

Review

Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor (eds.), *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland*. Gent and London: Academia Press and The British Library, 2009. 1014 p. ISBN: 978-07-123-5039-6. € 96.

In the programme printed in the first issue of *Review of Reviews* in 1890, the pioneering journalist and editor W.T. Stead claimed that his journal would offer a kind of index to 'the mighty maze of modern periodical literature' in which 'the busy man wanders confused, not knowing where to find the precise article that he requires.' With much more modesty, and at a daunting distance of more than a hundred years, the editors of and contributors to *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism* (henceforth *DNCJ*) have succeeded brilliantly in helping the modern-day periodicals researcher better navigate this 'mighty maze'. The work follows in the steps of other significant bibliographical and research tools in the Victorian periodicals field such as the *Waterloo Dictionary of English Newspapers and Periodicals 1800-1900*, the *Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals* and *British Literary Magazines*. As a 'one volume, rapid reference work', *DNCJ* is inevitably more selective than the *Waterloo* and the *Wellesley*. But it also offers more than bibliographic data, and as

well as a starting point for research or quick reference much of the volume is engaging and well worth reading in its own right. For these reasons, serious scholars of the British press in the period will want to have access to it on their shelves or at the least via the ProQuest electronic edition. The fact, moreover, that this hefty and handsome reference work retails for about the same price as a typical 200-page academic monograph can only recommend it further.

Defining periodicals and newspapers 'as part of a single industry', the volume's 1,620 entries are divided into several categories. Most numerous, perhaps unsurprisingly, are the entries devoted to individual periodicals and newspaper titles and journalists/editors. Ample room is devoted to publishers and proprietors, illustrators and printers, distributors and inventors. Finally there are a number of longer, more discursive entries on what the editors call 'Topics', ranging from quite broad thematic issues, such as 'Imperialism and Journalism' and 'History and Journalism', to those more specifically relevant to the institutional and infrastructural development of the Victorian press, such as 'Journalism Schools' and 'House Magazines and Publishers.' The volume also helpfully includes a Chronology, an extensive Bibliography of

significant work in the field, a list of Archives and Electronic Resources, a series of Indexes and, like much of the century's journalism itself, is richly illustrated. As this short summary suggests, the entries to be found in *DNCJ* are pleasingly diverse, extending from short biographical or factual accounts to broad-ranging expert essays. Collectively they analyse the nineteenth-century press in depth from its technological and material origins to its biographical, contextual, textual and ideological aspects.

One of the most significant contributions of the volume is to draw much-needed further attention to the wide variety of writers who were engaged in producing copy for the nineteenth-century press. The period's journalists or, to invoke the parlance of the time, its 'miscellaneous writers', have generally been pushed to the fringes of its traditional literary histories. *DNCJ* happily pays much attention not only to familiar names from existing accounts like Francis Jeffrey, Frederick Greenwood and Andrew Lang, but also to more neglected figures, and to those whose connection to the world of newspapers and periodicals has been occluded or downplayed. Focusing on the journalistic careers of the politician Augustine Birrell, the geologist Robert Chambers and the economist Robert Giffen, for instance, has the interesting effect of refreshing our perception of these men, while simultaneously emphasising the pivotal role of the press in Victorian society and culture. The short biographies of the period's great novelists and poets, among them Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Wilkie Collins, Henry James and Thomas Hardy, underline the same points. All of them at some time

wrote for, or were very strongly influenced by, the periodical press. The entry on Hardy captures this cross-influence well, noting that the chronicler of Wessex was 'a consumer of the press as much as he was a contributor to it.' As well as realigning our understanding of writers like Hardy, these entries should have the effect of stimulating new research into the sometimes neglected journalistic careers of such canonical figures. *DNCJ* also pays significant attention to those involved in the press who were *not* journalists and editors. Particularly refreshing in this context is the number of entries devoted to the illustrators who played such an important role in the newspaper and periodical culture of the time. More than a hundred short entries provide the kind of detailed biographical information that is unavailable in one place in existing, widely-available reference works.

The 'Topics' sections are often challenging and illuminating, but this is also the most uneven element of the book. There is some repetition of information, for instance, between similarly-titled entries such as 'Cheap Journalism', 'Popular Press', 'Penny Papers' and 'Global Journalism' and 'Foreign Press.' While the coverage of topics is generally thorough, there are a few notable omissions and areas in which further discussion could be added. There is an entry on 'Reviewing' but not on 'Criticism', for example, and while strong attention is paid to the relationship with the transatlantic and colonial press the consideration of cultural interchange with continental journalism is less well developed, not extending much beyond entries on the 'Feuilleton' and the 'French Press.' There might also have been more detailed and thorough consider-

ration of the theoretical and critical developments that have shaped the field. *DNCJ* usefully includes entries on the Research Society for Victorian Periodicals and important reference works like the *Waterloo Directory*, as well as touching on critical debates in entries like ‘Paratext’, ‘Literary Replication’ and ‘Theory and Journalism.’ This aspect of the volume could, though, have been more comprehensive; if Gérard Genette merits a mention, then why not Mikhail Bakhtin? *DNCJ* might also have included further discussion of the digitisation projects and developments in the digital humanities which have influenced so many aspects of current research on Victorian periodicals. It should be mentioned that, perhaps inevitably with an undertaking of this size, *DNCJ* does contain one or two typos, slips and small errors. In a few cases there are also ‘dead links’ when the reader follows a cross-reference or source to find it is not listed elsewhere (as in the short biography of Annie Besant where there are cross

references to the journals *Lucifer* and *Theological Review* but no entries in *DNCJ*).

Minor issues such as these, however, do not detract from the impressive achievements of the *DNCJ*. Like the periodical press that is its subject, and reference works like the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* that it seeks to emulate, it is a ‘profoundly collaborative project’ which nonetheless demonstrates a great deal of coherence across its 1,014 pages. In the introduction the editors explain their hope that ‘students and scholars will find it useful, and absorbing.’ Its entries are certainly consistently thorough and well written. Like the best reference works, it is very much suited both to purposeful searching and pleasurable browsing, and many periodical researchers will surely be ‘tempted to read it through out of sheer interest and fascination.’

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