



Jennifer Phegley
2013 Curran Fellowship Report
Research Society for Victorian Periodicals

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Dear RSVP Board Members,

I am writing to report my progress on *Magazine Mavericks: John Maxwell, Samuel Beeton, and the Development of Niche-Market Periodicals in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England*, for which I was awarded the Curran Fellowship in 2013. RSVP's generous support allowed me to begin the research required to tell the story of how two self-made men, John Maxwell and Samuel Beeton, and their remarkable wives, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Isabella Beeton, and, later, Matilda Brown, collaboratively built lucrative magazine publishing empires out of little more than their abilities to imagine new groups of readers and craft ingenious marketing strategies to engage them. By focusing on case studies of Maxwell's working- and lower-middle-class family magazines and Beeton's women's, boys', and girls' magazines, this book explores several major questions: What circumstances allowed these men of modest means to form successful magazine ventures that spanned three decades, from the 1850s to the 1870s? How did these entrepreneurial publishers conceptualize new magazine formats to shape and reach neglected audiences? What role did the women writers in their lives play in their development of niche-market magazines? And, finally, what impact did the magazine genres they invented have on the Victorian publishing industry as a whole?

To begin answering these questions, I travelled to London in July 2013 to conduct research on Beeton's periodicals at the British Library and the Victoria and Albert Museum National Art Library. I spent four days at the BL where I studied Beeton's *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* (1852-1857) and the *Boy's Own Magazine* (1855-58). I spent an additional three days at the V&A examining the *Young Englishwoman* (1865-69) and *Myra's Journal of Dress and Fashion* (1875-76). As I read through the first few years of these magazines, I was able to get a sense of how each worked to serve different members of the family—mothers, daughters, or sons—helping them to develop individual identities while maintaining the importance of the domestic group as a whole. Indeed, the magazines themselves struck me as part of a family with many similarities in appearance, form, and style.

Maxwell and Beeton both subdivided audiences in a way that created distinct identities based on characteristics such as sex, age, and class, which they used to develop magazines that tapped into what they imagined to be the common interests and concerns of each targeted group. However, while Maxwell focused on high-quality illustrations and sensational fiction to capture readers' attention and secure their loyalty, my research suggests that Beeton cultivated his audiences by interacting with them in direct and palpable ways. Each issue incorporated a wide variety of innovative methods to engage his readers. He ran prize lotteries and subscription drives and created enticing special issues featuring "free" dress patterns or "bonus" novellas. He also cultivated readers through writing contests that culminated in the publication of their work and advice columns intended to forge personal connections and to create a sense of community.

Beeton linked his periodicals together into a family of products that spoke to each other through the

advertising on their wrappers as well as the editorial commentary within their pages. The *Young Englishwoman* referred readers back to the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* asked readers to check out fashion designs in *Myra's Journal*, and the *Boy's Own Magazine* urged the mothers and sisters of its readers to purchase other periodicals in the Beeton line. Beeton's periodicals, I argue, pioneered aggressive, interactive methods of courting niche-market readers. Other publishers borrowed Beeton's marketing techniques and imitated his periodical genres. Indeed, Ward, Lock, and Co. was eager to buy his magazines when financial bad luck and a few poor business decisions caused his empire to falter in the late 1860s. Beeton's successful brand is evident in that publisher's insistence on continuing to use his name to sell its products even after severing all ties with him and winning a lawsuit excluding him from all profits related to the publications he founded. By the 1870s Beeton was in decline, but his innovative marketing strategies were commonplace. Audiences became even more narrowly divided and there were now magazines for seemingly every special interest group from bicyclists to telegraph operators to anarchists. Beeton anticipated the advance of niche marketing and laid the foundation for the publishing practices that still dominate the industry today.

The work I did in London allowed me to build and refine this project so that I could apply for a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship to complete the book (currently under review). My Curran-supported research likewise informed two articles that I've submitted for publication. The first article outlines the development of the family magazine in the nineteenth century and makes significant connections between two genres that are typically studied in isolation: working-class penny weeklies and middle-class shilling monthlies ("Family Magazines." *Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century British Periodicals*. Eds. Alexis Easley, Andrew King, and John Morton. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Press, Forthcoming 2014.). The second article, on the Valentine's Day issues of *Bow Bells*, examines how this penny weekly targets women readers in part by borrowing methods from Beeton's *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* and other mid-century niche-market periodicals for women ("Reading Victorian Valentines: Working-Class Women, Courtship, and the Penny Post in *Bow Bells Magazine*" for *Comics Through the Looking-Glass: Reading the Palimpsest of Victorian and Neo-Victorian Graphic Texts*. Eds., Anna Maria Jones and Rebecca N. Mitchell. Under Review, Ohio University Press). Both articles were unintended but welcome products of my Curran Fellowship research.

The Curran Fellowship also led to a University of Missouri Research Board Grant for *Magazine Mavericks* that will allow me to take a research leave during the Spring of 2015. In addition, I was awarded a University of Texas Harry Ransom Research Center Fellowship for Spring of 2015. During a two-week visit to the Ransom Center I will study Maxwell's *Welcome Guest* (1858-61), the *Halfpenny Journal* (1861-64), and the *Sixpenny Magazine* (1861-63). I will also examine other niche-market publications that will help me understand the context in which these publishing entrepreneurs thrived, including the *Working Man's Friend and Family Instructor* (1850), the *Child's Friend and Family Magazine* (1844), the *Girl of the Period Miscellany* (1869), *Routledge's Every Boy's Annual* (1863-66), *Home Circle* (1850), and the *Ladies' Treasury* (1866). My primary research goal will be to establish a clearer understanding of Maxwell's strategies for reaching, defining, and shaping new audiences and to compare his approaches to Beeton's.

I greatly appreciate the support RSVP provided to get this book project off the ground and to help me secure additional funding. It was truly an honor to be selected for this award!

Sincerely,
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