month's installment comes out. Now, in January, William M. Thackeray's novel *Vanity Fair* begins appearing monthly in those same booksellers' stalls, its bright yellow covers contrasting with the familiar green wrappers of *Dombey*. Like *Dombey*, it is set mainly in London, on streets I know well. Only about 5,000 copies of *Vanity Fair*'s installments are sold each month, but as a true fan of "modern novels" interested in the rivalry between the two great authors, I buy each one and read it every month alongside *Dombey and Son*.[1] In March, I go to see *The String of Pearls, or the Fiend of Fleet Street* at the Britannia Theatre in London, excited to experience the melodrama version of a sensational novel that has been coming out in serial part issues since November. The gruesomeness of what we now know as the story of "Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber," set in a London neighborhood near the station where I buy my serials, resonates for me with the emotional violence Mr. Dombey inflicts on his wife and daughter and the social violence Becky Sharp both endures and perpetuates in Thackeray's story. I continue reading Dickens and Thackeray through the winter, spring, and summer, and then in October, a new bestseller hits the stands, this time in triple-decker volume form. Critics are raving about *Jane Eyre*, pseudonymously published by a previously unknown author, Charlotte Brontë. In November I rush through the installments of my other two novels to be able to dive into the storyworld of this phenomenally popular work, so expensive in hardcover that I must borrow it, one volume at a time, from the circulating library where I pay for an annual membership.

Holding the stories of *Dombey and Son* and *Vanity Fair* in my mind as I read the first volume of *Jane Eyre,* I am struck by the variations on a theme represented by the heroines of the three books: they are all motherless girls left to figure out how to navigate hostile surroundings on their own, they are all self-reliant and resourceful, and yet their ways of being in the world are completely different from one another. Their appearing all in one serial moment underlines the parallels between them. If, like twentieth-century critics of these novels, I had read them separately from start to finish, without experiencing their disparate themes and moods simultaneously, as it were, I would have a substantially different understanding of each heroine's motives and reactions, as the critical history of these three novels shows. (What literary scholar ever thought to compare Florence Dombey and Becky Sharp?)

Victorian readers of new novels would follow multiple stories at the same time, just as modern audiences follow TV serials, turning their attention from one storyworld to the next while waiting for subsequent installments to appear, and holding many plots in their minds simultaneously. Processing stories in this way has a significant bearing on how readers interpret, categorize, and evaluate them. Today, however, most people who read or study Victorian serial novels encounter them in volume form, taking in one book from cover to cover before picking up another, even if they pay attention to the serial breaks. Some organizations have recently initiated serial reading events featuring novels by Dickens and others, offering readers the opportunity to read installments of a Victorian novel in real time along with other readers, one installment per week or month, while blogs, tweets, and Facebook posts create a forum for discussing the text at the same monthly pace as the novel's original readers would have followed.[2] When serial reading projects offer online access to facsimiles of the original periodicals or part-issues—making possible what Linda K. Hughes has called "reading sideways" through the articles, stories, poems, and ads that appeared alongside the novel installments in the original publications—the experience is an even richer approximation of what the original audience would have done.[3]

What has been missing from current experiments in Victorian serial reading, however, is the opportunity to read parts of a novel concurrently with others that appeared in the same month and year, or what Helena Michie calls "reading synchronically."[4] To make this possible, I have built "Reading Like a Victorian," a webtool that indexes and links installments of novels to others appearing in their same "serial moment," available at

victorianserialnovels.org. Based at first on J. Don Vann's inventory of serial installments and moving from there to our own research into publication dates and venues, Colleen Morrissey and I are attempting to give present-day readers access to serial moments that span the whole Victorian period.[5]

We can read *like* Victorians by attending to installments of novels in their serial moments, but it would be naïve to imagine we could read *as* Victorians. Individual members of the original audience would have picked up installments randomly, skipped portions they happened not to buy, stopped reading a novel halfway through, or put off reading a novel until it came out in volume form. And, too, their assumptions, preoccupations, prejudices, and priorities would have been different from ours. Synchronic serial reading is not intended to be historical reenactment, but an intervention in the twenty-first-century criticism of nineteenth-century literature. If the longstanding interpretations, classifications, and reputations of canonical and noncanonical novels have grown out of reading them in volume form, then breaking those novels back down into their part-issue installments and reading them alongside the other texts in their respective "stacks" can help us think about our object of study not as a discrete novel-text read horizontally, as it were, from beginning to end, but as a series of texts to be read vertically, equally as connected to other novels in its serial moment as to its own later installments. Reading in the serial moment can change our understanding of what the very form of "a Victorian novel" is.

Notes

1. Robert L. Patten, "The Fight at the Top of the Tree: Vanity Fair vs. Dombey and Son," *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 10, no. 4 (1970): 759–73. Patten has detailed the impact of serial publication on this rivalry.
2. Recent experiments in serial reading include a coordinated reading in 2015 of *Our Mutual Friend* for "Dickens Day" at Birkbeck College and Susan Bernstein's blog, "Serial Readers," launched in 2008. See Ben Winyard, "The Our Mutual Friend Reading Project, 'May We Meet Again': Rereading the Dickensian Serial in the Digital Age." *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long 19th Century*, https://19.bbk.ac.uk/articles/10.16995/ntn.737.
3. Linda K. Hughes, "SIDEWAYS! Navigating the Material(ity) of Print Culture," *Victorian Periodical Review* 47, no. 1 (2014): 1–30.

4. Helena Michie, "Victorian(ist) Sentences: Synchronic Temporalities," in *On Periodization: Selected Essays from the English Institute*, ed. Virginia Jackson (2010), http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.90047.0001.001.
5. J. Don Vann, *Victorian Novels in Serial* (New York: Modern Language Association, 1985).

Settler Colonialism

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BRITISH settler colonies, colonies of occupation, and plantation colonies were built on unequal relationships between colonizer and colonized, and entailed the correlative exploitation of distant land, labor, and other resources.[1] While distinguishing between them is useful, the terms themselves are Eurocentric constructs, even as they denote material realities; the lines between them are not hard and fast; and no two colonies were exactly alike. British residents of colonies of occupation (like India and Hong Kong) were temporary and largely male. These merchants, missionaries, soldiers, and administrators (who, particularly in the latter two cases, sometimes moved between colonies) formed a "thin white line" of control over indigenous populations.[2] British residents of planation colonies (like those in the Caribbean) were only somewhat more permanent. These mostly upper-class plantation owners often spent months or even years in Britain, where their wives and children, if they had them, were as likely as not to reside. Because the Caribbean's indigenous population had been all but destroyed through contact with earlier European settlers, the British generated a labor force by importing Africans as slaves and Indians as indentured servants. Though non-whites outnumbered whites significantly, resistance—to poor working conditions, slavery (pre-1833), and other forms of inequality—was met with brutal reprisal. As in colonies of occupation, resources flowed out.

Settler colonies (in the nineteenth century, primarily Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa) were distinct from colonies of occupation and plantation colonies in that large numbers of British men, women, and children emigrated to them with the intent to remain permanently. These several million Britons (more than 1.5 million