

**The Guiding Brain and Directing Hand:
Human Interest Reporting and the Power of the Press in
W.T. Stead's *Pall Mall Gazette***

by

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A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of History
Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
August 2, 2005

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Your file *Votre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-33734-9
Our file *Notre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-33734-9

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Abstract

This thesis examines the efforts of W.T. Stead to increase the power of the British press through human interest reporting. Stead believed that newspapers constituted significant institutions of power, equal to the traditional institutions of government and church, and that their rightful role in society was to criticise injustices and inspire change through the direction of public opinion. This study examines Stead's editorial theory, based on his self-reflective writings on journalism, and how that theory was put into practice in two particular episodes of his career at the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the London newspaper that he edited from 1883 to 1889. The episodes examined are Stead's involvement in General Charles Gordon's 1884 expedition to Khartoum and the famous "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" exposé of child prostitution in London.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people for their contributions to my studies over the last two years:

My thesis supervisor, Dr. Pamela J. Walker, for her guidance on everything from the historiography of "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" to the best place to eat lunch near the British Library.

Dr. Mark Phillips, for his advice and encouragement, and Dr. A.B. McKillop, in whose class I discovered press history.

The staff of the British Library, the staff of the Women's Library at the London Metropolitan University, the archivists of the University of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne's Special Collections, the librarians at Carleton University's Interlibrary Loans office, and Joan White, the Graduate Secretary of Carleton University's Department of History, all of whom contributed to making the process so much easier and more enjoyable than I had expected it to be.

My friends Jaq Delaney, whose generosity allowed me to spend an unbelievable month buried in the archives of Britain, and Marie-Claude Danis, who has been unfailingly supportive.

My grandparents, great-aunts and uncles, regular aunts and uncles, and cousins, who always ask how my studies are coming along and are genuinely interested in the answer.

My parents, Ron Common and Lorraine Frost, whose love and unwavering faith in me have given me the confidence to do what I have, and whose example I try always to live up to.

Finally, Mackenzie, who is my sister and my best friend.

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"If any of my agents did not execute my instructions that of course is another matter. But if it be that in the execution of my instructions they have transgressed unwittingly the law which we were seeking to strengthen, I would pray that the sole punishment should fall upon me. But if Your Worship considers that you must commit the case for trial, I beg of you to remember that mine was the guiding brain and this the directing hand which alone is responsible for what was done."

- W.T. Stead's suppressed statement of defence, "The Eliza Armstrong Case,"
Pall Mall Gazette Extra, 30 October 1885, 93.

1. Introduction: Historiography of the Victorian Press and W.T. Stead

When Lucy Maynard Salmon published *The Newspaper and the Historian* in 1923, she did so with the aim of educating historians about the value and limitations of newspapers as sources. Salmon, then a history professor at Vassar College and the author of a number of books on American history, was writing at the end of an era that had seen an explosion in newspaper production, both in North America and in Europe.

Advancements in printing technology over the course of the nineteenth century had made printing faster and much less expensive than had ever been the case before, allowing for the development of newspapers as the first mass media. At the same time, social and economic developments, such as increased literacy levels and the rise of a middle class, led to an expansion of the potential readership base.

Newspapers, Salmon asserts in the introduction of *The Newspaper and the Historian*, can be of great value to historians, provided they are used with care. Although they lack the "veracity and trustworthiness"¹ of government or legal documents, newspapers give the historian an otherwise unattainable glimpse at "the spirit of a time or locality."² In the five hundred pages that follow, Maynard attempts to describe for historians the complexities of newspapers and other similar forms of periodical literature.

Maynard's discussion of subtleties of press publications is sophisticated for her time; her treatment of issues such as the implications for historians of collective or anonymous authorship in nineteenth century newspapers would not seem out of place if

¹ Lucy Maynard Salmon, *The Newspaper and the Historian*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1923), xli.

² *Ibid.*, xli.

put into a collection with press histories published in the 1980s. There is, therefore, a certain irony in the fact that Salmon does not discuss the value and interest of the press as a subject of historical inquiry in and of itself, despite the fact that *The Newspaper and the Historian* is precisely that: an extended study of the history of European and North American newspapers that traces public communication from the Greek and Roman eras through to the 1920s. Rather, Salmon is merely attempting to address the question with which she concludes her introduction: "What then is the newspaper and to what extent can it serve the historian?"³ In other words, how might newspapers be used by historians towards the research of subjects other than the press?

Salmon's *The Newspaper and the Historian* embodies the two ways in which historians approach newspapers, viewing them either as a source for or as the subject of their research. The book is a guide for historians seeking to use newspapers as sources for research. At the same time, *The Newspaper and the Historian* treats the press as the subject. The historians who fall into the former category are as varied as the actual subjects of their research. Historians who are studying the history of the press, however, particularly those focusing on the press of the late nineteenth century, fall into one of two categories: those writing institutional histories, which focus on the development of the institutional framework surrounding the press, and those writing textual histories, which examine changes in the form of the publications under consideration. The division between these two types of press history is expressed in every aspect of the historian's work, from the type of sources and research methodologies being employed to the kinds of questions being asked and the theoretical frameworks in which they are being discussed. One of the major points of disagreement between the two categories is the

³ *Ibid.*, xliii.

issue of the agency of the individual in the production of newspapers; institutional press historians attribute a great deal of authority to the role of the individual, where as textual historians tend to de-emphasise the individual in favour of focusing on the newspaper as the product of a collective effort. Each of these two types of press history have both advantages and disadvantages, and each contributes, in the end, to a more well-rounded perspective of the development of newspapers than either would alone.

Along with these two main categories exists a third type of press history, that of studies focusing on significant press personalities, such as Britain's Lord Northcliffe or America's Joseph Pulitzer. Northcliffe, Pulitzer, and other such press barons have, in particular, been the focus of historical studies due to the great social and political influence they wielded as the heads of press conglomerates and for their business successes. The biographies of such people often emphasise the adeptness with which they went from being journalists to the proprietors of single, small newspapers to the heads of massive press empires, configuring them as heroes of a Samuel Smiles bootstrap tale.

An example of this type of work is S.J. Taylor's 1996 *The Great Outsiders: Northcliffe, Rothermere, and the Daily Mail*,⁴ the story of the two Harmsworth brothers who, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, became Britain's premier press barons and were eventually granted titles by the British government. Taylor's work, but one of the many books published on Alfred and Harold Harmsworth, is typical of this kind of press history. The body of Taylor's primary source material consists of letters and similar archival material. The book has very little to do with the *Daily Mail*, the

⁴ S.J. Taylor, *The Great Outsiders: Northcliffe, Rothermere and the Daily Mail* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1996).

newspaper that the brothers co-founded in 1865 and instead focuses on the details of the lives of the two men. Taylor describes the lives of Alfred and Harold from their births through to their deaths in a series of interesting anecdotes only loosely united by the theme of the growth of a press empire. Their importance arises, not out of their association with the press, but rather from the social power that association gave them. Such studies, focusing as they do on the lives of individuals, bear more resemblance to the biographies of any other notable personality than they do to the other types of press history; that figures like the Harmsworth brothers were noteworthy because of their involvement in the press is of less importance than the mere fact of their wealth, power, and success.

Any significant change in newspapers, according to Salmon, occurs as a result of "the accretion of new interests"⁵ by their readerships. The development of the popular press over the course of the nineteenth century, however, was due to more than just a change in the *interests* of the newspaper audience. Rather, the new breed of newspapers were the result of the dramatic expansion of that audience to include segments of society that had never before been a part of a press readership.

The dynamics of press production altered drastically in this same period, in no small part due to the changes in readership, but also due to changes in technological advancement and press-related legislation. The press of the early nineteenth century was limited by the available printing technology, which did not allow for the speedy production of large quantities of newspapers. The mid- to late-nineteenth century, however, witnessed the mass mechanisation of the entire printing process. The invention of steam powered presses, rotary presses, mechanised type setting machines, and similar

⁵ Salmon, *The Newspaper and the Historian*, 10.

innovations sped up the printing process until mass quantities of single issues of newspapers could be produced daily. Newspaper producers were no longer faced with a choice between quantity and frequency, as they had been in the first few decades of the nineteenth century.

Another major determinate of British press production in the first half of the nineteenth century was an oppressive system of taxes placed on newspapers by the British government. These levies, which as a group came to be called the "taxes on knowledge" by their later detractors, taxed everything from the number of pages to the amount of advertising each publication contained. Historians addressing the rise of the popular press in the United States often cite the freedom of the taxes on knowledge as a major factor in the development of an innovative American press that remained unmatched in Britain until many years later. The most prominent of these taxes, and the one most thoroughly discussed by historians dealing with the subject, was the Stamp Tax, some variation of which had been in place in Britain since the Stamp Act of 1712.⁶ The Stamp Tax was a duty that had to be paid by all newspapers in order to be deemed legal publications. The repeal of the Stamp Act in 1855 and the subsequent repeal of many of the other taxes on knowledge led to a drastic increase in the number and type of newspapers and a drastic decrease in the cost of newspaper production. The elimination of these duties left newspaper production in Britain largely unregulated, and the British press moved quickly to catch up to the innovations of its American counterpart.

Historians of nineteenth century press are almost invariably concerned with the issues surrounding the development of the popular press and the relationship between the

⁶ Matthew Engel, *Tickle the Public: One Hundred Years of the Popular Press* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1996), 18.

popular and traditional press. The historiography of the British press of the nineteenth century is the historiography of the rise of a popular press. The new publications of the popular press reflected the interests of a new type of reader or, at the very least, what the producers of popular newspapers believed those interests to be. For historians, the popular press provides a means of examining the lives of those members of society not accounted for in the documents of government or diplomacy.

The earliest press histories were self-studies by former journalists or editors at the end of their careers, and were largely focused on the development of governmental and economic structures surrounding the press. Two such early press histories are T.H.S. Escott's *Masters of English Journalism: A Study of Personal Forces*, published in 1911, and Henry Simonis' *The Street of Ink: an Intimate History of Journalism*, published in 1917. Self-studies remained the mainstay of press history until the 1960s, the point at which press history, in its institution-focused form, began to gain momentum as a type of academic history.

The textual approach to press history, in contrast, came into its own as a field in the 1970s and early 1980s, the point at which historians such as Aled Jones and Laurel Brake began publishing their studies of Victorian era press and periodical literature. Text-focused historians tend to approach press publications as a record of the ideas and sensibilities of the period in which they were produced, and so begin their studies with the newspapers themselves and expand to extra-textual sources from there. Although both institutionally-focused and text-focused studies deal, in a broad sense, with the history of newspapers, each has a distinct set of sources and theoretical frameworks, making the two easily distinguishable.

In considering of the origins of the popular press in the nineteenth century, there are certain general points upon which the two types of press historians agree. Most of them agree that the explosion of publications aimed at a middle and lower class readership in the 1800s was related to the concurrent rise in literacy among members of those classes, to changes in the economic system in which newspapers were operating, and to advancements made in printing technology during that period. Nearly every consideration of the rise of the English popular press, irrespective of the specific focus of the work, opens with an account of the lifting of what were known as the "taxes on knowledge" over the course of the 1850s, the impact of the Education Act of 1870, and the development of printing technology that made the production of newspapers faster and cheaper overall.

Where the two types of press histories diverge, however, is in the specific weight given to each of these generally agreed upon causes, as well as in any additional causes they identify. This divergence may in large part be attributed to the type of sources each turns to in studying the press.

Lucy Brown, in her 1985 *Victorian News and Newspapers*, writes, "Anyone who attempts to write about newspapers in the nineteenth century quickly comes face to face with the difficulty of sources."⁷ Brown's book is an examination of the development of a news industry in Britain, looking at "where it came from, how it was handled, distributed, and presented,"⁸ with the intention of determining where newspapers fit into the political and social life of the period. In doing so, she focuses on the institutional frameworks surrounding the construction of news, describing changes in press related law, the birth of

⁷ Lucy Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 3.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

distribution agencies, and the development of newspapers as economic enterprises. One of her chapters, for example, focuses on the establishment of news agencies, those companies that organised "a whole network of co-operative news gathering arrangements"⁹ to which many smaller newspapers subscribed. For a provincial paper with a limited circulation, the cost of a subscription to a news agency like Reuters was much more manageable than the cost of sending their own reporters to London or even overseas to cover events of national and international importance.

The "difficulty of sources" Brown refers to is largely due to her focus on the institutional development of news; as she herself acknowledges, archived newspapers from the Victorian period are both plentiful and easy to work with. The difficulty she refers to is in obtaining sources that "establish the processes behind the finished result."¹⁰ The focus of Brown's work necessitates the use of the personal papers of journalists, editors, and proprietors, government records, business records of circulation figures and economic structures, and letters alluding to the ties between various newspapers and local political parties. These types of sources, unlike the actual issues of newspapers, are hard to come by; journalists wrote anonymously and changed jobs frequently, business records are often "scrappy"¹¹ if not entirely missing, and political ties were rarely ever documented. Only government records are readily available.

The opposite is true for historians focusing on the textual history of the press, for whom the central primary source material is the newspapers themselves. As Joanne Shattock and Michael Wolff write in their introduction to *The Victorian Press: Samplings and Soundings*, "The sheer bulk and range of the Victorian press seem to make it so

⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

unwieldy as to defy systematic and general study. Given the inadequacy of most existing reference works, the uncertainties of cataloguing, and that vague but all-too familiar feeling that there are literally millions of serial articles out there whose allure we dare not admit, we can barely grasp the dimensions of the subject, let alone come to grips with its content."¹² Rather than the dearth of sources that, as Brown asserts, institutionally-focused press historians are forced to deal with, historians interested in the development of the form of the newspaper are faced with an excess of sources, the collected weight of which can be overwhelming. This surfeit of sources, Shattock and Wolff argue, discourages even the attempt at a general study of the Victorian press, inspiring instead case study after case study from which only a "casual or glancing knowledge"¹³ of the greater body of newspaper culture may be derived.

One of the effects of the type of primary source material favoured by institutional historians is an increased emphasis on the role of the individual in the construction of newspapers. Archived collections of personal papers, published memoirs, and business accounts are inherently individual-centred records. Consequently, the sense of the press such historians develop is one that indexes itself to the achievements of the individual, allowing Piers Brendon to conclude his introduction to *The Life and Death of Press Barons* by asserting that "The history of modern journalism is the sum of their [the press barons'] biographies."¹⁴ Yet Victorian newspapers, like their modern counterparts, were the product of a collective effort by many people rather than that of a single author. Each issue of the newspaper was influenced, to varying degrees, by the journalists who wrote

¹² Joanne Shattock and Michael Wolff, ed., *The Victorian Press: Samplings and Soundings* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982), xiii.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Piers Brendon, *The Life and Death of the Press Barons* (New York: Atheneum, 1982), 4.

articles, by the members of the art department who determined the visual presentation, by the editor, and even by the paper's proprietor. Each of these individuals contributed to determining what Salmon called the "personality" of the newspaper, that unique character resulting from the combination of the paper's appearance and its content within the general framework of the specifications laid out by the proprietor and by the demands of the intended audience.¹⁵

In practical terms, the effect of multi-authored works, such as newspapers, is to create the impression of an authorless work. This is particularly so in the case of Victorian newspapers due to the widely accepted practice of anonymous journalism. As Michel Foucault argues in his "What Is an Author?", which expands on Roland Barthes' "The Death of the Author,"¹⁶ authorship serves a "classificatory function,"¹⁷ a means by which to define and organise texts into categories. This organising, according to Foucault, is the way readers begin to understand the texts under consideration, allowing them to compare texts and rationalise the relationships between them. The process, furthermore, is a limiting one, serving to locate the text within "a certain discursive set" and indicating "the status of this discourse within a society and a culture."¹⁸ Readers faced with authorless texts therefore attempt to construct an author as means of categorising, limiting, and therefore understanding those texts.

In her chapter "The Newspaper as a Personality", Salmon constructs the newspaper as entirely separate from any type of authorship. Newspapers are presented as

¹⁵ Salmon, *The Newspaper and the Historian*, 41.

¹⁶ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," Stephen Heath tr. and ed., *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?", Paul Rabinow ed., *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 107.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

objectified collectivities, as independent characters in their own rights, and are seemingly disconnected from the personalities of the individuals involved in their creation. This is especially interesting in light of the extended analysis Salmon provides later in the book on the respective roles of the various editorial contributors of newspapers. Instead of using Foucault's constructed author to limit the text, Salmon uses the text itself to construct boundaries, giving it the personality and agency of an author. This may be a reflection of the way in which newspapers in the Victorian era, the period that most occupies Salmon, were constructed. The "personality" of a newspaper was very consciously composed through both the visual presentation and the actual content to serve as a trademark of the publication separate from any sense of individual authorship. *The Times* was therefore constructed as *The Times*, as a seemingly authorless text, irrespective of any changes in personnel that may have occurred.

While institutionally-focused press historians emphasise the role of particular individuals, those historians more interested in the development of the text itself tend to de-emphasise individual agency. In part, this may be due to the form of Victorian newspapers, which serves to submerge the individual through conventions like anonymous authorship. Furthermore, although the construction authorship that Foucault discusses in his article describes the ways in which institutional historians had for some time dealt with the issue of individual agency and authorship in the Victorian press, institutionally-focused historians rarely approached the process analytically. When textual historians of the press began to come into their own in the 1980s, however, it was with a consciousness of the poststructuralist theories of Barthes, Foucault and others.

One of the works wherein this is most evident is Patricia Anderson's 1991 *The Printed Image and the Transformation of Popular Culture, 1790-1860*, which examines the development of a visual popular culture in Britain, largely through the rapidly expanding body of "cheap literature"¹⁹ being produced by the popular publishing industry. She discusses images from popular newspapers, magazines, advertisements, novels, and even school texts. One of the publications she examines in greater detail, considering it to be representative of the greater body of illustrated magazines in the mid-1800s, is a magazine called *The Penny Magazine*, a publication aimed, as the first issue stated, at a readership "whose time and means are equally limited."²⁰ In her consideration of the effect of this developing visual culture on what she asserts to be a much larger and much more socially varied body of readers, Anderson relies heavily on postmodern theories regarding image and photography. She writes, "It is the context of imagery that is of particular interest here for, as we will see, when, where, and by what means an image is reproduced together affect its meaning. We will find that illustration – most notably art reproduction – often had implicit contemporary social meanings which are sometimes still accessible."²¹ The analysis through which she attempts to explicate those implicit messages is taken largely from Barthes' work on meaning and image. She cites in particular the articles "The Photographic Message" and "The Rhetoric of the Image," both of which were first translated into English and printed in the same volume as "The Death of the Author."²²

¹⁹ Patricia Anderson, *The Printed Image and the Transformation of Popular Culture, 1790-1860* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 1.

²⁰ *The Penny Magazine* 1832 (I): 1, quoted in *Ibid.*, 53.

²¹ Anderson, *The Printed Image*, 13.

²² Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, tr. and ed. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).

Aled Jones' *Powers of the Press: Newspapers, Power and the Public in Nineteenth-Century England*, published in 1996, is similarly influenced by poststructuralist thought. The book is an examination of the construction in the popular consciousness of the Victorian era of "the newspaper as a harbinger, or indeed the active agent, of change,"²³ a focus that in and of itself shows the influence of Foucault's theories. Jones explores the connection between the real newspaper and the newspaper that was "imagined and theorised, written and spoken about"²⁴ as an almost entirely distinct cultural entity. Citing Foucault's theories on the discourse of power relations, Jones argues that "the means by which the social world was represented, and thus the way in which power was exercised at all levels [...] was believed by contemporaries to have been transformed by the coming of cheap printed news."²⁵ His book is an attempt to map the construction of what contemporaries believed to be the new identities based in individual newspapers and the related dispersions of power.

A second area in which the division between institutional and textual press historians is evident is in the methodology and theoretical frameworks used by each. Historians focusing on the bureaucratic frameworks surrounding newspapers tend to favour a unidisciplinary approach, relying almost entirely on traditional methods of researching and interpreting history. Piers Brendon, for example, presents his study of the rise and fall of press barons in the form of a relatively linear narrative, charting the governmental, economic, and social changes that allowed for the emergence of that

²³ Aled Jones, *Powers of the Press: Newspapers, Power and the Public in Nineteenth-Century England* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996), xi.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

"remarkable species"²⁶ of unimaginably powerful men. In his *The Life and Death of Press Barons*, published in 1982, Brendon focuses on British and American press lords to the exclusion of equally worthy characters from other areas of the world. He does so in part as a means to reduce his topic to manageable proportions, faced, as he was over the course of his research, with an overabundance of archival material. In contrast to Brown's lamented dearth of sources, the lives of figures such as Lord Northcliffe, Lord Beaverbrook, Horace Greeley, and Joseph Pulitzer have been meticulously documented and studied, both by their contemporaries and by historians in the period following their respective deaths. Brendon further justifies his narrowed scope by asserting that it is his intention to "chart the ebb and flow of journalist influence"²⁷ within the shared British and American journalistic tradition, a goal that would only be undermined by attempting to rationalise personalities steeped in, for example, the French or German traditions.

In light of Brendon's assertion that the history of the press is composed of the collected biographies of the press barons, it is unsurprising that his book is precisely that: a series of anecdotal accounts of the lives of the press barons that Brendon uses to explicate general themes. However, unlike those biographical works that trace a single press personality from birth to death and provide greatly detailed descriptions of all aspects of his or her life, Brendon's accounts centre around the connection between the individuals under consideration and the growth of their press empires, paying only cursory attention to those aspects of their personal lives that did not directly affect their public roles in the press. Brendon's work is based on his examination of the large archival collections of personal papers and the published memoirs relating to the

²⁶ Brendon, *The Life and Death of the Press Barons*, 1.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

individuals under consideration. By and large, his book is an account of the ways in which certain personalities, benefiting from the particular governmental, social, and economic conditions that existed in the period between the 1880s and the 1980s, acquired and accumulated both power and wealth. A slightly earlier examination of precisely the same topic, with precisely the same methodology and largely the same conclusions, is Hugh Cudlipp's *The Prerogative of the Harlot: Press Barons and Power*, published in 1980. Cudlipp focuses on the careers of William Randolph Hearst, Lord Northcliffe, the first Lord Rothermere, Henry Robinson Luce, and Lord Beaverbrook. *The Prerogative of the Harlot* and *The Life and Death of Press Barons* are very similar in structure to those national histories that describe in great detail the actions of key political personalities and make little mention of extra-governmental characters or events; the approach taken by both books serve to provide a Great-Man perspective of the history of the press. Like their political equivalents, such works give a valuable insight into a narrow aspect of newspaper history, while, at the same time, excluding a great deal from their consideration of developments in the press.

In contrast to the tendency towards unidisciplinarity exhibited by institutional press historians, text-focused historians generally take a very interdisciplinary approach to their studies. In attempting to examine the changes in the form of newspapers, the causes thereof, and the effect those changes may have had on the readership, textual historians frequently combine traditional history research methodologies with theories borrowed from literary criticism, art history, sociology, media studies, mass communication studies, and journalism. Paul Rutherford, in his 1982 *A Victorian Authority: the Daily Press in Late Nineteenth-Century Canada*, relies heavily on mass

communication theory in his attempt to describe the authority wielded by or, inversely, on the Victorian era press of Canada. Rutherford, in tackling the very difficult task of describing the reaction of the readership to Canadian newspapers in a period that predates audience response polling, turns to H.D. Lasswell's model of communications research.²⁸ Lasswell's model invests both the producers and consumers of mass communications media with a degree of agency and is instrumental in the formation of Rutherford's eventual conclusion: that both halves of the supply and demand equation wielded a certain degree of authority over the other. Although Rutherford's *A Victorian Authority* focuses on the growth of daily newspapers in Canada, the research methodology he adopts from media studies and the general conclusions he draws are applicable to the study of press history in Britain as well.

One exception to the tendency of institutional press historians to avoid a more multidisciplinary approach is Alan J. Lee's *The Origins of the Popular Press in England, 1855-1914*, published in 1976. Lee's book is an institutional press history that is heavily influenced by Marxist theory and focuses on governmental, social, and economic structures. In accounting for the rise of the popular press, he describes the expansion of education and literacy, the advancements made in printing technology, the development of systems of distribution, and the professionalisation of journalism. Furthermore, in the introduction to the book, Lee asserts that the Victorian era press was inextricably linked to politics and the processes of democracy. He writes, "For the first half of the nineteenth century, at least, there seemed to be as triumphant an accord between liberal theory and liberal achievement in the press as in education or in free trade. By the end of the

²⁸ Paul Rutherford, *A Victorian Authority: the Daily Press in Late Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 6.

century, however, the triumph and achievement were matters of history. Party and press seemed locked in a parallel decline."²⁹

Lee, like Rutherford, uses H.D. Lasswell's model for communications research in order to study both the production and the consumption of newspapers in England. He turns to Lasswell in an attempt to describe the largely undocumented process of the commercial consumption of newspapers in the Victorian era. Similar issues relating to audience reception and response frequently inform the questions being asked by text-focused press historians, most of whom also turn to mass communication or media studies theory in the face of an even more extreme shortage of sources than that which faces historians researching institutional histories.

As is the case with the sources and theoretical frameworks favoured by institutional historians, which encourage what is arguably an overemphasis on the role of the individual, the newspaper-centric and multidisciplinary approach of textual press historians has its limitations. Most notably, as Shattock and Wolff write, "the trees prevent us from seeing the forest [...] although we know of a few of the most interesting trees and are aware of thousands of others, we do not really believe there is a forest, just a gathering of trees."³⁰ Where institutional-minded press historians tend to stress the importance of a few key individuals, textual press historians have a tendency to emphasise the importance of particular publications to the greater body of periodical literature. The practice of beginning with the text of the newspaper and expanding from that point can serve to decontextualise the publication in question, which has much the

²⁹ Alan J. Lee, *The Origins of the Popular Press in England, 1855-1914* (London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1976), 15.

³⁰ Shattock and Wolff, *The Victorian Press*, xiii.

same effect on the perspective of the textual historian as immersion in one set of archived personal papers can have on the institutional historian.

The danger of this perhaps unbalanced perspective is especially acute in a field that preoccupies itself with the largely undocumented processes of reader response. Much of the work of textual historians rests on the assumption that newspapers are, in fact, the manifestation of a particular set of ideas and sensibilities, what Salmon calls the "spirit of a time or locality."³¹ The rationale for studying the shift in the form of newspapers, therefore, is that what is actually being studied is the evolution of the ideas that exist behind the text. The conclusions that are thereafter drawn rest on a set of assumptions regarding the precise demographic of the readership, the intended messages being communicated by newspaper producers, and that those messages are in fact being received largely *as* intended by the newspaper's audience. These assumptions often have little direct documentary support, but have been extrapolated from peripheral sources. The effect of Shattock and Wolff's "gathering of trees", therefore, is to undermine many of the historian's conclusions.

Recent years have seen the emergence of a new trend in the study of press history towards the consideration of issues of empire and colonialism. This in large part is a reflection of the explosion in the popularity of postcolonial theory, both within and outside the discipline of history. The rise of this trend may be charted through the pages of such journals as the *Victorian Periodicals Reviews* and *Victorian Studies*, which have, since the mid-1990s, been carrying increasing numbers of articles and reviews of books on the relationship between the Victorian periodical press and issues of colonialism.

³¹ Salmon, *The Newspaper and the Historian*, xli.

Scarcely an issue of either journal has been published since 2000 that has not contained at least one article or book review on a postcolonial topic.

The historiography of this emerging subfield is an interesting one, containing many examples of both institutionally-focused and text-focused histories. An example of the former may be found in Simon J. Potter's *News and the British World: the Emergence of an Imperial Press System, 1876-1922*, published in 2003. The book, a revision of Potter's Ph.D. thesis, examines the development of a unified imperial press in Britain and the Dominions of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa following the completion of a "network of cable connections between Britain and each of the Dominions of white settlement, allowing near-instantaneous communication."³² Potter is attempting to trace, through the development of an international system of connected institutions and individuals, the creation of a British imperial identity. He relies a great deal on the E.J. Hobsbawm's theories on the construction of national sentiment and Benedict Anderson's ideas regarding imagined communities in his examination of this constructed identity, which he describes as being defined through a mixture of cultural and racial criteria.

As is the case with most institutional press historians, Potter gives the greatest weight to archival collections of personal papers. Over the course of his research, he consulted the papers of many key press and governmental personalities for each of the areas under consideration, using them to "put editorial opinion as expressed in newspaper columns into its proper context, drawing out the interests of those involved in the process

³² Simon J. Potter, *News and the British World: the Emergence of an Imperial Press System, 1876-1922* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), vii.

of production."³³ This has led to a very personality-driven study of the connections between press agencies, distribution agencies, and governmental agencies. He identifies key figures in each of the newspapers and governments under consideration and traces their careers through the archival material that is his dominant source and through the newspapers that are a secondary expression of "the interests of those involved."

In contrast to Potter's institutional examination, *Negotiating India in the Nineteenth-Century Media*, edited by David Finkelstein and Douglas M. Peers, provides a very good example of a textually based study of the colonial press. The book is a collection of essays that deal with the dual role of the press both as a site of hegemony and as a site of resistance to that hegemony in imperial India. As Finkelstein and Peers write in their introduction to the collection, *Negotiating India in the Nineteenth-Century Media* is in many ways an extension of a pre-existing body of literature regarding the ways in which India was represented to audiences both in Britain and in India through travel accounts, diaries, official records, and literary works.³⁴ Many of the articles in the book are predicated on the work of critics such as Edward Said and Anne McClintock, whose analysis of colonial discourse provide the theoretical base upon which Glenn R. Wilkinson and the other historians of *Negotiating India in Nineteenth-Century Media* are building.

In their introduction, Finkelstein and Peers assert that their book serves to fill a gap that had existed at the intersection of postcolonial theory, media history, and the study of the Victorian era press. Historians of the Victorian era press had until that point

³³ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁴ David Finkelstein and Douglas M. Peers, "A Great System of Circulation: Introducing Indian into the Nineteenth-Century Media," *Negotiating India in the Nineteenth-Century Media*, David Finkelstein and Douglas M. Peers, ed. (London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 2000), 2.

largely ignored the issue of representations of colonialism. Postcolonialists, on the other hand, had disregarded the large body of potential source material presented by Victorian periodical literature. Media historians, finally, tended to focus on radio, film, and television, paying only cursory attention to the mass media of the nineteenth century. As Finkelstein and Peers complain, post-colonialists and media historians "either ignore the Victorian press or strip-mine it for pithy quotes."³⁵ The purpose of their book, then, is to construct nineteenth century newspapers as "sites of contestation" aimed at a much broader audience than the travel accounts and literary works that occupied earlier critics.

As was the case with earlier text-based studies, the articles collected in *Negotiating India in the Nineteenth-Century Media* focus on the press publications themselves and are informed by theories from a number of disciplines. The authors of the various essays originate from a wide range of disciplines, and include historians, literary critics, and those media historians who have presumably proven themselves to be exceptions to the 'strip-mining' norm.

The division between institutional press historians and textual press historians is by no means absolute. Both are at least minimally concerned with the central preoccupations of the other. In the examination of the body of work concerning the press in the nineteenth century, however, the classification is a useful one, providing a solid base for the analysis of source, methodology, and theoretical frameworks. Historians writing institutionally-focused press histories rely predominantly on government and archival collections of personal papers or business records. The result of this particular source base is that such historians tend to emphasise the role played by the individual in the construction of Victorian era newspapers. Textual press historians, in contrast, begin

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

with the newspaper itself and expand out from that centre. They make use of theories taken from a number of other disciplines in their efforts to describe processes that are largely undocumented. The recent growth of a historiography of colonialism and the press brings with it a new set of theoretical issues that have yet to be fully explored. The division between institutional focused and text focused histories, however, is still very much present in this new historiography.

For a man who was regarded by his contemporaries to have had an undeniably significant role in the development, not only of the British press, but also of British domestic and international policy in the late Victorian period, W.T. Stead is underrepresented in the historical record. The historiography of his life and career is episodic; historians encounter and discuss the part he played in individual and isolated events without addressing the overall context of his career. Press historians from T.H.S. Escott, writing at the turn of the twentieth century, to Aled Jones, writing at the turn of the twenty-first, credit Stead with the invention of "New Journalism," the name given by contemporary literary critic Matthew Arnold to the new style of newspaper writing that had emerged and exploded in popularity in the last two decades of the nineteenth-century.³⁶ He is also credited with inventing or popularising such newspaper features as the interview, the editorial column, article headlines, and signed articles.³⁷

Many of the journalistic advances attributed to Stead by the body of British press historians were not actually of his invention. He was not the originator of the press

³⁶ Arnold was not a fan of the new press. In the article in which he coined the term, Arnold wrote that the 'New Journalism' "has much to recommend it; it is full of ability, novelty, variety, sensation, sympathy, generous instincts; its one great fault is that it is featherbrained. It throws out assertions at a venture because it wishes them to true, does not correct either them or itself, if they are false; and to get at the state of things as they truly are seems to feel no concern whatever." (Matthew Arnold, "Up to Easter," *Nineteenth Century* XXI:123 (May 1887), 638-39.)

³⁷ O.J. Hale, *Publicity and Diplomacy, with Special Reference to England and Germany, 1890-1914* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1964), 13.

interview, use of images, or the personal note in journalism. Many of those features had appeared much earlier in the pages of the American popular press. Rather, Stead was a master of integration. Like Darwin, who collected a number of pre-existing scientific theories into a unified theory of evolution, Stead borrowed techniques from a variety of sources. Yet, even if Stead was not the first to use such techniques in his newspaper, he was the first to use them in such a systematic and meaningful way. While these techniques may have first been introduced elsewhere, from the perspective of Stead's readers, critics, and admirers, both in Britain and in the United States, he had created something innovative and unique..

Stead, as he is portrayed by the majority of press historians, is one-dimensional; he is an innovative journalist whose efforts to increase the circulation of his paper led to significant and lasting changes in the British press. Although such historians will occasionally make reference to Stead's explosive "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" series, the focus of such historians is on the form and not the content of Stead's journalism. Historians who encounter Stead in the process of researching one of the many political or social events in which he had a leading role, on the other hand, often do not have a sense of how each specific episode fit into the greater context of Stead's editorial career. They consider his involvement in the event under consideration to be unique, an aberration in a generally average journalistic career, rather than seeing it as an example of Stead's general editorial approach.

There have been, since Stead's death on the *Titanic* in 1912, three full-length biographies and one significant biographical essay written on his life and career. The first was written by Stead's daughter, Estelle W. Stead, and was published in 1913. As a

record of Stead's life, *My Father: Personal and Spiritual Reminiscences* is a wonderful source. The majority of the book is composed of excerpts from Stead's many articles and personal papers, occasionally interrupted with a paragraph or two of commentary or personal reminiscences by the author. The account is, however, a highly biased account without much analytical content. Stead, in the last decade of his life and particularly following the death of his eldest son in 1907, became intensely interested in matters of spiritualism and the occult. Estelle Stead, who shared her father's interest, devotes disproportionate attention to Stead's various 'premonitions' and attempts to contact the dead through séances, automatic writing, and other means.

A much less biased account of Stead's life may be found in Frederick Whyte's two-volume *Life of W.T. Stead*, published in 1925. Whyte was a professional journalist who had, during Stead's life, occasionally submitted articles to the various publications that he had edited. Not long after Stead's death, Whyte undertook to write a comprehensive account of his life. Whyte's account includes interviews with many of Stead's friends and colleagues, who were still living while he was writing his book, and provides an extremely detailed description of every event of any importance in Stead's life. Whyte's *The Life of W.T. Stead* is generally considered by historians to be the definitive existing biography of the editor, and is the source most cited by historians who find themselves discussing Stead's involvement in various events of national or international importance.

According to J.W. Robertson Scott, however, Whyte's biography is a faithful account of Stead's actions but not a true representation of Stead's character. In the introduction of his book *The Life and Death of a Newspaper* on the history of various

editors of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, Scott writes that "Whyte, although a kind-hearted man of some literary skill and experience, had never met Stead; he was a Roman Catholic dealing with a fervent Evangelical, and he was dilatory."³⁸ To emphasise his point, Scott, who worked as a journalist under Stead's editorship for four years, also includes a comment from one of Stead's sons, who wrote in a private letter that he was "profoundly disappointed with [Whyte's] book; adequate justice has not yet been done to my father."³⁹ The biographical essay on Stead included in Scott's book is, presumably, much more representative and provides a very different perspective on Stead's character. Due to the constraints of the length of the essay, however, many of the significant events discussed in depth by Whyte's book are only superficially addressed in Scott's account.

Raymond L. Schults writes in his *Crusader in Babylon: W.T. Stead and the Pall Mall Gazette*, the third full-length biography of Stead and the only one written as an academic history, that Whyte and Scott's books both provide an account of Stead's life without accompanying it by any significant analytical discussion of his contributions to the field of British journalism. Schults does not mention Estelle Stead's biography, but the same criticism may be applied to her account of her father's life and career. Although his criticism of the two books is generally warranted, Schults is exaggerating somewhat when he writes that "in each instance Stead's contributions to the New Journalism are regarded as but one chapter in the stories of the man and the newspaper. The resulting treatment, although more cursory, still is brief and incomplete."⁴⁰ Although both authors

³⁸ J.W. Robertson Scott, *The Life and Death of a Newspaper: An Account of the Temperaments, Perturbations and Achievements of John Morley, W.T. Stead, E.T. Cook, Harry Cust, J.L. Garvin and three other Editors of the Pall Mall Gazette* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1952), 7.

³⁹ Quoted in Scott, *The Life and Death of a Newspaper*, 7.

⁴⁰ Raymond L. Schults, *Crusader in Babylon: W.T. Stead and the Pall Mall Gazette* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), ix.

only briefly address the actual development of Stead's journalistic style, their description of Stead's editorial career and his involvement in various social and political movements amply demonstrates the motivations behind the creation of the "New Journalism."

Schults' own book, published in 1972, was intended to fill the gap in the historiography left by press historians who wrote without acknowledging Stead's personality and Stead biographers whose accounts provided inadequate analysis of Stead's place in the history of the British press. Although he relies rather too heavily on Whyte's "Roman Catholic" portrayal of Stead's "Evangelical" personality, Schults' account goes a long way towards accomplishing his goal. Unfortunately, *Crusader in Babylon* has been largely ignored and is rarely cited by the subsequently published books and articles that address various aspects of Stead's life and career.

When press historians credit Stead with the invention of "New Journalism" and, more specifically, with the introduction of specific newspaper features into British press culture, they are not falling victim to Foucault's author function. Stead was known, even among his contemporaries, for his interest and involvement in every aspect of newspaper production, to a far greater degree than was usual among his fellow editors at other newspapers. More than any other individual, Stead may be considered the "author" of the *Pall Mall Gazette* in the years between 1883 and 1889, the period during which he edited the paper. Stead had very definite opinions as to the proper role of the press in society and, by participating in everything from the visual layout of the paper to the actual writing of a significant portion of each issue's content, he worked to bring the *Pall Mall* as close as possible to his ideal.

This thesis, which examines the development of the *Pall Mall Gazette* under the editorship of W.T. Stead, may largely be considered an exercise in textual history. The primary focus is on changes in the form of the newspaper itself and the intended effect of those changes on the paper's readership. My focus on Stead, however, is uncharacteristic of textual press history, yet the role Stead played at the *Pall Mall* necessitates this altered approach.

The first chapter of this thesis will discuss Stead's editorial theory. Over the course of his career, Stead published a number of articles that described not only what he believed to be the role of the press in society, but also the means by which that role would best be fulfilled. The press, according to Stead, was properly a force for change and a source of extra-governmental authority. The ideal newspaper did not restrict itself to merely commenting on the events of the day, but worked to inspire or influence them.

The second chapter will examine one of Stead's earlier efforts as the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* to use the newspaper as an agent of change. In 1884, Stead successfully campaigned to have General Charles Gordon appointed to the increasingly turbulent Soudan region. For the next year, until Gordon's death in January of 1885, Stead carefully chronicled the developments in the Soudan, focusing his narrative around the person of Gordon. This chapter will discuss the way in which Stead reinvented Gordon as a celebrity figure and used his image to engage the interest of the *Pall Mall's* readership.

In the third chapter of this thesis, I will discuss Stead's most famous press campaign, his "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" exposé of child prostitution in London. Much of what has been written by historians on the "Maiden Tribute" has

addressed the series as a catalyst for legal reform or as a record of an otherwise largely undocumented social process. By addressing the articles in the context of Stead's stated editorial theory and his earlier campaign, I will discuss their impact as an event of journalism.

2. Be Bold and Again Bold and Always Bold: W.T. Stead's Editorial Theory and the Ideology of Human Interest Reporting

"[Stead] was the greatest egoist I have ever known and yet a singularly modest man and he had so little disposition to make a fetish of himself that his first instruction to his biographer would be bold and again bold and always bold."

- Letter from A.G. Gardiner to Frederick Whyte, 29 June 1923.

On September 14th, 1880, W.T. Stead sent a note to J.A. Godley, who was at that time employed as W.E. Gladstone's secretary. Stead had last seen Godley while in London the previous month, when he was in town to be interviewed for the position of assistant editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*. The letter he sent to Godley read:

I called at 10 Downing Street the next day after I saw you, to tell you the result of my interview. You had left town, they said, so I could not see you. I have accepted the assistant editorship of the P.M.G. I will commence my London life on Oct 15 or 16th. [...] I hope the future may belie the misgivings with which you regard this step. Whether it be fruitful to myself, I have not the slightest doubts in the world as to its being my simple duty to obey the call. I hope Mr. Gladstone would not disapprove of my decision, but I am sure he would respect my motive. [...] I need hardly say that when I come to London I shall greatly prize any opportunities I may have of ascertaining from you where then I can be most useful to the cause.¹

Stead's decision to leave his post as editor of the *Northern Echo*, a newspaper based in Darlington, for the position at the *Pall Mall Gazette* was not one he made lightly. He was concerned about giving up full control of the *Echo* in exchange for a subordinate position under John Morley at the *Pall Mall*. Furthermore, as he put it in a letter to Henry Yates Thompson, the proprietor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the newspaper had in the past been one "redolent of Society and the Clubs," based in a city "steeped in cynicism and

¹ Letter from W.T. Stead to J.A. Godley, 14 September 1880, Gladstone Papers Vol. CCXVIII, AD44303-F.335, The British Library.

indifference."² Stead's own career had, until that point, represented a marked deviation from the kind of traditionalist journalism that the *Pall Mall* seemed to represent. Thompson, who had inherited proprietorship of the newspaper from his father-in-law earlier that year, assured Stead that he had a very different kind of future in mind for the *Pall Mall*, one that he hoped Stead would help him build. Stead, convinced of Thompson's earnestness, accepted the position and embarked on what was to prove the most eventful decade of his editorial career. By end of the 1880s, Stead had gone from an obscure editor of a small northern paper, "unknown to the world at large, but [...] already famous in journalistic circles for his immense energy and efficiency, his untiring zeal, and his fervid temperament,"³ to the man who was, years later, described as "the first of journalists"⁴ and a "public man [who] transcended journalism."⁵ In the process, Stead founded a new tradition of British journalism. Upon taking up full editorship after Morley's departure in 1883, Stead cast off the traditional bonds of political and press affiliation in favour of developing the *Pall Mall Gazette* into a power independent of governmental sponsorship. Stead had a very clear idea of the rightful role of the press in society; it was the duty of newspapers, he felt, to criticise injustices and to inspire change.

A newspaper's power and the means by which it could effect significant and lasting change was based, Stead believed, in its ability to direct the tide of public opinion. "It [cannot] be pretended," Stead wrote in 1906, "that the newspaper has a fair chance of exercising its best influence upon many of its readers." He went on to argue, however, that "even the worst of newspapers may become a means of education if it is studied, not

² Quoted in Frederick Whyte, *The Life of W.T. Stead*, vol. 1 (London: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1925), 72.

³ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁴ Albert, fourth Earl Grey, "The World Pays its Tribute," *Review of Reviews* vol. XLV (May 1912), 481.

⁵ J.L. Garvin, "The World Pays its Tribute," *Review of Reviews*, 487.

skimmed – remembered, not merely employed as a kill-time."⁶ If readers could only be made to pay attention, the potential of the press was limitless. The key, Stead believed, was to appeal to the emotions, not the intellect, of his readers. Through the use of human interest reporting and the creation and manipulation of celebrity image, Stead hoped to re-construct the press in general, and the *Pall Mall Gazette* in particular, as an institution of social power that was at least equal to, if not more powerful than, the government.

a. The Future of Journalism

"No more simple and effective method of educating the democracy in the functions of citizenship could be imagined, and how could it possibly be worked so cheaply and so efficiently as from the office of a great daily paper?"

- W.T. Stead, "The Future of Journalism," *Contemporary Review* L (November 1886), 676.

According to press historian Mark Hampton, the latter half of the nineteenth century witnessed a significant shift in the perceived function of the press in British society. In a recent article in the *Victorian Periodical Review*, Hampton asserts that newspaper men of the mid-nineteenth century viewed their role as being that of educators, imparting truth and encouraging rationality in their mass audience, particularly in relation to matters of politics.⁷ This was especially true of members of the growing popular press. Newspapers, to many liberal or reform-minded individuals, represented new hope for an improved, more democratic British society. Education and knowledge, words that already had significant social cachet as a result of the efforts of education reformers and the campaign against the so-called 'taxes on knowledge' that had until

⁶ W.T. Stead, *A Plea for the Revival of Reading, with a Plan of Campaign* (London: Stead's publishing House, 1906), 12.

⁷ Mark Hampton, "Liberalism, the Press, and the Construction of the Public Sphere: Theories of the Press in Britain, 1830-1914," *Victorian Periodical Review*, 37:1 (Spring 2004), 74.

recently been such an impediment to press growth, came to be seen as the answer to the majority of society's ills. Newspapers, it followed, were the ideal medium through which both could be imparted en masse to the increasingly literate population of Britain.⁸

In the late nineteenth century, Hampton goes on to argue, the old educational model of the press was superseded by one he terms the representative model. In this new approach to press production, the flow of information was reversed; rather than presenting truths known by the upper and politically endowed classes to the uninformed but increasingly enfranchised lower classes, the press was imagined to represent the interests of 'the people' to Parliament more directly and forcefully than the structures of the political system itself allowed. In effect, the representative model "posited newspapers as *constituting* the readers' exercise in self-government."⁹ This was a significant change from the previous belief that the role of the press was to prepare its readers to be well-informed, active participants in government.

The *Pall Mall Gazette*, from the time of its founding in 1865 through to the end of John Morley's term as editor in 1883, nicely fit Hampton's educational theory of press production. Under its first editor, Frederick Greenwood, the *Pall Mall* was constructed as an organ of rationality and reflection, its tone an intentional imitation of the periodical publications of the time. When Morley took over as editor of the *Pall Mall*, he continued much in Greenwood's vein, retaining the former editor's emphasis on opinion pieces and political commentaries. The *Pall Mall Gazette* under its first two editors was a well-constructed and well-respected, but largely unremarkable newspaper.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 77; emphasis original.

Hampton's idea of the representative model of the press, however, does not fully encapsulate the transformation of the *Pall Mall Gazette* under W.T. Stead, who took over editorship of the paper in 1883. Hampton, in his article and again in his book, *Visions of the Press in Britain, 1850-1950*, identifies Stead as exemplifying, perhaps more than any other of his contemporaries, the representative approach to journalism. Yet, while the *Pall Mall* under Stead does occasionally seem to fit the definition, for the most part Stead far exceeded the limitations of Hampton's representative press.

One of the areas wherein the gap between Hampton's theory and Stead's editorial career is most apparent is in the consideration of the role of the readership. In the representative model of the press, Hampton asserts, the audience is forced into a passive position. Where the educational approach assumed, at the very least, an eventually active audience, the representative one assumed an indefinitely inactive one. This apparent shift was in part symptomatic of a loss of faith in the capability of anyone, regardless of class, to be educated; it was increasingly felt by former advocates of the educational function of the press that while everyone could be taught to read, not just anyone was able to think.¹⁰ The role of the press, then, was no longer to educate the uneducated, but rather to represent the uneducatable.

Hampton's failing lies in his attributing to Stead a belief in the inability of the mass public to be educated and in the rightful passivity of his audience. Rather, Stead, who published a number of articles reflecting on the role of the press in British society, subscribed to an image of his audience that bore far more resemblance to the educational model's active readership than the passive readership of the representative press. Stead believed that it was the role of the press not to replace its audience, but to lead it in the

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 82.

processes of self-government. If democracy was to turn 'the people' into a mass parliament, then the press was to play the role of Prime Minister.

The respective roles of the press, as led by the person of the editor, and its readership were symbiotic, a dynamic exchange of ideas and opinions. Stead felt that the press should at all times be aware of public opinion on the leading issues of the day. If it seemed that the elected governmental officials were acting in ignorance of the will of their electorate, it was the duty of the press to correct them. At no time, however, should the press cross the line between an awareness of the will of the masses and blind obedience to the same. "The first duty of every true man," Stead wrote in his 1886 article "The Future of Journalism," "if he believes that public opinion is mistaken, is to set himself to change it."¹¹ It was with this precept in mind that Stead assumed editorship of the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1883 and immediately introduced an innovative kind of active journalism that perfectly suited his ideas of the role of the press in society.

b. Written by Gentlemen for Gentlemen

"Whatever it has defended or whatever it has attacked, the *Pall Mall Gazette* has always been distinctively the *Pall Mall Gazette*. [...] It has been the great educator of the journalists of Britain, and that because it has always possessed what Mr. W.E. Forester in 1879 said was 'a most unfair monopoly of brains.' On the whole, I think, if any one had been offered his free choice of a position from which to influence the course of English history for the last quarter of a century, he would not have chosen badly if he had elected to be the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*."
- W.T. Stead, "Character Sketch: *The Pall Mall Gazette*," *Review of Reviews* VII (February 1893), 139.

The first issue of the *Pall Mall Gazette* was published on Tuesday, February 7, 1865. J.W. Robertson Scott, in his history of the first fifteen years of the *Pall Mall*, describes that first issue as "a large folio (13½ in. by a little more than 10 in.) of eight

¹¹ W.T. Stead, "The Future of Journalism," *Contemporary Review*, L (November 1886), 664.

pages, price twopence."¹² Each page was organised into two long, vertical columns of text, divided by a thin line down the centre of the sheet. Articles were divided by discrete horizontal lines or, occasionally, by headlines in capitalised and italicised text that was otherwise precisely the same font and size as the text of the articles themselves. The cover page was topped by a very plain two to two and a half inch header that read, simply, "THE PALL MALL GAZETTE, An Evening Newspaper and Review," followed by the issue number, the date, and the price. The style adopted for the *Pall Mall* was, as Stanley Morison points out in his *The English Newspaper*, quite traditional and quite out of fashion. By the 1860s, advancements in printing technology and an increasingly competitive marketplace had led to the adoption of a more flamboyant aesthetic among British newspapers. The first issue of the *Pall Mall*, in contrast, was presented in the kind of stark, simple "book type cut" that had been abandoned by the bulk of the British press nearly forty years earlier.¹³ The lead article of that first issue, titled "The Queen's Seclusion," was a meditation on Queen Victoria's retreat from public life following the death of her husband and a declaration of support for her stated intention to return to open the new session of Parliament.

Although the appearance of the *Pall Mall Gazette* remained much the same until the 1890s, the newspaper that was founded in 1865 bore very little resemblance to the newspaper it became twenty years later, during the height of the *Pall Mall's* fame and influence. Rather, the early *Pall Mall Gazette* was much more like its fictional namesake in William Makepeace Thackeray's *The History of Arthur Pendennis*, published between

¹² J.W. Robertson Scott, *The Story of the Pall Mall Gazette, of its first editor Frederick Greenwood, and of its founder George Murray Smith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950), 135.

¹³ Stanley Morison, *The English Newspaper: Some Account of the Physical Development of Journals Printed in London between 1622 & the Present Day* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), 202, 271.

1849 and 1850, than the *Pall Mall* of the 1880s. Though the paper's proprietor, George Smith, and its first editor, Frederick Greenwood, staunchly denied that their publication shared anything more than a name with Thackeray's fictional newspaper, the fact remains that for the first fifteen years of its existence, the real *Pall Mall Gazette* seemed very much a paper "written by gentlemen for gentlemen."¹⁴ As Charles Pebody writes in his *English Journalism*, published the year before Stead was appointed full editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*:

The proprietor and editor have always repudiated the suggestion that the paper was published upon the lines of Thackeray's *Pall Mall Gazette* [...], but the associations and even the style of the paper have been too much for them. The proprietor [Smith] was Thackeray's publisher. The editor [Greenwood] was Thackeray's associate in the conduct of *Cornhill*. They christened the paper with Thackeray's title. The conclusion was irresistible. The *Pall Mall Gazette* must be the ideal journal written by gentlemen for gentlemen, and that the public have persisted in counting it from the first day of publication.¹⁵

Smith and Greenwood intended their publication to represent a new kind of daily press, one that mixed the news reporting of other daily papers with the reflective tone of a monthly or quarterly publication. Greenwood, in particular, had a very clear idea of the direction he wanted the new publication to take. He had for some years been attempting to interest a publisher in his idea of a daily newspaper modelled after the *Anti-Jacobin*, a periodical devoted to political criticism published in the 1790s, and the *Saturday Review*, one of the more popular and well-regarded periodicals of the mid-1800s.¹⁶ Greenwood's

¹⁴ William Makepeace Thackeray, *The History of Arthur Pendennis*, quoted in W.T. Stead, "Character Sketch: *The Pall Mall Gazette*," *Review of Reviews* VII (February 1893), 139.

¹⁵ Quoted in Scott, *The Story of the Pall Mall Gazette*, 127-6.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 122-123.

Pall Mall Gazette "was to be edited, with high intelligence, complete integrity, steadfast patriotism and, by present standards, small sales."¹⁷

The early sales of the *Pall Mall Gazette* were, in fact, so "small" by any standards as to give its proprietor considerable pause. The *Pall Mall* was funded through a combination of advertising revenue, subscriptions, sales by newsboys or through newsstands, and, in leaner times, the personal pocket of its proprietor. In the first month and a half of its publication, the circulation of the *Pall Mall* averaged only 600 copies per issue. Advertising sales were equally dismal and Smith despaired of the paper ever succeeding. By mid-summer of 1865, however, both circulation and advertising sales began to rise, and by October, Smith was finally feeling that the *Pall Mall* may succeed after all.¹⁸ The balance between advertising, subscription, and individual sales remained relatively stable until the era of Stead's "Maiden Tribute", when a number of advertisers, subscribers, and newsstands boycotted the *Pall Mall* even as the sales of individual issues through other means increased exponentially.

In 1880, Smith turned proprietorship of the then established and well respected *Pall Mall Gazette* over to his son-in-law, Henry Yates Thompson. The *Pall Mall* had, under Greenwood's editorship, come to be known as a strongly Conservative publication that was resolutely critical of Gladstonian policy.¹⁹ Greenwood himself came to develop an intense personal dislike of Gladstone and had used the *Pall Mall* on numerous occasions to campaign against his policies and reforms. In contrast, Thompson was a Liberal and had been actively involved in politics in a range of capacities prior to acquiring the *Pall Mall Gazette*. As Scott writes, with Thompson assuming

¹⁷ Scott, *The Life and Death of a Newspaper*, 3.

¹⁸ Scott, *The Story of the Pall Mall Gazette*, 145.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 235-36.

proprietorship, "a change in the Party temperament of the *Pall Mall* was imperative."²⁰

Unable to accustom himself to the shift in political tone, Greenwood resigned soon after Thompson took over, and with him went a number of the *Pall Mall's* Conservative journalists. In Greenwood's place, Thompson hired John Morley, who had previously edited the *Fortnightly Review* and the *Morning Star*, and W.T. Stead, enticing him from his position as full editor of the *Northern Echo* for a position of reduced authority at the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

c. W.T. Stead

"[Stead] was invaluable: abounding in journalistic resource, eager in convictions, infinitely bold, candid, laborious in surefooted mastery of all the facts, and bright with a cheerfulness and geniality that no difference of opinion between us and none of the passing embarrassments of the day could ever for a moment damp."

- John Viscount Morley, *The Works of John Morley: Recollections, vol. I*, 154-155.

William Thomas Stead was born July 5th, 1849, at Embleton Manse, near Alnwick, in Northumberland. He was the second of nine children born to Reverend William and Isabella Stead. When Stead was a year old, the family moved from Embleton to Howden, near Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The Reverend Stead was a Congregational Minister and both he and his wife Isabella were known for their "deep and simple religious faith,"²¹ an attitude that in later years came to be considered one of Stead's defining characteristics. Stead was, for most of his childhood, educated at home by his father, benefiting from the Reverend's religious training.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 237.

²¹ Estelle W. Stead, *My Father: Personal and Spiritual Reminiscences* (London: William Heinemann, 1913), 3.

At the age of twelve, Stead was sent to Silcoats, a boarding school located near Wakefield. According to Whyte's *Life of W.T. Stead*, he was at first very unhappy at Silcoats and, in reaction, took comfort in the intense study of the Bible. He soon grew accustomed to the school and to being away from his family, and in later years looked back on his time at Silcoats as a pleasant one. Those first few months had, however, left him with a strengthened sense of his faith, and it was during that time that Stead formally joined the Congregational Church. Stead later wrote that "the Congregationalists, as the heirs of Cromwell and Milton and the Pilgrim Fathers, and the representatives of extreme Democracy which knows neither male nor female, and makes the votes of the whole Church the supreme and only authority in the Church; have always attracted me, nor does the attraction grow less with years, although I have often differed more or less from many Congregationalists."²² He remained a devout member of the Congregationalist church until his death.

In 1863, when Stead was fourteen, he left Silcoats and took up an apprenticeship as an office-boy in a merchant's counting house in Newcastle. In his free time, he continued his education by reading extensively and writing essays, which he submitted to writing competitions. He held, by that time, serious literary aspirations; describing himself as he was in the early 1860s, Stead later wrote "I was intensely ambitious with a personal ambition that made me wish to make a name for myself."²³ Taking writers such as T.B. Macaulay and Thomas Carlyle as role models, Stead made plans to write a history

²² Quoted in *Ibid.*, 24.

²³ Quoted in Scott, *The Life and Death of a Newspaper*, 91-92.

of the Puritan movement and a new study of Oliver Cromwell's life, letters, and speeches that he hoped would compare to Carlyle's own *Life of Cromwell*.²⁴

Stead's priorities changed significantly in 1869, following a temporary decline in his health. Working in an office all day and conducting his research at night had given him eyestrain and there was some question as to whether or not he might be going blind. The potential loss of his sight made him feel that "this dream of ambition was unworthy and un-Christian," and convinced him, he wrote, "to put away all idea of ever writing the [Cromwell] book, or of making a name for myself and simply set to work to labour for those who were around me."²⁵ Forbidden by his doctor to read at night, Stead threw himself into volunteering at social and religious agencies devoted to good works. He developed a particular interest in those organisations working to alleviate poverty in the Newcastle region. The decline in his eyesight proved to be impermanent and, after a few months of evenings spent working for social improvement rather than bent over his books, it returned to normal.²⁶

Stead's involvement in social improvement agencies was, ironically, what brought him back the next year to the literary career he had abandoned, although with a new direction. His first journalistic efforts took the form of a series of letters to the editor of the *Northern Echo*, a local newspaper published in the town of Darlington. The letters addressed the organisation of community-based charitable societies and their usefulness for organising the distribution of funds to deserving recipients. Stead, who by that time had finished his apprenticeship and was employed as a clerk, had in his off-hours

²⁴ Whyte, *The Life of W.T. Stead*, vol. I, 18.

²⁵ Quoted in Scott, *The Life and Death of a Newspaper*, 92.

²⁶ Stead, *My Father*, 36.

founded one such community charity society.²⁷ Those early letters and, later, articles for the *Northern Echo* were the next step in his efforts to improve local conditions, a step he hoped would serve to bring widespread recognition and support to the activities of his organisation. Stead was soon writing regularly for the *Echo*. Each week, he wrote about three lead articles plus assorted short notes, but received pay for none of them. The editor of the *Northern Echo*, in response to a query from Stead as to whether he might have some financial remuneration for his efforts, regretfully replied "saying that he was very sorry but there was no fund available to pay outside contributors, and that if I insisted upon payment he would just have to fall back upon his own unaided pen to produce all the editorial matter that the paper contained."²⁸ Despite the question, at the time Stead "still had no intention of becoming a journalist, or of making my living by journalism."²⁹ Instead, he aspired to a position as a bank clerk, because they were well-paid and their work days ended very early, leaving them their evenings to pursue other interests.³⁰

Stead's introduction to journalism was common enough; many professional journalists began by submitting the occasional essay or article to local newspapers. His introduction to his editorial career was much more unusual. In 1871, the former editor of the *Northern Echo* left the newspaper. The *Echo*'s proprietor, J. Hyslop Bell, offered the position to Stead, who had just turned twenty-two and who had never been paid for any of his journalistic efforts. As Whyte writes, "the story of how [Stead] came to be given his first post as an editor at the age of twenty-two, before he had ever seen the inside of a

²⁷ Whyte, *The Life of W.T. Stead*, vol. 1, 22.

²⁸ W.T. Stead, quoted in Stead, *My Father*, 46.

²⁹ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 46.

³⁰ Scott, *The Life and Death of a Newspaper*, 92.

newspaper office, is really a remarkable one."³¹ Considering the frequency with which Stead had been contributing to the paper, however, Bell's offer was not quite as remarkable as Whyte makes it out to be.

The offer of an editorship had brought Stead to a point, Whyte writes, "when he must decide whether to embark definitely on a journalistic career and thereby acquire greater power, perhaps, for benefiting his fellow-men, or to continue, less ambitiously, in the multifarious activities which fill up his life in Newcastle."³² After some deliberation and a consultation with his parents, who expressed reservations at the prospect of a career in journalism, Stead decided to accept the position and was, by late July of 1871, installed as the new editor of the *Northern Echo*. He maintained that office until September of 1880, when he left the *Echo* for the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

In 1873, Stead married Emma Lucy Wilson, whom he had known since childhood and who was precisely the same age as he. By the time the family left Darlington for London, it had expanded to include the first four of William and Lucy Stead's six children. His years at the *Northern Echo* did not bring Stead the wide-spread fame that his later London career did, but it did establish him as a noteworthy individual in journalism circles and ultimately brought him to the attention of the proprietor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*. As the fourth Earl Grey once wrote, "Stead amused me to begin with. I found that this provincial editor of an obscure paper was corresponding with kings and emperors all over the world and receiving long letters from statesmen of every nation."³³ Under Stead's direction, the *Northern Echo* had expanded beyond its previously limited, community-based scope to address matters of great national and international importance.

³¹ Whyte, *The Life of W.T. Stead*, vol. I, 22.

³² *Ibid.*, 28.

³³ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 32.

When Stead was offered the assistant editorship of the *Pall Mall Gazette* in September of 1880, he deliberated over his decision in much the same way as he had when offered his place at the *Northern Echo*. Stead's first consideration was, always, how he might best fulfil what he considered his duty: to help those in need of aid. He questioned whether that end would be better served from the editor's seat of a small provincial paper or the assistant editor's seat of a widely-read London publication.

Ultimately, he decided that:

as lieutenant of a chief who will probably be often absent, I would have more power in driving the machine of State and of reaching the ears of those who with tongue or pen reach others. I will have to sacrifice something of liberty but will unquestionably gain in power. It is possible that Morley may not long remain there, or rather attenuate his editorship more and more to mere nominality, and if I am able to do the work, I may become more and more the *Pall Mall Gazette*, that is to say one of the half-dozen men in London whose advice is at least listened to by the rulers of the Empire on every subject that arises for settlement.³⁴

The passage, a diary entry written shortly after his return from the interview with Thompson and Morley, concluded with the statement "When I see the devil so strong and his assailants so timorous and half-hearted I long to be in a place where I can have full slap at him."³⁵

The relationship between Stead and Morley was an interesting one and, ultimately, to the benefit of the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Despite at least nominally sharing political views – both were, in 1880, generally Liberal – they were remarkably dissimilar in personality. Ultimately, the difference between the two men was a simple one: Stead was a born journalist, with the passion, showmanship, and wide range of interests necessary to succeed at the profession; Morley, on the other hand, was a born politician,

³⁴ Quoted in Scott, *The Life and Death of a Newspaper*, 114.

³⁵ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 114.

suitably sombre and high-minded, passionate in his support of his chosen causes and indifferent to most others. In his two volume autobiography, *Recollections*, Morley devotes but one paragraph to his time as the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*. The first half of that paragraph is spent praising his predecessor, Greenwood. A handful of sentences are spared for Thompson, who hired Morley, and the last half of the paragraph is an admiring but reserved sketch of his "lieutenant," Stead. Of his own editorship, Morley says nothing. Rather, he discusses the political atmosphere, his aspirations to Parliament, and his work during the same period on his book, *The Life of Cobden*.³⁶ Morley's stint as an editor was, in his own mind, a brief footnote in his rise to political office. In a little over two years, Stead had been promoted to full editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

d. The Trust for Such High Uses Given³⁷

"I put away from me, as of the Evil One, all dreams of fame and literary ambitions on which I had fed my boyhood, and resolutely set myself to do what little I could, there and then, where I was, among those who surrounded me, to fulfil 'the trust for such high uses given.' It was one of the decisive moments in my life. Since then I can honestly say that I have never regarded literary or journalistic success as worth a straw, excepting in so far as it enabled me to strike a heavier blow in the cause of those for whom I was called to fight."

- W.T. Stead, quoted in Estelle W. Stead, *My Father: Personal and Spiritual Reminiscences*, 30.

Morley's departure in 1883 marked the end of an era that had begun in 1865.

Contemporaries would likely have placed the division earlier, at the departure of Greenwood and the shift in the paper's party loyalties in 1880, yet the *Pall Mall* under

³⁶ John Viscount Morley, *The Works of John Morley: Recollections, vol. I* (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1921), 154-155.

³⁷ The quote comes from James Russell Lowell's poem "Extreme Unction." Stead frequently quoted Lowell's work in general, and that poem in particular, in his articles and essays.

Morley continued to operate in much the same way, allowing for differences in political affiliation, as it had under Greenwood. As Stead himself wrote in a later article for the *Review of Reviews*, "Mr. Morley inherited to the full the idea of conventional dignity with which Mr. Greenwood had imbued the [editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette's*] office. Mr. Morley was as studious of decorum as Mr. Greenwood, if not more so. He abhorred sensationalism."³⁸ When Stead took over as editor, however, it marked the beginning of a new age, not only for the *Pall Mall*, but for British journalism as a whole. Whether in imitation or in reaction, the British press was not and could not be the same as it had been before Stead.

Society, in Stead's view, rested its weight on three pillars: the government, the church, and the press. The strength of each of these pillars determined the stability of the society. Each institution served a purpose particular to itself, which kept them in balance through a forced interdependence. Yet, of the three, Stead saw the press as superior to either the government or the church, for while the government could play no part other than its own, nor could the church, the press could and had been government, church, and press in one. The government, Stead made clear in his 1886 article "Government by Journalism," could not represent the interests of its electorate half as well as a newspaper could. Nor could any church as forcefully and effectively direct so many along the moral path. Neither government nor church, certainly, could play the part of impartial force for justice that was, in Stead's opinion, the role of the press in society. Both were too mired in tradition and bureaucracy to be effective. Only the press, led by the person of the editor, was fluid enough to play the parts of any or all three of the necessary institutions at once.

³⁸ W.T. Stead, "Character Sketch: *Pall Mall Gazette*," *Review of Reviews* VII (February 1893), 150.

Although Stead certainly acknowledged the existence of less loftily inspired practitioners of his craft – those who would "grind out so much copy, to be only paid for according to quantity, like sausages or rope yarn"³⁹ – he generally regarded the profession of the press with a kind of reverence. The best pressmen embodied the fluidity of role that made the press superior to either the government or the church. Journalists were simultaneously "rulers" and "prophets."⁴⁰ An editor, as Stead described him in one of his most oft-quoted turns of phrase, was "the uncrowned king of an educated democracy."⁴¹ Editors "alone of mortals live up to the apostolic injunction, and, forgetting the things that are behind, ever press forward to those which are before."⁴² These greater mortals, furthermore, had little need for the institutionalised checks and balances of their power that restrained true kings and bishops, for editors and journalists gained their power directly from the people they claimed to represent and lead. The editor who no longer spoke for the people was no longer listened to and quickly fell into obscurity.

If Stead's editor was king, however, he was an enlightened sort of despot. If he was a kind of public preacher, his duties were more like those of a local vicar than of a bishop preaching from high. At the root of all of Stead's ideas regarding the role of the press and the editor in society were the precepts of responsibility and action. In this way, if not in others, Stead met Hampton's definition of an editor of the representative press. Hampton's educating editor took an intellectual, distanced approach to his readership, merely pointing out to them that there were ills in society and counting his

³⁹ W.T. Stead, "Government by Journalism," *Contemporary Review* XLIX (May 1886), 664.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, 655.

responsibilities fulfilled. Anything beyond the simple identification of the problem was beyond the purview of a journalist. In Stead's view, however, it was the rightful job of the editor to seek out, expose, and then rectify any and every problem in society, and only then should the editor consider his duties discharged. Stead was quite contemptuous of that passive kind of editing, which he dismissively described as "journalism of the mere critical or paragraph-quilting species."⁴³ His kind of journalism, on the other hand, could never be described as 'merely' anything. The journalist and editor who, like Stead, approached his profession with drive and determination would surely find that, "if he worthily fulfils the duty of his high office, then nowhere on this planet will there be such a seat of far-extended influence and world-shaping power as the chair from which that editor, in directing the policy of his paper, will influence the destinies of the English race."⁴⁴ This would remain true as long as the man in question worked always for the benefit and improvement of the society in which he lived, rather than for his own aggrandisement, and, of course, as long as he could keep the attention of the audience he claimed to speak for.

This concept of the press as an active and responsible body did not develop late in Stead's career, but, rather, inspired it to begin with. As someone once rather ungenerously wrote of Stead, he "mounted to fame on a beggar's back."⁴⁵ Those first letters and articles on poverty and the value of community-based charity organisations in the *Northern Echo* had been written with the hopes of drawing the attention of people far more influential than he to his cause. Whyte, in describing this early effort, writes that Stead, "intent on his crusade," sent a marked copy of the published articles to "a man of

⁴³ Stead, "Future of Journalism," *Contemporary Review*, 664.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 679.

⁴⁵ "Some Dates in the Life of William Thomas Stead," *Review of Reviews* XLV (May 1912), 495.

influence whom [Stead hoped] to stir to action."⁴⁶ The episode, which may be considered a minor prologue to Stead's later journalistic career, demonstrated what Stead even then believed to be the role and the power of the press.

In practical terms, there is little significant difference between Hampton's idea of a representative press and Stead's of a responsible, active one. Each purports to take a more direct approach to affecting change than the earlier forms of press and each, at its root, conceives of the press as a balancing force in society, working to curb the excesses of the powerful and champion the rights of the weak. Where Hampton and Stead differ, however, is on the topic of the identity and role of the audience.

Any discussion of audience or public opinion in relation to the Victorian era press is necessarily highly subjective. In a period that predates systematic, or even haphazard, reader response polling, audience reaction must be inferred from such indirect and difficult to interpret records as letters to the editor, the reactions of other publications, or fluctuations in the publication's circulation. In many cases, however, the only letters to the editor still in existence are those that were selected and published *by* the editor, making them a rather suspect record of public opinion. Likewise, the reactions of other newspapers can be argued to represent no more than the opinions of *their* editors, journalists, or proprietors, rather than that of their audiences. Changes in circulation, furthermore, may be interpreted in a number of ways. The *Pall Mall Gazette* reached its peak circulation during the publication of Stead's "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" series of articles, which exposed and savagely criticised the flourishing child prostitution

⁴⁶ Whyte, *The Life of W.T. Stead*, vol. I, 23.

trade of London.⁴⁷ Yet it is impossible to draw definite conclusions as to what that rise of circulation actually represented in terms of audience reaction. The increase in the *Pall Mall's* circulation following the publication of the "Maiden Tribute" may be equally attributed to approval, disapproval, or merely curiosity regarding the sensational discussion of a rather scandalous topic.

The actual character, opinions, and reactions of the audience is far less important, however, than what Hampton and Stead respectively believed them to be. At a time where such information was nearly impossible to obtain, the perception held by each man is as important as the reality of the public opinion. This is particularly true of Stead, for where Hampton's perceptions affect only his evaluation of the historical situation, Stead's ideas regarding his audience formed the basis of his actions for the duration of his editorial career. In fact, all of Stead's theories of press production are, at their base, a meditation on either the understanding or the manipulation of public opinion. As Stead unequivocally stated in his article "The Future of Journalism," it was the first duty of an editor to know the opinion of the masses and, if he found it to be misguided, to do all that he could to correct it.⁴⁸

According to Hampton's model, which he asserts Stead personified, the audience of the representative press consisted of a passive readership whose interests the newspaper claimed to represent to the policy makers in government. They were the disempowered members of society who, lacking any true voice or cohesion, must be content to be spoken for by the press. There is, however, a fundamental illogic to Hampton's construction, one that derives from a somewhat careless definition of the term

⁴⁷ "The Pall Mall Gazette," *Waterloo Directory of English Newspapers and Periodicals, 1800-1900*, Series 2, Vol. 9 (Waterloo: North Waterloo Academic Press, 2003), 13.

⁴⁸ Stead, "The Future of Journalism," *Contemporary Review*, 664-665.

'audience.' The true audience of Hampton's representative press was the government or any other body with the power to affect change. The representative press spoke *for* the powerless, but they spoke *to* the powerful. That silent, begrieved mass who lived under the protection of the representative press were under no obligation to so much as read the newspapers that purported to speak on their behalf.

Stead, in contrast, was very precise in his definition of his audience. It consisted of members of the government, irrespective of party affiliation, and of church officials, irrespective of denomination. His audience contained social reformers, political reformers, and church reformers. Stead's audience encompassed anyone seeking change and everyone Stead thought might be capable of bringing that change about. "The secret of influence," Stead wrote, "is to get at the right individuals in every town and village, and to attach them as closely as possible to the newspaper by establishing personal relations between them and the directing staff."⁴⁹ This Stead did with enthusiasm; he felt no hesitation in writing to public figures of all sorts, offering them his opinions on the events of the day and sending them clippings of articles from the *Pall Mall Gazette* or from other publications that he felt it was to their advantage to see.⁵⁰

Both Hampton's educational and representative models, furthermore, locate the press squarely in the middle of the social hierarchy of Britain. Hampton's press acted as

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 671.

⁵⁰ An example of this aspect of Stead's correspondence may be seen in the Gladstone Papers, held by the British Library in London. Stead wrote to W.E. Gladstone almost monthly for the entirety of the latter's political career, offering opinions and advice on everything from the question of Irish home rule to relations between Britain and Russia to proposed church reforms. In reply to a distinctly unfriendly and unwelcoming note from Gladstone's secretary, Stead wrote, "I do not write to Mr. Gladstone except when I think it necessary for the nation to call his attention to facts that might otherwise be overlooked." (Letter from W.T Stead to H.W. Primrose, 27 April 1885, Gladstone papers, AD 44303 F.355, British Library.) At the time, Stead was campaigning against one of Gladstone's policies in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, which, although he himself saw no reason to cut off his correspondence, made his thoughts on what was "necessary for the nation" rather unwelcome at Downing Street.

an intermediary between social extremes; the educational press passed information from high to low, the representative press from low to high. Stead's press, however, was at the very least equal to any other power in society. As he wrote "The Future of Journalism," the press, as embodied by the editor:

would not govern the Empire, but his voice would be the most potent among all those whose counsels guide the holders of our Imperial sceptre; he might not "wield at will the fierce democratic," but he would be the most authoritative interpreter of its wishes, and his influence, both upon the governed and the governors, would be incomparably greater than that of any other living man.⁵¹

Stead, both as a journalist and as an editor, did not restrain himself to speaking on behalf of a victimised lower class, but, rather, attempted and often succeeded in influencing policy in everything from social reform to international relations. His goal was to create, through the judicious application of the power of the press, a better future. Stead sought neither to educate nor to represent, but to "ever press forward"⁵² into future made better by his efforts.

e. The Ideal Local Editor

"As in the forest you cannot see the trees for the wood, so [Stead's] ever-stirring activity, which embraced the whole of life and human proclivities, has hidden his talent as a writer and sparking originality, full of the unexpected as to form and inspiration."

- Jean Finot, "A French Appreciation of Mr. W.T. Stead," *La Revue*, reprinted in *Review of Reviews* XLV (June 1912), 638.

In his articles "Government by Journalism" and "The Future of Journalism," Stead made very explicit his views on the source of the press' power in society. As he wrote in the former, "The editor's mandate is renewed day by day, and his electors register their

⁵¹ Stead, "The Future of Journalism," *Contemporary Review*, 664.

⁵² Stead, "Government by Journalism," *Contemporary Review*, 655.

vote by a voluntary payment of the daily pence."⁵³ The articles, extended discussions of the origins of an editor's power and the ends to which that power should be used, did little, however, to address the means by which an editor may gain that power to begin with. That topic Stead addressed in a 1893 article written for the *Bellshill Speaker*, a small newspaper published in northern England. The article, entitled "The Ideal Local Editor," was written in the form of a step-by-step guide for small town journalists. Although "The Ideal Local Editor" was addressed specifically to the editors of community newspapers, the underlying principle of Stead's advice was broadly applicable. As well, Stead made it very clear in the article that he considered his work in London to be no different than his earlier work in the local press of Darlington except perhaps in scale, for his community in the intervening years had broadened to include "all the earth."⁵⁴

In "The Ideal Local Editor," as in his two earlier articles on journalistic theory, Stead discussed the role and responsibilities of editorship using the vocabulary of government and church. Yet the editor, unlike government or church officials, had no inherent legal or moral authority. Rather, the power of a member of the press lay in the ability of an editor or journalist to exert influence over their readers. "The newspaper Editor," Stead argued, "represents the aspirations after the ideal. He wields no power but that of persuasion and of instruction: in short, he represents the idea of *Ecclesia docens*, of the Teaching Church, in all that relates to the life of the individual."⁵⁵ The editor's power, when compared to that of government or church, had no solidly defined source

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 655.

⁵⁴ W.T. Stead, "The Ideal Local Editor," *Bellshill Speaker*, 10 February 1893, in Frederick Whyte Papers, FW98: Cuttings Regarding the *Life of W.T. Stead* 1890-1901, University of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

and ever threatened to disappear without notice; it was more in the line of influence than true authority. On any day, an editor's readership could decide to withhold their "voluntary payment of the daily pence"⁵⁶ and the editor would find himself ignored, his mandate having been revoked. In order for the editor to gain and keep power, he had to be able to maintain his influence over his readership. The best way to do that, Stead believed, was by appealing to the readers' sentiment first, and to their intellect second.

Stead, in "The Ideal Local Editor," advised editors not to limit themselves to the discussion of local events, nor to ignore them entirely in favour of the greater world events, but to find a way to inspire a sense of connection between local interests and "the movements that are going on in the world at large."⁵⁷ He wrote, "the great object of a local editor in dealing with all affairs at a distance is to deal with them from the point of view of the men, who, reared and educated in Bellshill, have gone abroad and live close to the heart of the movement, the incidents of which are reported in the columns of the press."⁵⁸ The goal of the editor was to reduce his readers' consciousness of their own removal from world events and, thereby, inspire a personal rather than a distanced interest in their outcome.

Stead felt that the most effective means of inspiring that personal interest was to first and always locate the individual, the human, within the greater and often overwhelming story. The story of the individual within the mass or of the particular within the abstract served to give readers a point of connection with events that may otherwise have had no real bearing on their lives. The focus on the human element left a perceptual gap into which readers could readily insert themselves, making them feel as

⁵⁶ Stead, "Government by Journalism," *Contemporary Journalism*, 655.

⁵⁷ Stead, "The Ideal Local Editor," *Bellshill Speaker*.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

though they were active participants rather than passive audience members, and thereby inspiring a sentimental investment in the outcome of the events under discussion. In essence, Stead was proclaiming human interest reporting, which focuses on individuals and creates them as characters in the public consciousness, as the source and the means of increasing the power of the press in society.

Literary critic Richard A. Lanham discusses a similar idea in his book *The Electronic Word: Democracy, Technology, and the Arts*. Although Lanham is specifically addressing the impact of the new media of electronic texts, his ideas regarding reader experience and response are broadly applicable. His theories of reader reception hinge on the idea of the relative 'transparency' of different types of texts. Certain texts, his example being traditional printed texts, are opaque. The reader of such texts is kept ever conscious of the presence of the text itself as an intermediary between the ideas contained within and the audience to which those ideas are being communicated. In order to access the ideas, the reader must look at the text, be conscious of it, then move through it to deal with the abstract thought the text represents. Opaque texts, Lanham argues, encourage a kind of distancing. The reader's intellect is engaged, but his or her emotional response is limited by the constant reminder of distance by the presence of the text.

Other kinds of texts, Lanham goes on to assert, may be regarded as being far more transparent. Such texts limit the sense of their presence, encouraging a more visceral response from their readers. The impression is given, rightly or wrongly, of the communication of "unintermediated thought,"⁵⁹ limiting the perceptual distance between

⁵⁹ Richard A. Lanham, *The Electronic Word: Democracy, Technology, and the Arts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 4.

the reader and the content. Where opaque texts encourage self-consciously rational responses, transparent texts call forth unconscious reactions. Where the former is a carefully considered and premeditated answer to the text, the latter is unexamined, immediate, and far more potently felt.

Although Lanham's theories are primarily concerned with the effect of evolving form on reader response, they still hold true when applied to the question of a change in content. The shift in the late nineteenth century from Greenwood and Morley's intellectual and rational *Pall Mall Gazette* to Stead's sentimental and sub-rational one had much the same effect on readers that Lanham argues the twentieth century's shift from the printed to the electronic word did. The educational press, which Hampton asserts was intentionally designed to encourage rationality and an emotionally divorced intellectualism,⁶⁰ served to constantly remind readers of their role as audience members. The ever-present consciousness of the intermediating text served to limit emotional reactions in favour of intellectual ones. Stead's approach to journalism, in contrast, ever sought to reduce the reader's consciousness of the text, to subvert the rational response, and to evoke an immediate, emotional reaction. Although he did not discount the intellectual response of his readers, he wanted that response to follow and be subject to the sentimental one. In reducing the sense of a mediating presence between the reader and the content, Stead encouraged sentimentality and recast the reader, not as audience, but as active participant. The power of the press, then, was based in the journalist's or editor's ability to evoke and then manipulate that kind of emotional engagement. The most effective editor or journalist was the one who could make his readership forget that

⁶⁰ Hampton, "Liberalism, the Press, and the Construction of the Public Sphere," *Victorian Periodical Review*, 73.

they were not, in fact, active participants but *reactive* ones, following the leads given to them by the press.

f. The Leading Actor

"It is curious how little the public estimate of public men accords with their real character as it is known by their intimates."

- W.T. Stead, "Character Sketch: The Right Hon. John Morley, M.P.," *Review of Reviews* II (November 1890), 424.

In examining Stead's discussion of press power and the manipulation of sentiment, the emphasis he placed on the role of individuals, the human inside the human interest story, is obvious. As Stead wrote in the first issue of the *Review of Reviews*, "To know the character of the leading actor in the contemporary drama is essential to the right understanding of its history and its literature."⁶¹ Stead founded the *Review of Reviews*, a monthly magazine devoted to the review of the leading periodicals of the day, upon his departure from the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1890. In keeping with his views of the import of the "leading actors" of public life, each issue of the *Review of Reviews* contained an article length biography of an individual who had, in the proceeding month, figured prominently in the public eye or who Stead felt merited special attention for one reason or another. Stead himself wrote the monthly feature "Character Sketch" from the first issue of the magazine until his death in 1912.

Human interest journalism is and always has been closely related to celebrity culture. The relationship is so close, in fact, that some historians of popular culture use the terms almost interchangeably; a human interest story is, invariably, a story about a celebrity. Certainly, this is the approach taken by Charles L. Ponce de Leon in his book

⁶¹ W.T. Stead, "Programme," *Review of Reviews* I (January, 1890), 14.

Self Exposure: Human Interest Journalism and the Emergence of Celebrity in America, 1890-1940. Although Ponce de Leon acknowledges in passing in his introduction that other kinds of human interest stories exist, he often uses the terms "human interest journalism" and "celebrity journalism" interchangeably, emphasising the importance of the former to the development of the latter.

Ponce de Leon, in his examination of the development of celebrity culture in the United States, makes a very important distinction between the image of the celebrity as portrayed by the media and the person living behind that image, who may bear very little resemblance to the 'celebrity' sharing his or her face and name. The existence of a division between the constructed personality and the real person upon which it is marginally based leaves the media free to manipulate the image of the celebrity to its own ends, even as the existence of the real person behind the image lends authenticity and disguises the fictional aspect of the celebrity character. The celebrity image may therefore be used to embody abstract ideas, much the way a character in a novel may be.

Ponce de Leon's book is an examination of celebrities as the icons of a popular culture that is simultaneously "a repository of utopian hopes as well as a vehicle encouraging acceptance of the status quo."⁶² As Stead's own description of public figures implies, celebrities may be considered fictional characters in the public "drama."⁶³ However, where Ponce de Leon's focus is on deconstructing the celebrity image, Stead's own considerations of celebrity focused on their creation and the ends to which such public personalities may be used.

⁶² Charles L. Ponce de Leon, *Self-Exposure: Human-Interest Journalism and the Emergence of Celebrity in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 4.

⁶³ Stead, "Programme," *Review of Reviews*, 14.

In examining Stead's editorial theories, historians turn most often to his "Government by Journalism," yet it was in his article "The Future of Journalism" that Stead explicitly stated his views. In opening his discussion on the changes he foresaw in his profession, Stead wrote:

Everything depends on the individual – the person. Impersonal journalism is effete. To influence men you must be a man, not a mock-uttering oracle. The democracy is under no awe of the mystic "We." Who is "We"? they ask; and they are right. For all power should be associated with responsibility, and a leader of the people, if a journalist, needs a neck capable of being stretched quite as much as a Prime Minister. For the proper development of a newspaper, the personal element is indispensable.⁶⁴

In that passage, Stead was addressing the idea, not merely of celebrity, but of the celebrity journalist. "The Future of Journalism" was written in a time when the old convention of anonymous journalism, which had held sway from the birth of the mass press through to the turn of the twentieth century, was beginning to make way for the practice of what historian D.L. LeMahieu terms "personal journalism."⁶⁵ As Lucy Brown writes in her *Victorian News and Newspapers*, "the main defence of anonymity in the newspaper press had always been that anonymous articles carried more weight because they were published with the authority of the newspaper behind them."⁶⁶ Stead's "Future of Journalism," however, articulated the ideology of the new personal journalism, which was that accountability and, ultimately, authority were gained through the recognition of the individual behind the article. LeMahieu, in his book *A Culture for Democracy: Mass Communication and the Cultivated Mind in Britain Between the Wars*, asserts that Stead was one of the most notable proponents of personal journalism, for it was Stead who

⁶⁴ Stead, "The Future of Journalism," *Contemporary Review*, 663.

⁶⁵ D.L. LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy: Mass Communication and the Cultivated Mind in Britain Between the Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 44.

⁶⁶ Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers*, 108.

popularised the practice of publishing interviews with noteworthy individuals and founded a style of newspaper writing that "took readers into the editor's confidence."⁶⁷ Of course, the personality of the celebrity journalist was as artificial a construct as that of any other kind of celebrity, but the effect was the same; readers, feeling as though they had come to know and like the individual behind the newsprint, were more willing to become emotionally engaged in the interests or, in Stead's case, the crusades of the journalist or editor.

The timing of Stead's emphatic rejection of the old ethos of anonymous authorship was significant. Both "The Future of Journalism" and "Government by Journalism" were published in 1886, a little over a year after the publication of Stead's "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" series of articles and the events surrounding it. Shortly after printing the "Maiden Tribute" series, Stead and three others who had been involved with the investigation upon which the articles were based were arrested on charges of kidnapping. In the course of investigating child prostitution in London, Stead had purchased a young girl by the name of Eliza Armstrong, largely to prove that it could be done. Stead and his accomplices were convicted and sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment. Stead ultimately served two months at a prison called Holloway Gaol. He served his term and was released in January of 1886. His "Government by Journalism" article was published in the May issue of the *Contemporary Review*, while "The Future of Journalism" was published in that same periodical the following November.

Although the "Maiden Tribute" articles were published anonymously, signed only as "The Report of Our Secret Commission" or "By the Chief of our Secret Commission," the coverage of the later trial changed Stead from anonymous editor to celebrity

⁶⁷ LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy*, 44.

journalist. Upon his release from Holloway in January of 1886, Stead wrote and published a series of articles for the *Pall Mall* entitled "My First Imprisonment," emphasising and completing the transformation. Beneath the title of each instalment, centred, isolated from the surrounding text, and in an only slightly smaller font, was printed "By W.T. Stead." The "mystic 'We'"⁶⁸ that Stead so scorns in "The Future of Journalism" was nowhere to be found.

That the editorial idea described in "The Future of Journalism" was based in large part on Stead himself is indisputable. Morley, in his autobiographical *Recollections*, recounts a conversation he had with Stead upon visiting the latter in Holloway Gaol. According to Morley, in the course of the visit, Stead suddenly turned to him and said "As I was taking my exercise this morning in the prison yard, I asked myself who was the man of most importance now alive. I could only find one answer – *the man in this cell*."⁶⁹ Stead echoes this sentiment, in much the same words, in speaking of his ideal editor. In "The Future of Journalism," Stead wrote that a good editor, possessed of a desire to effect change and with the resources of the press at his disposal, "might, if he wished it, become far the most permanently influential Englishman in the Empire."⁷⁰

Statements such as these were what led F.W. Hirst, the author of a biography of John Morley, to accuse Stead of "a colossal egoism and an unwholesome greed for notoriety."⁷¹ Yet such a characterisation fails to take into account Stead's motivations. Perhaps a better characterisation is that posited by one of Stead's contemporaries, who

⁶⁸ Stead, "The Future of Journalism," *Contemporary Review*, 663.

⁶⁹ Stead, quoted in Morley, *Recollections*, vol. I, 191.

⁷⁰ Stead, "The Future of Journalism," *Contemporary Review*, 664.

⁷¹ F.W. Hirst, *Early Life & Letters of John Morley*, vol. II (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1927), 93.

described him as equal parts P.T. Barnum and Don Quixote.⁷² As a friend of Stead's, A.G. Gardiner, put it in a letter to Frederick Whyte, Stead "was an astounding jumble of passions, motives, fervours, beliefs, superstitions, fancies and frenzies."⁷³

At the root of all of Stead's Barnum-esque showmanship, his efforts to manipulate reader sentiment and increase the power of his particular corner of the British press, was his desire to make the world around him a better and more just place to live. As Stead put it in an interview published in the January 1904 issue of *The Christian Realm*:

I am not a journalist. I'm a revivalist preacher. I'm always standing upon a tub of one kind or another preaching. There are some things that ought to be stopped; others that ought to be striven for; and when I see clearly what I'm convinced is the right course I at once begin to preach, and go on preaching, 'This is the way; walk ye in it.' My aim has always been to get things done, and the Press has been the chief medium of my preaching. That's the simple fact.⁷⁴

For all that Stead advised a rather cold-blooded manipulation of reader sentiment, he did so as an impassioned crusader working towards nobler ends, not as Hirst's unfettered egoist. His chief arrogance rested in his belief, unspoken but evident none the less, that he alone could achieve those ends. Stead would lead the way or the way would never be found.

⁷² Lord Milner, quoted in White, *The Life of W.T. Stead*, vol. I, 104.

⁷³ Letter to Frederick Whyte to A.G. Gardiner, June 29, 1923, Frederick Whyte Papers, FW 77.1: Misc Letters to Frederick Whyte, University of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne.

⁷⁴ Rev. W.C. Chisholm, "W.T. Stead, Journalist and Revivalist Preacher," *The Christian Realm*, January 1904, in Frederick Whyte Papers, FW 98: Cuttings Regarding the *Life of W.T. Stead* 1890-1901, University of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne.

g. One Word Spoken Strongly

"We are now living in a momentous time in which our influence may be brought to bear to tell for good, in the great battle of right and wrong, for good or for evil. In such times one word spoken strongly and decisively will tell more than whole years of work when things are not as critical."

- W.T. Stead, "Address at Stratford-on-Avon," *Review of Reviews* V (April 1892), 411.

"Government by Journalism" and "The Future of Journalism," the two articles in which Stead presented an explicit and concisely articulated explanation of his editorial theory, were written after two of the most eventful years of his entire career. Former journalist and British press historian T.H.S. Escott called it the "high-pressure period of the Stead administration."⁷⁵ Promptly after taking up full editorship of the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1883, Stead launched the first of his many press campaigns for social betterment – what he light-heartedly referred to as his "escapades."⁷⁶ In October of 1883, he wrote an article that drew attention to the recently published *Bitter Cry of Outcast London*, a pamphlet by Andrew Mearns on the living conditions of the abject poor in London. In an article that in many way prefigured his later "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" series, Stead briefly summarised the key points of the *Bitter Cry of Outcast London* and the common themes in the inundation of readers' letters that had been received by the *Pall Mall Gazette* offices on the topic. The question asked most frequently by his appalled readers was "where to begin,"⁷⁷ and of course Stead had the answer. He wrote, "Whatever else is wanted - and much will be wanted - the personal exertions of those who feel the heinousness of our present negligence are the first thing

⁷⁵ Escott, *Masters of English Journalism*, 254.

⁷⁶ Whyte, *The Life of W.T. Stead*, vol. I, 104.

⁷⁷ W.T. Stead (unsigned), "Outcast London: Where to Begin," *Pall Mall Gazette*, October 23, 1883, 1.

needful, and the one thing which must always remain indispensable."⁷⁸ He was, in short, calling for the active participation of his readers, declaring that it was necessary if any kind of significant change was to be effected.

Three months later, in January of 1884, Stead published his "General Gordon for the Soudan" and the accompanying interview article "General Gordon on the Soudan." The two articles marked the beginning of one of the most blatant demonstrations of government by journalism of Stead's career. The campaign was an undeniable success, although it ultimately had somewhat disastrous results. The Gordon campaign was followed in September of 1884 by one of similar impact, which began with an article entitled "The Truth About the Navy, by One Who Knows." The series of articles, which purported to expose the dangerously low funding of naval expansion by the British government, proved to be as effective a demonstration of the political power of the press as the Gordon campaign had been. In both instances, Stead sought to direct public opinion and inspire his audience to action.

In May of 1885, just as he was beginning his "Maiden Tribute" investigations, Stead also worked in his inimitable way to prevent a war between Britain and Russia over the Penjdeh Incident. Russian troops had moved into Afghanistan, which area, although not officially a protectorate, the British were rather possessive of. The advance was perceived by the British government as a threat to British India, which lay just beyond the Russian occupied territory.⁷⁹ In the face of an impending Anglo-Russian war and mounting Russophobia among members of Parliament, Stead embarked an energetic press campaign in favour of arbitration and peace.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ R.A. Johnson, "Russians at the Gates of India?: Planning the Defense of India, 1885-1900," *Journal of Military History*, 67:3 (2003), 698.

Two months later, the first chapter of the "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" was published in the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Stead never referred to his "Maiden Tribute" campaign as an "escapade," but, rather, a "crusade." The series sparked an unprecedented public reaction and marked what was arguably the height of Stead's editorial power, as well as the beginning of his new career as a celebrity journalist.

According to Whyte, Stead had already formulated much of what was articulated in his two articles on press theory during his earliest days as a journalist in Northern England. He began his career with a great faith in the power of the press to effect change and an equally fervent belief in his own duty to address and correct the wrongs and injustices of the society in which he lived. As one of his contemporaries put it, for Stead, "the Press was a sword to cut down the foes of righteousness, a platform from which to hearten and inspire the armies of the Lord, a pulpit from which to preach his crusades, a desk at which he could expound his policy for making a new heaven and a new earth. He was a man with a mission, and journalism was the organ through which he wrought it. *He wrote to get things done – done and not merely talked about.*"⁸⁰ His efforts during the first two years of his reign at the *Pall Mall Gazette's* Northumberland Street offices should be looked upon, not as an evolution of an ideology of the press, but as a refinement of a methodology. With each successive campaign, Stead improved his means of inspiring his audience to action and, in the process, founded a new tradition of British press production, which contemporary literary critic Matthew Arnold dubbed the "New Journalism."⁸¹

⁸⁰ Dr. Clifford, "Memorial Service at Westminster Chapel, April 25th, 1912," *Review of Reviews*, XLV:269 (May 1912), 490; emphasis original.

⁸¹ Harold Herd, *The March of Journalism: The Story of the British Press from 1622 to the Present Day* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1952), 224.

3. Great and Greater Britain: Indirect Power of the Press and the Construction of an Imperial Hero

"'The nation at large' is no longer confined to Great Britain. It has expanded over the vast territories of Greater Britain."

- W.T. Stead, "Character Sketch: *The Times*," *Review of Reviews* I (March 1890), 189.

Thursday, February 5th, 1885 found Stead anxiously awaiting news from the Soudan. The siege of the city of Khartoum, which had lasted for some months, had been brought to an abrupt end when the rebel Soudanese forces broke through Khartoum's defences in the small hours of the morning of January 26th. Since the Soudanese forces, led by the Mahdi, had seized the city, no news had reached Britain of the state of affairs at Khartoum. It was only on that Thursday, almost two weeks after the actual fall of Khartoum, that word of the city's seizure reached England. The specific details of the fall of Khartoum were as yet unknown, as was the fate of the British officials who had been directing the Egyptian defence of the city, but more information came with each passing hour, and so Stead waited.

Stead was particularly eager for any news of General Charles Gordon, the man sent by the British government just over a year earlier, in January of 1884, to negotiate the most peaceful possible withdrawal of the British troops and non-military British citizens from the increasingly unsettled Soudan. Stead felt that he and he alone was responsible for Gordon's appointment to Khartoum. Although Stead might have somewhat over-estimated his role in the path that Gordon's career had taken, it was not that far from the truth. Stead had mounted a highly successful campaign to have General Gordon appointed to solve the crisis in the east, beginning with his January 9th, 1884

article entitled "Chinese Gordon for the Soudan." The article was accompanied by a partial transcript of the interview with Gordon that Stead had conducted the day before. Stead had sought Gordon's opinion on the increasingly volatile situation in the Soudan because Gordon had, some years earlier, served as the British Governor General of the area and was widely considered to be an expert on the Soudanese people and their situation.

In Southampton, a short train ride outside of London, February 5th also found Augusta Gordon anxiously awaiting word from Khartoum. Augusta was General Gordon's sister and the two were very close. When his military career took him out of England, as it had done numerous times over the years, Gordon wrote lengthy weekly letters to Augusta. When he was in England, Gordon often stayed with her, as he had been doing the day he had met Stead in person for the first time. The journalist had come to Augusta's home to repeat in person his request for an interview, which Gordon had previously refused by letter.

Conscious of the closeness of Charles and Augusta's relationship, as well as Augusta's mounting concern as January of 1885 closed with no word from or about her brother, Stead had taken care to pass on any information he had as soon as he could. That Thursday, Stead sent Augusta a telegram that read, "I deeply regret to inform you that bad news has come from the Soudan Khartoum fell 3 days before Wilson arrived rebels now in possession no news whatever about your brother [...] it is terrible but do not despair."¹ He quickly sent a second telegram after that message to add, "Pray regard

¹ Telegram from W.T. Stead to Augusta Gordon, 5 February 1885, Gordon Papers, AD 51300 F.64-65, The British Library; Sir Charles Wilson had been sent to Khartoum at the head of a relief mission during the city's besiegement. Wilson and a moderate armed force had come up the Nile on steam ships, but arrived, as Stead said in the telegram, three days after the Mahdi's forces had broken through and taken Khartoum.

telegram just sent as strictly confidential you will probably receive official information soon."²

Before Augusta received the official word Stead assured her was forthcoming, however, he had sent her two more telegrams. The first related the rumour that Khartoum had been betrayed by a traitor from within and mentioned that General Gordon was believed to be alive as a prisoner of the Mahdi.³ The second telegram elaborated, stating that Stead had just heard "authentic news" that the "Mahdi informed Sir Charles Wilson that your brother is alive and well wearing Mahdi's uniform."⁴ The day closed with no official confirmation one way or the other of Gordon's fate. In actual fact, Gordon had perished in the Mahdi's initial attack of January 26th.

In a letter to Augusta on February 6th, the day after his flurry of telegrams and before word of Gordon's death had reached England, Stead wrote that even if Gordon had perished, Augusta should not be bitter. She should mourn the loss of her brother, but she should do so with pride. "[F]or think you not," Stead asked in the letter, "that his spirit will rise again & that something of the Gordon soul will thrill the hearts & inspire the souls of thousands."⁵

Yet "something of the Gordon soul," or, perhaps more accurately, something of Stead's making that was very like it, had already been inspiring the readership of the *Pall Mall Gazette* for months. Over the course of his campaign on Gordon's behalf, Stead had built an elaborate and highly admirable public character for Gordon, one which Stead

² Telegram from W.T. Stead to Augusta Gordon, 5 February 1885, Gordon Papers, AD 51300 F.66, British Library.

³ Telegram from W.T. Stead to Augusta Gordon, 5 February 1885, Gordon Papers, AD 51300 F.67, British Library.

⁴ Telegram from W.T. Stead to Augusta Gordon, 5 February 1885, Gordon Papers, AD 51300 F.68, British Library.

⁵ Letter from W.T. Stead to Augusta Gordon, 5 February 1885, Gordon Papers, AD 51300 F.69, British Library.

then used to manipulate public sentiment and influence government policy on the topic of the Soudan. In his letter to Augusta, Stead described his own role has having been to help "place your brother as it were on a pedestal, so that all mankind should for the space of a whole year be compelled to gaze in ever increasing admiration & wonder & reverence at so ideal a type of the Christian Englishman."⁶ One cannot, however, "compel the gaze" in any direction without also turning the head, which consequence Stead whole-heartedly embraced. Where the British public directed its attention, so the British government followed, and Stead was the one pointing the way for the masses. Stead's involvement in the Soudan crisis of 1883-1885 was perhaps the most blatant demonstration of the power of journalism of Stead's editorial career, matched only by his later "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" campaign.

a. Government by Journalism

"The telegraph and the printing-press have converted Great Britain into a vast agora, or assembly of the whole community, in which the discussion of the affairs of State is carried on from day to day in the hearing of the whole people."
 - W.T. Stead, "Government by Journalism," *Contemporary Review*, 654.

The advantages of government by journalism over government by *government* were, in Stead's opinion, multitude. The most important one, however, was very simply that government by conventional means was subject to bureaucracy and government by journalism was not. Bureaucracy, in Stead's vocabulary, was synonymous with incompetence. Bureaucracy served to separate the elected from the electorate, allowed and even encouraged corruption, and, perhaps most damagingly, reduced the effectiveness of those few strong-willed and capable individuals who might have been

⁶ Stead to Augusta Gordon, 6 February 1885, AD 51300 F.69, British Library.

trusted to put things to right. Stead's belief in the importance of individual agency was absolute; his faith in the bureaucracy-laden government to find a worthy individual and give him the freedom to operate was non-existent.

On January 1st, 1884, the first New Year after Stead took over editorship of the newspaper, the lead article in the *Pall Mall Gazette* was entitled "The Old and the New." The article was unsigned and the only self-reference contained within was carefully couched in terms of the editorial 'we.' In his biography of Stead, Frederick Whyte implies that Stead wrote the article, although he never outright confirms it, and the content of the piece itself suggests this to be the case.⁷ Although the article purported to be a programme statement for the coming year's *Pall Mall*, it proved to be instead a set of directives for the British government on domestic, imperial, and foreign matters.

The idea of a unified, albeit far-flung, British race under the rule of the British Empire was a concept that occupied a great deal of Stead's attentions in his later years at the *Pall Mall* and throughout his tenure at the *Review of Reviews*.⁸ This same idea, in a slightly less developed form, provided the base for "The Old and the New." The article emphasised the responsibilities of a government to the people living under its power, an opinion that Stead publicly promoted many times over the course of his career. As it was put in the article, the British government's "object should be everywhere [in the Empire]

⁷ Whyte, *The Life of W.T. Stead*, vol. I, 111.

⁸ One expression of Stead's belief in the unity of the British race was his effort to found an Anglo-American press association. The association's members were to include, as Stead put it in a letter to E.T. Cook, "those who believe in the unity of the English speaking race, and who are willing to work together to promote the friendly co-operation of the Empire and the Republic." Stead goes on in that same letter and in later ones to say that, while the association should at first consist mostly of journalists, he hoped it would come to encompass representatives of all sorts from the whole of the English speaking world. (Letter from W.T. Stead to E.T. Cook, April 9, 1898, Frederick Whyte Papers, FW95: Correspondences Between E.T. Cook & W.T. Stead, 1885-1922, University of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne.)

the same; to govern for the sake of the governed."⁹ On the topic of the role played by individuals in the progress of the world, the article could not be more explicit. As the introductory paragraph reads:

Evolution is the greatest of all revolutions, for it is a constant factor in the progress of the race. Our creeds and our institutions perish or pass, not because we will but because they must. Necessity, not logic, abolished the Corn Laws, a not less inexorable authority may one day abolish the House of Commons. In presence of great changes slowly accomplishing themselves in the ages [...] the insignificance of the individual appears almost infinite. Yet in shaping the future of the world and the race, the individual counts for much, and the faith of the great aggregates of the individualities counts for more.¹⁰

The individuals whose initiative would shape "the future of the world and the race" would look after themselves; Stead, on the other hand, would see to the "faith of the great aggregates," empowering those individuals he deemed worthy to reach their full potential and enabling them to overcome any limitations that might be placed on them by the evils of bureaucracy. This empowerment would, in theory, result in a situation that was simultaneously to the advantage of the individual, to society at large, and to Stead and the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

Throughout his journalistic and editorial career, Stead was forever drawn to those dynamic personalities who were possessed of a strong will and a sense of determination, qualities Stead himself had in abundance. He cared little whether the person's convictions – political, religious, or otherwise – agreed with his own, so long as they were committed to the pursuit of what they considered to be the right and moral course. The underlying character of the person was what interested Stead, because while minds

⁹ W.T. Stead (unsigned), "The Old and the New," *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 1 January 1884, 1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

could be changed, hopefully to bring the individual in question into agreement with Stead, that character would remain constant.

On a more practical level, these dynamic personalities served a second purpose for Stead beyond the simple pleasure of associating with interesting people; they provided a rich cast of characters for the 'reality' he constructed in the pages of the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Although Stead could and did, on many occasions, create celebrities out of the most ordinary of figures, the literary potential of personalities such as General Gordon, Prime Minister W.E. Gladstone, the Russian Mme. Novokoff, and Pope Leo XIII was much greater. Figures such as thirteen year old Eliza Armstrong, one of the piteous characters around which Stead's "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" revolved, appealed to the *Pall Mall's* readership because they were ordinary people caught up in extraordinary circumstances. Public sentiment was engaged by the thought of average young girls trapped in such unfortunate situations. The appeal of such characters lay in their helplessness to help themselves, or, rather, in their lack of individual agency.

This was quite a different kind of appeal than that of the characters around which Stead's explicitly political journalistic efforts revolved. The personalities that populated Stead's government of journalism were emphatically not the victims of circumstance, but, rather, the kind of intelligent, moral, and capable individuals who directed circumstance. Stead did not appeal to the public with these characters, instead he celebrated them in the public forum and demanded that his readership celebrate them as well. He created heroes out of his public characters, defying any of his audience to name a person more suitable for whatever role Stead had in mind for his hero to play.

Stead's campaign on behalf of General Gordon was, as historian R.H. Gretton put it, "probably the first occasion on which a newspaper set itself, by acting as an organizer of opinion on a particular detail of policy, to change a government's mind at high speed. However strongly newspapers had spoken before this on political subjects, they had not adopted the method of hammering, day in, day out, at a single detail, and turning policy into a catchword."¹¹ On January 7th, 1884, only two days before Stead published his "Chinese Gordon for the Soudan," Gordon had submitted his resignation to the War Office with the intention of accepting a post in the Congo from King Leopold of Belgium.¹² The British government had briefly considered sending Gordon to the Soudan, but had dismissed him as being too erratic and far too inclined towards head-on confrontation to manage what they hoped would be the largely peaceful withdrawal of British and Egyptian troops from the region. There was also the matter of Gordon's term as Governor General of the Soudan beginning in 1877. Gordon had repeatedly clashed with many of the other administrators of the region, both British and native, before his resignation in 1880. There was a good deal of lingering resentment towards Gordon by the members of the region's administration as a result of his rather aggressive methods, even four years later. Furthermore, Gordon was known to be an extremely devout Christian and doubts were expressed by various members of government as to the wisdom of sending him to deal with the Mahdi's rebellion, which was as much a religious as it was a political uprising.¹³

¹¹ R.H. Gretton, *Modern History of the English People* (London: Martin Secker, 1930), 124.

¹² Lord Godfrey Elton, *Gordon of Khartoum: The Life of General Charles George Gordon* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), 272.

¹³ John H. Waller, *Gordon of Khartoum: The Saga of a Victorian Hero* (New York: Atheneum, 1988), 326.

Nine days after the publication of Stead's article, however, Gordon left England for Khartoum. None of the government's previous concerns regarding Gordon's temperament had abated, nor had any of the extremely valid reasons for Gordon not to be appointed to Khartoum vanished, yet the public support for Gordon sparked by Stead's campaign was so overwhelming as to be impossible for the government to ignore. On Friday, January 18th, at 8:00 in the evening, Gordon boarded a train headed for the coast of England and the ship that would take him to Egypt. Gordon's month-long journey across Egypt to Khartoum, his efforts upon reaching the city, and the besiegement that ultimately resulted both in the fall of the city and in Gordon's death were faithfully recounted in the pages of the *Pall Mall Gazette* for the next year. Even when the only news was that there *was* no news from Gordon or Khartoum, the *Pall Mall* duly noted it in either a leader on the front page or at the head of the section devoted to international news later in the newspaper. Gordon's efforts were kept in the forefront of the public consciousness by the continuous updates, while his character in the public eye was being ever fleshed out by the periodic publication of his letters on various subjects or of articles about him by his many friends, relatives, and acquaintances. As late as 1886, a year after Gordon's death, the *Pall Mall Gazette* continued to publish articles describing such things as Gordon's opinions on the Irish Home Rule debate¹⁴ or trying to imagine what his reaction would be to a post-election change in governmental personnel.¹⁵ There were even articles that speculated on such topics as whether or not Thomas Carlyle had predicted Gordon's demise at Khartoum.¹⁶ The death of Gordon was relevant only in so far as it had inspired an even greater swell of public sentiment for him. The constructed

¹⁴ "General Gordon's Plan for Home Rule," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 1 January 1886, 1-2.

¹⁵ "Out/In," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 27 January 1886, 1.

¹⁶ "Carlyle and Gordon: A Coincidence or a Prophecy?," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 28 January 1886, 11.

character of Gordon lived on long after the fall of Khartoum, ready for Stead to make use of without even the inconvenience of a real man possessed of independent opinions to restrain him.

Underlying every reference to Gordon in the *Pall Mall Gazette* was the implication that the fall of Khartoum was not due to any failure on Gordon's part, but, rather, was the result of governmental incompetency. The evils of bureaucracy had overwhelmed any benefit that may otherwise have been gained by the exercise of government by journalism. At no time did Stead acknowledge that perhaps the government had been right to be concerned about Gordon, and that it was Stead himself that may have erred in supporting the wrong man. Rather, as was made very clear by the *Pall Mall's* discussion of the matter in the weeks following the fall of Khartoum, Stead felt that the real failing lay in the government's inability to trust in the agency of the individual. Had they trusted Gordon from the beginning and provided him with the support he needed in a timely manner, the events of January of 1885 would surely have turned out differently. However, what support the government did offer was too little and, as the headlines of the *Pall Mall Gazette* frequently proclaimed in the early months of 1885, "Too Late!"

b. Facing a Crisis

"It is a very pretty mess, but one thing is certain, we shall not be allowed to go on as at present. Events will be too strong for us."

- "Facing a Crisis," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 3 January 1884, 1.

Matters in the Soudan had been growing more and more unsettled for years before Stead published his "Chinese Gordon for the Soudan," and although missteps by the

British government certainly had not helped diffuse the situation, they were far from the universal cause that Stead made them out to be. The origins of the crisis were vastly more complex than simple bureaucratic incompetency. Rather, the motivations behind the Mahdi's uprising were equal parts political and religious dissatisfaction. The Soudan's Muslim population had not fared well under their largely Christian, arguably corrupt, and entirely British-controlled Egyptian government. Under the direction of the Mahdi, the general atmosphere of dissatisfaction erupted into open rebellion.

The Soudan had, since the early part of the nineteenth century, been a region of some contention. As historian John Marlowe points out in his *Anglo-Egyptian Relations, 1800-1956*, before the Soudan Convention of 1889, the southern limits of Egypt were not particularly well-defined.¹⁷ Over the course of the decades between 1820 and 1850, on the basis of that imprecision, the majority of the Soudanese region was claimed by and brought under the authority of the Egyptian government. Meanwhile, the period witnessed an increasing number of ties, both diplomatic and economic, being forged between Egypt and Britain, beginning with the 1840 Treaty of London.¹⁸ Although diplomatic relations between the two countries disintegrated on multiple occasions, a few times to the point of military conflict, the strength of the economic ties between the two countries never faltered and good relations were eventually restored, with Britain maintaining the upper hand in the alliance.¹⁹

Khedive Ismail, following his appointment as Pasha of Egypt in 1863, began immediately to develop plans to extend Egyptian authority in the Soudan beyond the

¹⁷ John Marlowe, *Anglo-Egyptian Relations, 1800-1956*, 2nd ed. (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1965), 138.

¹⁸ Robert T. Harrison, *Gladstone's Imperialism in Egypt: Techniques of Domination* (London: Greenwood Press, 1995), 4.

¹⁹ Marlowe, *Anglo-Egyptian Relations, 1800-1956*, 50.

basic occupation that had been established in the first half of the century to real control. In order to guarantee the support of Britain for the project, he disguised it by claiming an intention to suppress the slave trade that ran rampant in the region. To further secure British support, he appointed a series of British Governor-Generals to oversee the administration of the central African region, beginning with Sir Samuel Baker in 1869.²⁰ Baker was succeeded by General Gordon, who served as the Governor of the Equatorial Provinces of Central Africa from 1872 to 1876 and as the Governor-General of the Soudan from 1877 to 1878.

According to historian Robert T. Harrison, the Treaty of London, which served to codify Anglo-Egyptian relations in 1840, was based on "earlier imperial models in India wherein the British Raj secured guardianship treaties with numerous princes as buffers against potential enemies."²¹ Harrison goes on to argue that this model, which in India had resulted in open control and annexation, provided the basis for the direct British administration of Egypt that was established under the Gladstone's Liberal Parliament in 1882. Following the outbreak of war in Afghanistan in 1879 and 1880 and the seizure of Tunis by France in 1881, Gladstone's government began to fear for the safety of British India, which was vulnerable to attack through the Suez Canal. When Egypt itself became destabilised, a revolution breaking out against the established Khedive administration in 1881, Gladstone took the opportunity to step in and establish direct British control in Egypt and, by extension, the Soudan. By September of 1882, British forces had occupied Egypt and the country was firmly under the thumb of the foreign administration. The British intervention, executed in the interests of protecting India, was in direct opposition

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 140.

²¹ Harrison, *Gladstone's Imperialism in Egypt*, 4.

to both the 1840 Treaty of London and general Liberal ideology.²² By October of 1882, plans were already being made to withdraw the British forces from Egypt as soon as "the state of the country and the organization of proper means for the maintenance of the Khedive's authority will permit it."²³ Gladstone was still attempting to effect that withdrawal in fall of 1883, when the situation in the Soudan reached a critical point.

The Mahdi, against whose figure Stead cast the heroic Gordon in his evocative imperial fairytale, was born Mohammed Ahmed ibn Abdullah. He decided at an early age to devote his life to Islam, which he did with such great fervour that he was cast out by his mentor, Sheikh Mohammed al-Sharif Nur al-Da'im, for criticising the latter's opulence. Mohammed Ahmed's faith had inspired an asceticism that was greatly offended by his former teacher's excess.²⁴

Mohammed Ahmed's piety eventually began to attract followers, one of whom, a man who became one of the leading figures of the Soudanese rebellion, named him the 'Mahdi,' or Messiah. Abdullahi ibn Mohammed, as historian John H. Waller describes him in his *Gordon of Khartoum*, was a "stern activist" who provided a great deal of the momentum behind the initial Mahdist movement.²⁵ In 1881, Mohammed Ahmed accepted the title of the Mahdi and mounted an open campaign against the non-Islamic rulers of the Soudan. Although he began by simply speaking out against the Egyptian government, he did not flinch when the movement developed a more militant nature following the Egyptian government's attempt to suppress the Mahdi's followers by sending troops out to their home on the Island of Abba. The Mahdists, armed with no

²² *Ibid.*, 78.

²³ Memoranda from British Foreign Secretary, Lord Granville, quoted in Marlowe, *Anglo-Egyptian Relations, 1800-1956*, 131.

²⁴ Waller, *Gordon of Khartoum*, 301-302.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 305.

more than sticks, triumphed against the better armed, albeit ill-trained and badly organised, Egyptian troops. They also triumphed in all successive confrontations with the Egyptian army. Each victory fed the growing legend of the Mahdi, seeming to confirm his claim that he was waging a holy war, and drew ever greater numbers to his following.²⁶ Over the course of 1882 and 1883, the rebellion spread as the Mahdi gained control over ever-greater parts of the Soudan. Although the Egyptian and British governments initially dismissed the threat posed by the Mahdi, viewing him as a fanatic fundamentalist operating on the very edge of Soudanese society, as time passed and his influence grew, they became more and more alarmed.

November of 1883 marked the true beginning of the Soudanese crisis, at least from the perspective of the British government. As British historian William F. Butler put it in his 1897 biography of General Gordon, "there came a thunder clap which all at once brought [the situation in the Soudan] painfully close at hand to us."²⁷ That month witnessed what the British government viewed as the massacre of a British force at the hands of the Mahdi, although in actual fact the force was made up of Soudanese soldiers and led by less than a dozen British officers. In September of 1883, the force, led by Colonel William Hicks, marched out of Khartoum for Kordofan. In pursuit of the Mahdi, Hicks was drawn further and further into the desert, stretching the force's supply lines beyond endurance. The situation was compounded by the fact that Hicks' guides had been bribed by the Mahdi to lead the nominally-British force astray through waterless

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 307.

²⁷ Colonel Sir William F. Butler, *Charles George Gordon* (London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 1897), 194.

territory. Lost, dispirited, and dangerously low in supplies, Hicks' force provided little challenge to the Mahdi's followers when they finally attacked on November 3rd, 1883.²⁸

Butler's biography of Gordon, a highly patriotic account published as part of a series entitled "English Men of Action," described the British response to Hicks' defeat in bald terms, writing:

So complete was the slaughter that for many weeks no detail of the disaster was known. It lay, and still lies, shrouded in the silence of a total extinction. Although there were only ten Englishmen in ten thousand Egyptians, the defeat at Kazghil was a severe blow to our *prestige*; and it was easy to see that even in Egypt, so hateful had our presence become to the people of the Delta, the news of the loss of their army in the Soudan was a subject of ill-concealed satisfaction since it embraced the foreigner in its catastrophe.²⁹

According to Butler, it was that sense of having been abandoned even by their supposed allies, the Egyptians, that convinced the British government the time had come to abandon the region to its domestic politics. Resolved on this course of action, plans began to be made in December of 1883 to withdraw all elements of the British and Egyptian military presence from the Soudan as quickly as possible.

c. Chinese Gordon for the Soudan

"It is a rare piece of good fortune that at the critical moment in the destinies of the Soudan and the Nile Valley the ablest Englishman who ever held command in Equatorial Africa should be once more within two hours of London."

- W.T. Stead, "Chinese Gordon for the Soudan," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 9 January 1884, 1.

On January 8th, 1884, Stead boarded a train for Southampton, determined to obtain an interview with the man considered, at least by some, one of the foremost authorities on the people and politics of the Soudan. Stead had written to General

²⁸ Waller, *Gordon of Khartoum*, 317-318.

²⁹ Butler, *Charles George Gordon*, 194.

Gordon to request an interview on the topic that had dominated the pages of the British press for weeks, only to be politely, but firmly, refused. Gordon had arrived in England from the continent only the day before, on January 7th, but had already submitted his resignation to the War Office. In his written refusal to Stead, Gordon explained that he had resolved to keep his opinions to himself and not become involved in the debate over the Soudan. Stead, undaunted by the refusal, decided to repeat his request in person in the hopes that he could convince Gordon to change his mind.

Gordon, upon finding Stead on the doorstep of his sister's Southampton home, again refused to grant an interview, but Stead persisted. He described the government's intention to not only withdraw all British personnel from the Soudan, but also to pressure the native Egyptian government to do the same. Aghast at the proposal, one of Gordon's biographers states, the General "proceeded with the utmost animation to unburden himself of a torrent of facts and arguments."³⁰ For the space of two hours, Gordon indulged in a blazing criticism of the government's scheme and offered, in return, the bare outline of an alternative plan of action. Not only would the evacuation of the region likely have negative implications both for the British and for the people of the Soudan, Gordon argued, such a withdrawal was not even possible. As the transcript of the interview published the next day in the *Pall Mall Gazette* read:

How will you move your 6,000 men from Khartoum – to say nothing of other places – and all the Europeans in that city, through the desert to Wadi Halfa? Where are you going to get the camels to take them away? Will the Mahdi supply them? If they are to escape with their lives, the garrison will not be allowed to leave with a coat on their backs. They will be plundered to the skin, and even then their lives may not be spared. Whatever you may decide about evacuation, you cannot evacuate, because your army cannot be moved.³¹

³⁰ Elton, *Gordon of Khartoum*, 273.

³¹ "Chinese Gordon on the Soudan," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 9 January 1884, 11.

To abandon the Soudan, Gordon argued, even if such an abandonment were possible, was to give up Egypt as well. To retreat from the Mahdi and his followers was to invite similar rebellions from all corners of that country. Yet, since abandonment was not possible, the discussion of the consequences thereof was irrelevant. The decision to be made was not whether or not to withdraw from the Soudan; there was no choice but to stay. The only decision that remained was whether to, as Gordon put it, "surrender absolutely to the Mahdi or defend Khartoum at all hazards. The latter," Gordon stated with finality, "is the only course which ought to be entertained."³²

Stead was delighted. He had found in Gordon an authority that agreed precisely with his own opinions on the situation in the Soudan. He had not approved of the government's decision to withdraw, but, lacking an alternative proposal, had not opposed it as vigorously as he might otherwise have done. Gordon, however, offered not only the alternative that Stead had been looking for, but also the human angle on the otherwise abstract discussion of international politics. His first consideration seemed not to be the political implications of the proposed withdrawal, but rather the consequences for that withdrawal for the British and Egyptian troops, as well as for the Soudanese people themselves. Gordon was forceful and engaging and Stead discovered that he genuinely liked and admired the other man. In short, Stead had found in Gordon a man worthy of championing.

The interview published the next day in the *Pall Mall* was a departure from the usual style of Stead's interview pieces, which were rather unique at the time. Stead is generally credited by press historians as being the populariser of the newspaper interview

³² *Ibid.*

in Britain. This was a view that many of Stead's contemporaries seemed to share. As an article on Stead written some years later for the *South Wales Liberal* proposed, his success with interviewing may have been equally due to Stead's methods and to his writing style.

Of Stead's interview method, the *South Wales Liberal* journalist wrote, "Gifted with a splendid memory, [Stead] does not frighten the lady or gentlemen with whom he is conversing by producing note-book and pencil, but mentally registers the conversation and, when alone, transcribes it unerringly."³³ The style of the eventual article based on the interview was equally unusual for the time. Stead typically began his interview articles with a description of the setting in which the interview took place and of the appearance of the interviewee. He was also of the habit of interspersing similar details throughout the article, breaking up the transcript of the interview with notes that the interviewee had risen or gestured or smiled at a particular point. The effect of such notes was to turn the printed article from a dry script, not unlike the published court proceedings that occasionally graced the pages of the *Pall Mall* under the two previous editors, into something that seemed more like an extract from a conversation that a reader could easily imagine having with an acquaintance. Yet the interviews were definitely monologues, rather than dialogues, as any leading questions Stead may have asked in the course of the interview were not included in the final article. The interviewee was left standing alone in a carefully described setting, passionately lecturing the *Pall Mall's* readership on some topic of interest.

³³ "Mr. W.T. Stead," *South Wales Liberal*, 13 February 1892, in Frederick Whyte Papers, FW98: Cuttings Regarding the *Life of W.T. Stead* 1890-1901, University of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne.

The difference between Stead's usual interviews and his interview with Gordon is striking. Stead's introductory note to "Chinese Gordon on the Soudan" was brief, noting only Gordon's recent return to England, his impending departure for the Congo, and the authority of, as well as his reluctance to share, his opinions on the Soudan. The only description Stead offers of the surroundings in which the interview took place was to mention that Gordon was staying with his sister in her Southampton home. Stead made no effort to describe Augusta Gordon's sitting room, in which the actual interview took place.³⁴

Perhaps Stead felt that his usual style would detract from the force of Gordon's interview. Certainly, although the final article is nothing more than the published transcript of their two hour long conversation, it does not lack dynamism. Statements that, "for their fidelity,"³⁵ the British and Egyptian troops would be abandoned and slaughtered, or that "the great weakness is not at Khartoum, but at Cairo"³⁶ could hardly be described as dry, even without an accompanying description of Gordon's pacing. Perhaps, also, Stead felt that the lead article he wrote and published in the same issue of the *Pall Mall* as the interview was accompaniment enough.

To a far greater degree than the interview, that lead article, entitled "Chinese Gordon for the Soudan," marked the beginning of the re-creation of Gordon as an imperial hero in the public eye. In it, Gordon is declared, "unquestionably,"³⁷ to be the foremost authority on the Soudan. His views, although they conflicted with those of the

³⁴ This despite the presence of Augusta's massive leopard-skin divan, which every Gordon biographer seems to delight in describing when discussing the occasion. During the interview, Stead sat on the rather notable piece of furniture while Gordon paced about the room. Nor does Stead mention the presence of Captain Brocklehurst, a friend of Gordon's who was also staying with Augusta and was in the room at the time. Gordon was truly left alone at centre stage, expounding on the topic of the Soudan.

³⁵ "Chinese Gordon on the Soudan," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 11.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ W.T. Stead (unsigned), "Chinese Gordon for the Soudan," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 9 January 1884, 1.

government, are claimed to be supported by "every authority who looks at the matter from a purely Egyptian standpoint,"³⁸ rather than from a perspective clouded by British party politics. The article stops short of expressing the complete faith in Gordon to triumph over any situation that coloured many of the *Pall Mall's* later efforts on his behalf, but it is optimistic. "Why not send Chinese GORDON with full powers to Khartoum," Stead asks. "He may not be able single-handed to reduce that raging chaos to order, but the attempt is worth making, and if it is to be made it will have to be made at once. For before many days General Gordon will have left for the Congo, and the supreme opportunity may have passed by."³⁹ Stead's article marked the beginning of the creation of a public character for Gordon that inspired trust and affection from the *Pall Mall's* readership. Gordon was, over the subsequent months, presented as a paragon among men. His imperfections were carefully minimized or reconfigured as admirable qualities.⁴⁰ The Gordon that appeared in the pages of the *Pall Mall* would not be hard-pressed to save the world with only a pinch of gunpowder and a single pistol. Saving Khartoum with thousands of men, good fortifications, and the faith of the British public would, therefore, present little challenge.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*; It was the custom in the leaders of the *Pall Mall Gazette* to print proper names all in capitals and leave nicknames, titles, and positions in the usual title case.

⁴⁰ In a later article, Stead addressed the doubts expressed by some in the government regarding Gordon's sanity. Stead replied to the criticism by writing that, of course, those with "not a tittle of [Gordon's] administrative genius, or his shrewd political sagacity, shrug their shoulders and say that Gordon is mad. And of course, if they themselves are the type of true sanity, they are right; but if so, then he is one of those madmen whose madness is of the nature of inspiration." Gordon, according to Stead, was in a class all his own, and therefore misunderstood by lesser men. The explanation shifted the focus from Gordon's very real eccentricities and unpredictable nature to the staid and morbidly predictable personalities of his critics. (W.T. Stead, "Chinese Gordon," *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, XXVIII:4 (August 1884), 561.)

d. A Voice out of the Sky

"Public opinion was tranquil because uninformed, when suddenly, as a voice out of the sky, General Gordon was heard asking what was to become of the garrisons. 'There are some twenty-five thousand soldiers in the Soudan whose only offense is loyalty to their sovereign. Are you, in return for their fidelity, going to abandon them to massacre?'"

- W.T. Stead, "Chinese Gordon," *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* XXVIII:4 (August 1884), 558.

Stead, in his construction of Gordon's public character, had an impressive body of pre-existing archetypes to fall back on. The form of the imperial soldier hero had long since been established by earlier newspaper accounts of foreign wars and by publications such as the *Boys Own Paper* and similar magazines for young English boys. Stead's particular narrative of Gordon's expedition to the Soudan echoed, in many ways, the imperial narratives that had been a dominant part of British popular consciousness since the mid-nineteenth century and was populated by the kind of simply drawn, morally unambiguous characters that were so typical of the juvenile literature that had exploded in popularity in the same period. The resulting tale was a compelling and sensational one that invited readers to respond with the uncomplicated emotion of the *Boys Own Paper* audience rather than with the measured intellectualism expected of an adult.

Graham Dawson, in his *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities*, writes that the figure of the "soldier hero of adventure"⁴¹ has been one of the most enduring symbols of both masculinity and of nationalism, particularly nationalism of the imperial sort. The expansion of the British Empire and the continual upheaval at its edges allowed for the creation of a soldier hero who was simultaneously an exciting, exotic figure and a symbol of domestic achievement. As

⁴¹ Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994), 1.

Kelly Boyd writes in her article "Exemplars and Ingrates: Imperialism and the Boys' Story Paper, 1880-1930," the British Empire was represented as "an evolving location in which adventure could take place."⁴² Yet, for all that men like Sir Henry Havelock, to use Dawson's example, proved their heroism in distant arenas, they were British in race and upbringing, and thus a source of national pride. As Dawson goes on to argue, the details of the foreign wars in which these soldier heroes engaged were important only in so far as they provided the basis for the far more generalised popular narratives constructed by the domestic British press. With the reality of war nicely blunted by the distance between the foreign front and the British reading audience, the press was free to interpret the truth to suit their own ends. As Dawson writes of the newspaper accounts of Havelock's suppression of the 1857 Indian Rebellion, "Once publicly amplified and condensed together in press reports claiming to be documentary 'truths,' for which [the British press] furnished the eyewitness evidence, these stories took on an altogether different significance. As sources for more generalized and powerful public narratives, they helped to establish the imaginative frame within which the impact of the revolt could be grasped by English readers."⁴³ Like children's morality tales, the imperial narratives created by the British press from the mid-nineteenth century on were tidy and to the point, with truth being subservient to the particular agenda being pursued. The heroic figures around which such stories revolved were equally open to interpretation. As Dawson writes, again of Havelock, "His image became a valuable commodity, inflected this way and that according to the various political and cultural projects with which it

⁴² Kelly Boyd, "Exemplars and Ingrates: Imperialism and the Boys' Story Paper, 1880-1930," *Historical Research* 17:163 (1994), 143.

⁴³ Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, 88.

became associated, from reform of the State to the sale of sheet music or to the spreading of gospel."⁴⁴

The figure of Havelock was still, almost thirty years after his death, a powerful cultural figure when Stead published his "General Gordon for the Soudan." Dawson mentions Gordon as one of the late-Victorian "expanding pantheon" of imperial heroes.⁴⁵ Unlike his fellows in the pantheon, who were honoured for their victories, Gordon was honoured for his "martyrdom in the imperial service at Khartoum" and considered "the most renowned of all exemplars of imperial virtue."⁴⁶ In an article published upon the confirmation of Gordon's death, the *Pall Mall Gazette* stated that:

Even with that terrible telegram of massacre and treachery before their eyes there is not one of his friends who for a moment regrets that General GORDON was sent to the Soudan to suffer and to die in the defence of Khartoum. Looking back over the whole of the dark, confused welter of bloodshed and blunder that filled the last year, the mission of General GORDON stands out distinct and clear as the one great achievement of England for which everyone has indeed good cause to thank GOD and take courage. Of all the gifts of Heaven to earth, the hero is infinitely the greatest. In him the race sees incarnate its highest ideals, and his existence is in itself of an inspiration.⁴⁷

Although Dawson never mentions Stead's role in the creation of Gordon's public image, it was Stead who first celebrated Gordon as an imperial hero and who first mourned him as an imperial martyr. Gordon, as described by Stead, fulfilled perfectly what Kelly Boyd identifies as the ideal qualities of the Victorian era imperial hero: "strength of purpose, an athletic grace and a prescient awareness of how to deal with any situation."⁴⁸ Gordon had

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ "In Memoriam," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 11 February 1885, 1; The article, like all *Pall Mall* lead articles, was unsigned. However, certain phrases that appear in both the article and in the private letter Stead sent to Augusta Gordon on February 6th, and Stead's personal interest in Gordon suggest that he might have been the author.

⁴⁸ Boyd, "Exemplars and Ingrates," 145.

prophesied the fall of Khartoum to the Mahdi, but would not abandon his faithful followers, and so was martyred in the name of the imperial project.

As historian Joseph Bristow argues in his *Empire Boys: Adventures in a Man's World*, the vast majority of the magazines aimed at a juvenile male audience served to celebrate the growth of the British Empire and the larger-than-life characters who populated it. Serialised novels following the exploits of British explorers and soldiers as they tamed the exotic outer-reaches of "Greater Britain" were the most popular and most enduring features to be found in the pages of such publications. The juvenile papers with their penny dreadfuls, as the entire genre of fiction came to be known, first appeared in the mid-1800s.⁴⁹ By the 1880s and Gordon's mission to Khartoum, the peculiar version of history, geography, and morality presented by the penny dreadfuls had become a firmly entrenched feature of popular consciousness, particularly for the men who had grown to adulthood reading them. By modelling his presentation of Gordon and the situation in the Soudan after the adventure stories that filled the pages of the boys' papers, Stead was tapping into a powerful and largely unexamined aspect of late-Victorian imagination.

The connection between the reality of Gordon and the Soudan crisis and Stead's penny dreadful-style version of it was not a difficult one to make. Indeed, many aspects of the Soudan situation already had strong correlations with certain recurring themes of the boys' imperial adventure stories. The confrontation of Christianity and Islam, for example, was a very popular penny dreadful plot device. The genre as a whole, Bristow

⁴⁹ Joseph Bristow, *Empire Boys: Adventures in a Man's World* (London: Harper Collins Academic, 1991), 11.

argues, tended to focus on "[a]ncient cultures and far-off places"⁵⁰ as a means of communicating very modern messages regarding the state of the world and the place of Britain within it. In stories taking place during the holy wars of the middle ages or in novels such as H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* and *She*, which follow the exploits of explorers in contemporary Africa, the clash between Christian heroes and Muslim villains served to demonstrate the moral virtues of imperialism.⁵¹ The uprising in the Soudan, led as it was by the religious figure of the Mahdi against the Christian imperial forces in the region, could well have been a plot taken directly from the pages of the juvenile magazines.⁵² The setting of the Soudanese crisis, furthermore, could not have been more appealing; Egypt, with its monolithic monuments to ancient culture, and Africa, with its associations of rampant exoticism and the dark days of slavery, were both possessed of endless cultural cachet to the imaginations shaped by the penny dreadfuls.

Yet the *Pall Mall Gazette* was no *Boys Own Paper* and although Stead made use of the themes and archetypes of the penny dreadful genre, he did so in a subversive way. His was an adventure story for adults and it carried with it a moral that had less to do with the glory of the Empire than it did the responsibilities of imperialism. The hero of Stead's story was, without a doubt, General Gordon. He displayed all the personality characteristics of the best imperial heroes: courage, piety, strength, a tendency to triumph

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 140-141.

⁵² Following his death and the fall of Khartoum, Gordon himself came to feature prominently in the penny dreadful version of history. In *Empire Boys*, Bristow discusses at length two very popular novels, G.W. Stevens' *With Kitchener to Khartoum* and G.A. Henty's *With Kitchener in the Soudan*. Both novels, written a decade and a half after Gordon's death and published serially in youth papers, feature the attempted rescue mission sent to Khartoum following the city's seizure by the Mahdi. Typical of such novels, the authors mixed historical figures such as Kitchener and Gordon with fictional protagonists and background characters. Neither author felt any compunction sacrificing historical accuracy in favour of entertainment or a more forceful statement of the moral of their stories, which was, inevitably, a celebration of the glory of the British Empire. In both books, the Mahdi is a menacing, villainous figure against which Gordon is cast as the doomed imperial hero. (*Ibid.*, 147-153)

against overwhelming odds, and an incongruous mix of paternalism and brutality for the native populations of the exotic corners of the world he found himself in. He had led a life worthy of any adventure story hero, his eventful military career having provided him numerous opportunities to distinguish himself against the enemies of the Empire. His nickname, "Chinese" Gordon, came from his suppression of the Taiping rebellion in China in 1864, which he accomplished despite being outnumbered and leading a Chinese force, rather than a British one. The occasion of his triumph, according to Stead, was well known in the east, but had all but been forgotten by the western world.⁵³ Stead, of course, was more than happy to remind his readership of the story.

The villain of Stead's story, however, was not the Mahdi, as would have been the case in one of the penny dreadfuls. Instead, that role was played by the British government. Over the course of the *Pall Mall's* coverage of the events in the Soudan, the Mahdi emerged as Gordon's worthy foe, which is not quite the same as being the villain of the piece. The Mahdi was portrayed by Stead as having been forced to rebel by the outrageous and barbaric persecution of the Soudanese people at the hands of the Egyptian government. Stead excused the Egyptian government, whose behaviour towards the Soudanese left the Mahdi and his followers no choice but to defend themselves, as being the same as 'native' governments everywhere: helplessly corrupt and incapable of improvement. Ultimately, the fault lay with the British government, which had neglected its imperial duty and failed to intercede as the Egyptian government forced the Soudan into a state of crisis. The British government, in Stead's opinion, had done great harm by doing nothing at all, or too little too late, or far too much of entirely the wrong thing.

⁵³ Stead, "Chinese Gordon," *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, 556.

Stead, in an article published in the August 1884 issue of the *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, collected the pieces of the Gordon story that had been scattered through the pages of the *Pall Mall Gazette* over the proceeding months and reformed them into a concise narrative. The article, which is entitled simply "Chinese Gordon," bears equal resemblance to Stead's later monthly character sketches in the *Review of Reviews* and the adventure stories of the boys' magazines. In it, Stead made his opinions abundantly clear while taking cheerful artistic licence as he described the character and history of General Gordon, the history of the Soudanese uprising, the events that led to Gordon's appointment, and everything that had occurred since Gordon's arrival at Khartoum almost seven months earlier.

The underlying message of the article is unmistakable: even faced with the overwhelming odds presented by the morally and politically complex situation in the Soudan, Gordon would doubtlessly have triumphed had it not been for the constant and destructive interference of the British government. As matters stood in August of 1884, however, that doubtless victory was very much in peril. The same government that in January had ordered the impossible withdrawal from the Soudan had, by August, "vetoed every plan by which [Gordon's] pacific mission might have been successful."⁵⁴ As Stead described the situation, in the months that Gordon had been at Khartoum, he had come up with several schemes by which to accomplish the impossible and withdraw the British and Egyptian troops from the region. Gordon was even quite confident that he would be able to bring the non-military European population of Khartoum out with them, as such people would certainly be in danger once the Mahdi took control of the city. Yet, in each instance, the British government refused, by telegram from the safe distance of London,

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 560.

to give Gordon permission to carry out his plans. If Gordon was offered any explanation for the refusals, Stead did not mention it. Instead, the reasoning behind each of Gordon's plans was discussed at length, while the government's refusal presented as irrational. As each refusal was received and more time passed, the situation in Khartoum grew ever more dangerous. After months of not only offering no support, but even going so far as to prevent Gordon from doing all that he might to resolve the situation, the government, as Stead writes, "telegraphed to [Gordon] to desert his garrison and come home.

Gordon's reply was a flat refusal. His soldiers had followed him to danger and death. 'I cannot desert my garrison.' So he remained at his post, and will remain. Behind the ramparts of the beleaguered city he will stand or fall with those whom he was sent to save. If he cannot take them with him, he will die at his post."⁵⁵

The differences between the villains and the hero of Stead's story were clear and absolute. Where the British government was ever willing to abandon their responsibilities at the first sight of opposition, Gordon would fulfil his duty even unto certain death. When the government thought nothing of leaving its loyal soldiers and citizens to be massacred at the hands of the Mahdi, Gordon's first thought was ever for the people under his protection. That was clear even in Stead's initial interview with Gordon, wherein the General raged against the injustice of repaying the fidelity of the British and Egyptian soldiers with death and bemoaned the inevitable consequences of a withdrawal for the Soudanese, who were "a very nice people" and deserved "the sincere compassion and sympathy of all men."⁵⁶ Finally, and most damagingly, where the government was deaf to common sense and good advice, preferring instead to issue

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ "Chinese Gordon on the Soudan," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 12.

ignorant orders that only served to worsen the situation, Gordon conceived scheme after scheme that might have accomplished the impossible, if only he had been given the opportunity to try.

The comparison between the government and Gordon, who was ever Stead's symbol of the ideal of individual agency over bureaucratic authority, was most forcefully made in Stead's description of the conversation in which Gordon was offered the post at Khartoum. The passage is a judicious mix of fact and fiction in which Stead describes in detail an occasion for which he was not present. In doing so, he freely inserted excerpts from "Chinese Gordon on the Soudan" as if Gordon had in fact been speaking to a group of Ministers and not to Stead when he said them. The government does not appear to its best advantage in Stead's semi-fictional scene, seeming to blindly insist, against Gordon's reasoned advice, that the impossible evacuation of the Soudan be carried out at once. Following the public outcry against "evacuation by massacre,"⁵⁷ the government finally relents long enough to ask that Gordon:

undertake the evacuation of the country with the least possible risk to life and property, and to arrange for the safe removal of the Egyptian employees and troops. [Gordon's] own opinion was distinctly adverse to the abandonment of Khartoum. 'Defend Khartoum at all hazards,' was the watchword of his policy. 'Whatever you may decide about evacuation, you cannot evacuate, because your army cannot be moved.'⁵⁸

The government refused to listen, however, and informed Gordon that their decision has been made, thereby setting the stage for the tragedy to come. Gordon, despairing for the fate of the Soudanese people, agrees to accept the mission anyway, in the hopes that he may be able to salvage something of the situation.

⁵⁷ Stead, "Chinese Gordon," *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, 558.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 558-559; The two lines of Gordon's dialogue are both quotations from the earlier *Pall Mall Gazette* interview, "Chinese Gordon on the Soudan."

Although Stead, by the end of his "Chinese Gordon" article, seemed to foresee Gordon's fall at Khartoum, his statements to that effect were more a dramatic warning to the government than a true prediction of Gordon's death. The reports on Gordon's situation that continued to appear daily in the *Pall Mall Gazette* remained cautiously optimistic that Gordon, a truly heroic individual with a history of accomplishing the militarily impossible,⁵⁹ would eventually triumph over the evils and incompetencies of the British government. When the news of Gordon's death was confirmed in February of 1885, Stead was shocked to learn that his infallible hero had fallen. He had fully expected Gordon to triumph in the end and so Stead immediately turned his attentions to determining why he had not.

d. In Memoriam

"Cruel suspense has given place to sad certainty. All conjectures as to the survival of General GORDON must now be put on one side. The news published this morning appears to place beyond a doubt the fact that he fell stabbed by traitors in the midst of his faithful troops when Khartoum was betrayed. The end came as he expected it. [...] Khartoum has been evacuated by massacre, and with Khartoum General GORDON has perished."

- "In Memoriam," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 11 February 1885, 1.

The fall of Khartoum on January 26th, 1885 may have meant the end of Gordon's life, but it had little effect on the survival of the character that had been created in the public consciousness. If anything, Gordon's death increased the power of his image, elevating him from mere hero to something significantly more. In the memorial published in the *Pall Mall Gazette* the day the rumours of his death were confirmed, Gordon was described as having been the sum of all of England's greatest heroes

⁵⁹ Stead often referred to Gordon's suppression of the Taiping Rebellion as a bolster to flagging spirits among his readership.

reincarnated in a single being. He, the article stated, had "the chivalry of ARTHUR, valour and saintly life of the Great ALFRED, and the religious convictions of OLIVER the Protector – all were united in that slight form, now alas! laid low in death."⁶⁰ His death was declared a loss to all members of the British race, as those who had known him and so felt that loss most keenly could attest. Yet, by February of 1885, all of England, or at least the part of it that comprised the readership of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, felt that they had known Gordon and could count themselves among those most bereaved. "There was no one who knew him but that loved him," claimed the author of the memorial article, and due to Stead's efforts, the entire *Pall Mall* readership believed they knew Gordon. Stead had, in his reporting on Gordon and the Soudan crisis, demonstrated the effectiveness of human interest reporting. He had followed his own advice, as given in the articles "The Ideal Local Editor" and "The Future of Journalism," to first and always locate the human element within the greater story and had been met with incredibly effective results. The response of Stead's readership to the story of Gordon at Khartoum gave Stead a kind of indirect, yet indisputable power. He had but to mention Gordon's name in connection with a certain plan to gain his audience's attention and once he had that, he could rely on his own persuasive powers to convince them of the virtues of his way of thinking.

The means of the Mahdi's victory at Khartoum had tarnished his image as the worthy foe of the ever honourable Gordon. Khartoum had not been attacked openly, but, rather, betrayed from within. One of the city administrators had proven to be a follower of the Mahdi's and had opened the gates to the Soudanese rebels. At the first hint of the treachery, long before the details of Gordon's defeat were confirmed, an article in *Pall*

⁶⁰ "In Memoriam," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 1.

Mall suggested that the Mahdi was in grave danger of slipping in the nation's estimation. If Khartoum had been taken honourably, "by sheer hard fighting,"⁶¹ that was one thing. Even if Gordon had perished in the defence of the city from an open attack, it could be forgiven, for such a worthy death would have only "crowned a career glorious beyond compare."⁶² The possibility that Khartoum had fallen to "long premeditated treachery,"⁶³ however, was discussed in far less charitable terms. The former was to be expected from war; the latter was an affront. After the rumour of the betrayal was confirmed, the image of the Mahdi was blackened beyond redemption. No longer playing the part of a worthy and noble opponent, he was pictured instead as an ominous figure crouching at Khartoum, threatening the integrity of the whole of the British Empire from his desert fortress.

"What is to be done?" the lead article of the February 5th edition of the *Pall Mall* asked. The expedition sent out to relieve the besieged but friendly Khartoum was not equipped to face that same city held by unfriendly forces. Yet a retreat would be disastrous, as it would be a "confession to the Eastern world that we were beaten, and it would mean war and mutiny from one end of Asia to the other."⁶⁴ Then there was the question that had brought about Gordon's involvement to begin with: whether a withdrawal was even possible. The expedition had gone out to rescue Gordon, only to find themselves stranded and imperilled. At the centre of the debate was the Mahdi, who

⁶¹ "What Is To Be Done?," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 5 February 1885, 1.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

had, however unfairly, beaten Britain's champion and seized control of the situation in the Soudan. He and not the British was now the "master of the Soudan."⁶⁵

Despite that, however, the Mahdi was still not the villain of Stead's story. He had become a significantly less sympathetic figure in it, to be sure, but the real menace continued to be the British government. "What is to be done?", the *Pall Mall* asked on February 5th, and the next day provided the answer. "Ministers meet today under pressure of great crisis," the leader on February 6th began, "What have they to do? The question is easily answered. They must do exactly the reverse of that which they have always done ever since this sad business began. They must assume responsibility, decide definitely upon their policy, and then leave the ablest man available on the spot a free hand to carry it out."⁶⁶ In Stead's opinion, all of the most prominent individuals involved in the business of the Soudan were beyond reproach. General Gordon had given his life for the cause of peace in the Soudan. Lord Wolseley, the head of the relief expedition that had arrived three days too late to save Gordon, had wasted not a single moment in his rush to Khartoum. Stead himself had clearly done all that was within his power, having found Gordon and given him all the support the *Pall Mall Gazette* was able to muster. The failure, it was clear to Stead, had been on the part of the government, which had through arrogance, ignorance, and meaningless factionalism cost Britain its hero and potentially its empire. In that, at least, Stead's villain was exactly like that of an adventure story; it was simply unexpected that the greatest enemy of the British Empire should prove to be the British government itself.

⁶⁵ "The Mahdi's First Move," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 19 February 1885, 1.

⁶⁶ "Considerations for the Cabinet," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 6 February 1885, 1.

Khartoum was lost, according to Stead and the *Pall Mall Gazette*, because the British government shirked the responsibilities that it should have assumed and assumed the responsibilities that rightfully belonged to someone else. The role of the government was, rightfully, to decide upon a general policy. The means by which that policy was to be carried out should have been left in the hands of the "ablest man available on the spot."⁶⁷ In the matter of the Soudan, Stead criticised in the early months of 1885, the government had done the exact opposite. Where they should have made a decision and stood firm behind it, the government had vacillated, losing time to the "promptings of personal prejudice or preconceived predilections for this, that, or the other course."⁶⁸ There had never been a clear Soudan policy; rather Gordon's mission seemed to change monthly. As Harrison explained it, "two contradictory levels of [Gladstone's] liberal thought and idealized political morality collided, causing confusion and frustration."⁶⁹ Where Gladstone's government should have stood back and trusted in General Gordon, the definition of the ablest man on the spot, the government had instead waded in. They had vetoed Gordon's every plan, Stead argued, rendering him utterly impotent in the Soudan.

"It is not," the *Pall Mall* admonished, "for a committee of elderly gentlemen sitting around a table at Downing street to dictate plans of campaign to their commander in the Bayuda desert."⁷⁰ Yet Stead had felt comfortable doing the same from his desk at the *Pall Mall Gazette* offices on Northumberland Street. For all of Stead's criticisms of the government's actions, he had, in many ways, behaved in a similar manner. He, too,

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Harrison, *Gladstone's Imperialism in Egypt*, 160.

⁷⁰ "Considerations for the Cabinet," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 1.

sat comfortably in London and dictated strategy for the African desert. His own actions escaped criticism simply because his dictates did not have the power of those made by the government. Because the government's decisions had been carried through to action, while Stead's had often come to nothing, Stead was left free to point to an ideal alternate reality in which his advice had been followed and disaster averted. In the months following Gordon's death, the image of a future lost was constructed in the pages of the *Pall Mall Gazette*. If only Gordon had been listened to, the *Pall Mall* bemoaned, Khartoum would not have been lost, the Mahdi would not have won, and the British Empire would not now be facing an even greater threat. Because the path taken had proven disastrous, the path not taken, that advised by Stead, could be assumed to have succeeded. The advantage of government by journalism, that indirect, organic sort of leadership the merits of which Stead was so convinced, may have lain in its lack of bureaucracy. Equally, however, the advantage may have lain in its lack of absolute effect. Government by journalism was superior to government by government only in so far as it did not exist.

The story of Gordon's mission at Khartoum, in so far as Stead presented it, was equally a victory of government by journalism and a failure of government by more conventional means. Gordon's appointment to Khartoum was in no small part due to Stead and his careful fanning of public sentiment. The government, giving in to the swell of popular support for "Chinese" Gordon, sent the General to the Soudan when they had previously intended to do no such thing. Therein lay the demonstration of the political power of the press. The events that followed, as far as Stead was concerned, was a vivid illustration of the failings of government. A camel, as the adage goes, is a horse built by

a committee. The Soudan, in Stead's eyes, was without a doubt the British government's camel. Beyond the sending of Gordon, the government ignored the demands of their electorate. Whenever a firm and timely decision was called for, the government could be trusted to offer only endless debate. An article in the February 25th issue of the *Pall Mall* asked:

can anything be imagined more degrading for a nation that professes to be self-governed than that it should be utterly unable to extract from its rulers any precise declaration as to whether the war upon which they are entering is to be one of pure devastation, or whether, after all, Ministers are going to try to chain the sands over which 'howls the tempest' of the desert, by the establishment of a good and stable Government on the ruins of the Mahdi's power? [...] If Parliament can get no more out of Ministers than this, Parliament, so far as matters of peace or war are concerned, is a mere nullity, and henceforth deserves to be relegated to the limbo in which dwells the phantasm of representative government now enjoyed by Egypt.⁷¹

Yet, as ever, the situation was infinitely more complex than Stead would make it out to be. The British government could no more be considered entirely to be blamed than Stead himself could be considered blameless. Where Stead could see only one alternative course, the one in which the government had put its faith in Gordon and Khartoum was saved, there were in fact many. Perhaps, had Stead not interfered, the government would not have found themselves pressured into sending a man they doubted into Khartoum. They might instead have sent a man in whom they had faith, one they would have had no qualms about supporting to the fullest extent. In subsequent years, as the matter of the fall of Khartoum moved out of the pages of newspapers and into the hands of historians, the question of the degree to which the disaster at Khartoum might be considered Stead's fault came to figure prominently.⁷² Many historians considered him

⁷¹ "A Worse Fog Than Ever," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 25 February 1885, 1.

⁷² Whyte, *The Life of W.T. Stead*, vol. I, 117.

far more to blame than the government, for it was Stead who had orchestrated Gordon's appointment to the Soudan and, when all was said and done, it had been under Gordon that Khartoum fell.

4. The Devil's Shilling: Celebrity Journalism and the Hero's Perspective in "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon"

"That large numbers of our young children join the army of the fallen every year is not disputed by anybody; the only question is, how are they recruited? The 'Lily story' went to show that in some cases mothers will as good as sell their children for 'the devil's shilling.'"

-"A Short Breathing Space," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 15 September 1885.

On November 7th, 1885, Stead was found guilty of kidnapping a thirteen year old girl by the name of Eliza Armstrong. He was sentenced to three months imprisonment for the crime, to be served at Coldbath-in-the-Fields Prison. After only three days in residence at Coldbath, the Home Secretary, in response to public agitation, converted Stead's status to that of a first class misdemeanant and had him transferred to the much nicer surroundings of Holloway Gaol, where he spent the next two months and four days. The time he had spent incarcerated during his trial was counted against the three month sentence and he was released in early January of 1886.

After his release, Stead always referred to his short tenure in prison as one of the happiest times of his life. In an article written for the *Penny Illustrated News* in 1910, to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of his conviction and subsequent imprisonment, Stead wrote:

to be a first-class misdemeanant is to have all the luxury of a cloistered retreat far from the maddening crowd provided for you at the cost of the State. There you can read and write and do your work undisturbed by callers, and far from the jangle of the telephone. You see no one whom you don't wish to see; you receive no letters excepting those you wish to receive, and the Governor of the prison stands between you and all unpleasant intrusions from the outside as a beneficent providence.¹

Despite the unlikelihood that Stead had actually been plagued by the "jangle of the telephone" in 1885, after the gruelling schedule to which he had subjected himself for the

¹ W.T. Stead, "Why I Went to Prison," *The Penny Illustrated News*, 19 November 1910, 9.

six months proceeding his conviction, he was certainly due his retreat. In May of 1885, Stead had set himself the monumental task of seeing British law changed and child prostitution in the city of London exposed and eliminated. His "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon," the four-part series intended to achieve that goal, was published in the *Pall Mall Gazette* only a month and a half later, between July 6th to July 10th. For the rest of the summer, Stead was occupied touring the country and speaking about his scandalous series and the situation it described. On August 14th, the Criminal Law Amendment Act, a bill that addressed the very concerns that so occupied Stead, received Royal Assent and was passed into law. By September 7th, Stead found himself attending proceedings at the Old Bailey, in which he stood charged of kidnapping and indecent assault as a result of his investigations prior to the writing of the "Maiden Tribute." As Stead himself put it in an article written and published upon his release from Holloway in January of 1886, "At last, after years of incessant stress and strain, and after six months in which every hour had to get through the work of two, I had come to a place where time was a drug in the market – where time was to hang heavy on my hands, where, after being long bankrupt in minutes, I was to be a millionaire of hours."²

The time was not an entirely pleasant one; among other things, the period witnessed the death of Stead's mother-in-law, with whom he had been very close, and his wife was left to travel alone to Newcastle to attend to her mother's funeral.³ By and large, however, Stead enjoyed the opportunity to reflect in peace on the chaos he had

² W.T. Stead, "My First Imprisonment I: Coldbath-in-the-Fields," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 18 January 1886, 2.

³ Letter from W.T. Stead to Millicent J. Fawcett, 5 January 1886, Autograph Letter Collection Vol.XI: W.T. Stead's Letters from Prison &c., 1885-1924, Women's Library, University of Metropolitan London; Stead wrote to Mrs. Fawcett, with whom he had been corresponding regularly for the duration of his imprisonment, that his mother-in-law's death "has made me feel for the first time some of the bitterness of a captive's lot."

blithely wrought with his campaign in the *Pall Mall Gazette* and what promised to be the beginning of a new chapter in his editorial career. The series had marked the end of the power of the anonymous editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* and the beginning of the power of Stead as an individual, which was an altogether different and more direct kind of influence. The "Maiden Tribute" served to recreate Stead as one of the early representatives of what Le Mahieu, in his *A Culture for Democracy*, identifies as a new breed of journalist: the public personality.⁴

a. A Man, Not a Mock-Uttering Oracle

"Impersonal journalism is effete. To influence men you must be a man, not a mock-uttering oracle. The democracy is under no awe of the mystic 'We.' Who is 'We'? they ask; and they are right."

- W.T. Stead, "The Future of Journalism," *Contemporary Review*, 663.

In her book *Prostitution: Prevention and Reform in England, 1860-1914*, historian Paula Bartley writes that the "Maiden Tribute" articles "invented a new genre of newspaper reporting."⁵ Similarly, Ann Robson states in her article "The Significance of 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon'" that the series represented not only an innovation of journalism, but also marked the beginning of a new type of social reform. The strength of the public's reaction to the series was, Robson argues, as much due to the involvement of the press as it was to the content of the articles. As she puts it, that Stead "should take up the attack on [...] the behalf of women was as revolutionary as the cause itself."⁶

⁴ Le Mahieu, *A Culture for Democracy*, 44.

⁵ Paula Bartley, *Prostitution: Prevention and Reform in England, 1860-1914* (London: Routledge, 2000), 88.

⁶ Ann Robson, "The Significance of 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon,'" *Victorian Periodicals Newsletter*, XI:2 (June 1978), 57.

That both Bartley and Robson should come to such a conclusion is unsurprising, given that both are considering the "Maiden Tribute" from the perspective of sexuality and gender history. Despite their claims, however, the "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" represented neither a revolution of journalism nor one of reform methodology, but was, rather, a continuation and expansion of Stead's usual journalistic efforts. While the success of the "Maiden Tribute" far surpassed that of Stead's previous campaigns and the articles have since come to represent Stead's most notable mark on the historic record, the series was not the aberrant event that historians such as Bartley and Robson present it to be. The "Maiden Tribute" crusade, like the Gordon campaign of the previous year, was an expression of what Stead believed to be the role and the responsibility of the press in society. As he had in the case of the Soudan Crisis, Stead sought to inspire and then manipulate public sentiment as a means of affecting change, this time in regards to the issue of child prostitution. In both instances, Stead did so by focusing on the individual within the greater movement, thereby providing a point of connection for the newspaper's readership. In January of 1884, Stead consciously created General Charles Gordon as a celebrity-hero in the public eye. Gordon provided an anchor for public sentiment regarding the rather intellectual issue of British foreign policy and affairs in the Soudan. In July of 1885, Stead once again sought to manipulate public sentiment by providing them with another admirable figure to champion, but this time he cast *himself*, rather than a third party, as the hero of the piece. The "Maiden Tribute," in a marked deviation from journalistic convention of the time, was written in the first person, not with the more impersonal and resolutely anonymous editorial 'we.' The articles were even, to a certain extent, signed, as each carried a by-line attributing the piece to the "Chief Director of the

Secret Commission." By the fall of 1885, even that meagre gesture to anonymity was abandoned when the "Chief Director" was openly acknowledged to be Stead himself.

The overall effect of these changes was to bring the readers one step closer to the content of the articles. More aggressively than ever before, Stead was demanding his readership abandon their traditional passive role and act. On July 4th, 1885, Stead warned "all those who are squeamish, and all those who are prudish, and all those who prefer to live in a fool's paradise of imaginary innocence and purity, selfishly oblivious to the horrible realities which torment those whose lives are passed in the London Inferno"⁷ to avoid the *Pall Mall Gazette* for the next four days. In the first chapter of the "Maiden Tribute," he addressed the readers who had chosen to abandon their "fool's paradise," writing "who is there among us bearing the name of man who will dare to sit down any longer with folded hands in the presence of so great a wrong?"⁸ With the "Maiden Tribute," Stead sought to bring the *Pall Mall Gazette* closer to his ideal newspaper, which, as he described it in his article "The Future of Journalism," would serve equally "as an engine of social reform and as a means of government."⁹ He went on to write in that same article, published the year after the "Maiden Tribute" series, that "the editor is the Sandalphon of humanity. Into his ear are poured the cries, the protests, the complaints of men who suffer wrong, and it is his mission to present them daily before the conscience of mankind."¹⁰ After that, it was up to honourable readers to heed their consciences and take action.

⁷ W.T. Stead, "Notice to Our Readers: A Frank Warning," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 4 July 1885, 1.

⁸ W.T. Stead, "We Bid You Be of Hope," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 6 July 1885, 1.

⁹ Stead, "The Future of Journalism," *Contemporary Review*, 671.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 670.

The "Maiden Tribute" was a personal, informal, and scandalous description of an evil that lived alongside the *Pall Mall's* audience in the streets of London. The emotional response of that audience was, consequently, exponentially greater than it had been regarding Gordon's Egyptian adventures. For all that Stead sought to bring his audience into intimate contact with Gordon's exploits, he could not offer them more than an observer's role, as Stead himself was restricted to that same position. In the case of the "Maiden Tribute" crusade, Stead's role was that of the hero, striding forth to right the wrongs of society. The perspective he offered his audience had changed equally. His readers, living vicariously through Stead, could also be heroes. Stead, like Theseus, descended into the Daedalean maze of London in search of the Minotaur. The thread Stead trailed was not intended, however, to help him find his way back out, but rather to lead others *in* to follow in his path.

Thomas Carlyle, forty-five years earlier, gave a lecture on what he called the Hero as a Man of Letters. "Hero-Gods, Prophets, Poets, Priests," Carlyle stated, "are forms of heroism that belong to the old ages, make their appearances in the remotest times; some of them have ceased to be possible long since, and cannot anymore shew themselves in this world. The Hero as *Man of Letters* [...] is altogether a product of these new ages; and so long as the wondrous art of *Writing*, or of Ready-writing which we call *Printing* subsists, he may be expected to continue, as one of the main forms of Heroism for all future ages."¹¹ Although the "Maiden Tribute" was not the birth of a new journalism or of a new spirit of reform, it did mark the beginning of a new kind of celebrity, one that bore a great resemblance to Carlyle's heroic Man of Letters. The "Maiden Tribute"

¹¹ Thomas Carlyle, "Lecture V: The Hero as a Man of Letters; Johnson, Rousseau, Burns," *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 133; emphasis original.

served to re-create Stead as a character in the public eye and marked the first episode in his new career as a celebrity journalist. Where Stead's previous journalistic campaigns had simultaneously demonstrated and increased the power of the press, the "Maiden Tribute" and all his subsequent efforts were tributes to the power of W.T. Stead, journalist, editor, preacher hailing his congregation of thousands from the pulpit of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and "uncrowned king of an educated democracy."¹² His celebrity and, therefore, his influence no longer relied on the position he held, as the editor of a popular daily newspaper, but was instead based on his personality. The public recognition of the authority of Stead as an individual rather than as the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* meant that, when he left the paper in 1889, he maintained his position in the public eye.

The convention of an anonymous press, which had held unquestioned sway in Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century, had by the era of the "Maiden Tribute" become a point of controversy. In the 1850s, anonymous journalism was considered to be the key to the respectable reporting of news. It was also considered the distinguishing feature that set the British press apart from its European counterparts, which tended to take a far more indulgent view of the "authorial vanity"¹³ of signed articles. Anonymity, mid-century press critics agreed, ensured that each individual article was judged by its own merits rather than by the history of its author, that an author's ego did not supersede his impersonal reporting of fact, and that the collaborative effort of producing newspapers was safely hidden away behind a uniform wall of text. The newspaper was to be viewed as a single text, not as a collection of components, and therefore must seem

¹² Stead, "Government by Journalism," *Contemporary Review*, 664.

¹³ Jones, *Powers of the Press*, 119.

to be the product of a single, albeit anonymous, authorial voice.¹⁴ As Aled Jones writes in his *Powers of the Press*, this reaction against signature journalism "arose out of the deep assumptions of a dominant tradition of journalism which, up until the 1860s, was essentially impersonal and pervaded by the collective presence of the editorial 'we.' Anonymity had provided that tradition with its code of honour."¹⁵

This tradition of unsigned authorship began to come into question, Jones goes on to say, in the 1860s, largely as a result of the increasing professionalisation of press production and a related surge of public interest in journalism as an occupation. As well, there was the European press tradition to contend with, which dismissed the dangers of authorial egotism as negligible compared to the advantages of the by-line.¹⁶ Open authorship was seen on the continent as the keystone of a credible press. Personal accountability ensured that a journalist was likely to be far more conscientious in his fact gathering and far more circumspect in his writing than he might otherwise have been. The debate between proponents of the British tradition of anonymity and the increasing numbers of those who favoured the European ethos of authorial accountability took up many column inches of space in British periodicals between the 1860s and 1880s. Ironically, that same period witnessed what Jones calls the "partial decline of anonymity,"¹⁷ wherein those same periodicals that served as the battleground for the debate over anonymity by the 1880s had themselves abandoned the tradition in favour of signed journalism. Among the newspaper press, however, anonymity still held sway, particularly for the all-important lead article. Even the *Pall Mall Gazette*, which, under

¹⁴ Laurel Brake, *Print in Transition, 1850-1910: Studies in Media and Book History* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 4.

¹⁵ Jones, *Powers of the Press*, 120.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 122.

Stead's editorship, had adopted a far more personal style of journalism, did not break with convention and publish signed lead articles until the era of "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon."

Yet, for all that the subject was debated, the effect of personal journalism was rarely discussed. The dispute over anonymous journalism revolved around issues of professionalism, credibility, and authorship, rather than of audience reception. Of the latter, editor George Lewis wrote in 1866 that, "Whenever people's minds are roused to admiration or stung to indignation, they are impatient of doubt as to the individuality of the writer. The pale abstraction 'we' passes unchallenged before their minds so long as the article does not move them; but 'we' becomes intolerable directly they are moved. They must have an idol or a victim."¹⁸ An anonymously authored work, to return to Lanham's theories about texts and audience reception, is opaque. The absence of an identifiable author serves to block the reader's immediate emotional reaction to the content and encourages, instead, a distanced, intellectual response to the text. Stead, to whom an unmoved, intellectual readership was anathema, removed that block by breaking convention and signing the "Maiden Tribute" series.

Hirst, in his biography of Stead's predecessor, John Morley, wrote that, "as understudy [to Morley] at the office of the *Pall Mall Gazette* in Northumberland Street, Stead's wayward emotions were under restraint."¹⁹ Once Stead was freed from the stabilising effect of Morley's presence and given sole responsibility for the *Pall Mall*, however, his "colossal egoism and an unwholesome greed for notoriety drove [him] from excess to excess, until at last he fancied himself to be possessed of supernatural

¹⁸ George Lewis, quoted in Brake, *Print in Transition*, 19.

¹⁹ Hirst, *Early Life & Letters of John Morley*, vol. II, 93.

powers."²⁰ This same sentiment was even occasionally expressed by Stead's friends, although they of course took pains to balance the criticism with praise. In a letter to Frederick Whyte about the then unpublished manuscript of his *Life of W.T. Stead*, A.G. Gardiner wrote that his friend had been "the greatest egoist I have ever known and yet a singularly modest man."²¹ The statement was less a contradiction than it seems on the surface. Stead was possessed of a true reformer's arrogance. His conceit was not of the personal kind but, rather, derived from his firm conviction that he and he alone clearly saw the evils of the world. It was, therefore, his sole responsibility to see them put to right. As he said in the interview published in *The Christian Realm*, "There are some things that ought to be stopped; others that ought to be striven for; and when I see clearly what I'm convinced is the right course I at once begin to preach, and go on preaching, 'This is the way; walk ye in it.'"²² At heart, Stead was of a kind with Don Quixote; P.T. Barnum was but his means of making his message heard.

b. The Tribune of the People

"Newspapers will never really justify their claims to be the tribunes of the people until every victim of injustice – whether it be a harlot run in by a policeman greedy for blackmail, or a ticket-of-leave man hunted down by shadowy detectives or paupers baulked of their legal allowance of skilly – sends in to the editorial sanctum their complaint of the injustice which they suffer."

- W.T. Stead, "The Future of Journalism," *Contemporary Review*, 669.

On July 6th, 1885, Stead sent the Earl of Carnarvon a copy of the first instalment of "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon." Accompanying the draft was a brief note

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Letter from Gardiner to Whyte, FW77.1: Misc Letters to Frederick Whyte, University of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne.

²² Chisholm, "W.T. Stead, Journalist and Revivalist Preacher," *The Christian Realm*, FW78: Cuttings Regarding the *Life of W.T. Stead*, University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

that read, simply, "Here is the first blast. There will be four in all. Thank God it is over at last. It has almost killed me, but it was worth while."²³ 'Blast,' as it happened, was the appropriate word to describe the series. The public reaction to the "Maiden Tribute" was overwhelming. The *Pall Mall* offices were besieged with protestors gathering to decry the luridness of the articles. Countless numbers of *Pall Mall Gazette* readers from across England sent notes cancelling their subscriptions to the paper, citing their disgust at the explicit discussion of so sexual a topic. Worse, many of the *Pall Mall's* regular advertisers withdrew their custom, offended at one passage or another in the series. As Stead wrote in an article published twenty-five years later in the *Penny Illustrated News*, "Because of one paragraph, which was held to have reflected upon the morals of the theatrical profession, a boycott was organised against the 'Pall Mall,' which deprived us of our theatrical advertisements."²⁴ Soon, Stead went on to recount, many of the paper's other advertisers joined the boycott, depriving the *Pall Mall* of a good portion of its daily revenue.

As the *Pall Mall Gazette's* advertisers were shunning the paper, however, each day's issue sold out. The demand for new instalments of the "Maiden Tribute" was far exceeding expectations and outstripping supply. The *Pall Mall's* circulation reached unprecedented heights during the publication of the "Maiden Tribute," jumping from just over 8,000 copies per issue to an average of 13,000.²⁵ For each person that protested that the "Maiden Tribute" was a sordid and sensationalist exaggeration without real basis in fact, there was another who considered it a necessarily shocking description of an

²³ Letter from W.T. Stead to the Earl of Carnarvon, 6 July 1885, Carnarvon Papers, AD 60777 F.79, British Library.

²⁴ W.T. Stead, "The Press and the Public Morals," *Penny Illustrated News*, 10 December 1910, 9.

²⁵ "The Pall Mall Gazette," *Waterloo Directory of English Newspapers and Periodicals, 1800-1900*, 13.

appalling reality that had too long been ignored. Irrespective of their opinions, everyone was buying the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Despite the decidedly mixed reaction, there *was* a response, an undeniably explosive one, which was in and of itself enough to serve Stead's purpose. The "Maiden Tribute" was meant, first and foremost, to call attention to the clandestine London trade in young girls and, by exposing its existence, take the first step towards its elimination.

Stead had intended the "Maiden Tribute" to force Parliament to pass the Criminal Law Amendment Act, a piece of legislation that would raise the age of consent in England from thirteen to sixteen. The act, which had been drafted at the recommendation of a governmental committee on child prostitution in England and abroad, had been languishing in bureaucratic limbo for several years. Time and again it had been brought before Parliament, only to be cast down, not due to any specific objections to the bill itself, but as a peripheral casualty of party politics. The "Maiden Tribute," Stead hoped, would bring to an end not merely the repugnant sexual trade in young girls that existed in 'darkest London,' but also the secret political manipulations that took place in Britain's highest chambers of power. Neither could possibly continue, Stead believed, under the harsh light of public attention.

In working towards this undeniably political end, however, Stead relied little on the language of government by journalism. The political vocabulary of his earlier Gordon campaign was all but replaced by a new language, that of evangelism. Although Stead once again sought to criticise the actions of, among others, the British government with the series, he did so on moral, not political, grounds. Political failings, in Stead's view, were limited in scope. They were the sole responsibility of the politicians who

made them. Moral failings, on the other hand, were more encompassing and could be rightfully laid on the doorstep of all members of a society. The "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" was not the impassioned speech by a Minister of a public Parliament, but a haranguing sermon by a preacher in a public pulpit. The series was a condemnation of sin and sinners, of lust, and of Christians, not politicians, who had failed to meet their moral responsibilities. "Prostitution in England," Stead wrote in the last chapter of the series, "is Purgatory; under the state regulated system which prevails abroad it is Hell. The foreign traffic is the indefinite prolongation of the labyrinth of 'Modern Babylon,' with absolute and utter hopelessness of any redemption."²⁶ The language of moral journalism, unlike that of political journalism, left little room for negotiation. There could be no discussion of which was the right path when one route led towards hell and the other away.

From the very beginning, Stead claimed that his goal was not to condemn vice, but to expose crime. In the first instalment of the series, he wrote, "I wish to say emphatically at the outset that, however strongly I may feel as to the imperative importance of morality and chastity, I do not ask for any police interference with the liberty of vice. I ask only for the repression of crime."²⁷ Yet, as the remainder of the series proved, the line between vice and crime was not well defined and the letter of the law could not accommodate the infinite variables of social life. The line between vice and crime was particularly ill defined in the context of the "Maiden Tribute," wherein Stead was, in no small part, attempting to prove the inadequacy of the law in order to promote the passing of the Criminal Law Amendment Act. Instead of addressing issues

²⁶ W.T. Stead, "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon IV," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 10 July 1885, 5.

²⁷ W.T. Stead, "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon I," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 6 July 1885, 2.

of illegality, as he had promised to do, Stead instead wrote about good and evil, heaven and hell, the failure of Godly Christians and the success of those serving an altogether different master.

Although the line drawn in the "Maiden Tribute" between crime and vice was indistinct at best, the boundary between good and evil was absolute, if somewhat arbitrarily determined. Interestingly, as Robson discusses in her "The Significance of 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon,'" Stead's idea of where that boundary lay was unconventional, to say the least.²⁸ Stead, in a private letter sent in the wake of the series' publication, wrote, "In the 'Maiden Tribute,' I do not say one hard word about any women, except those who made themselves agents for the ruin of women. I do not believe that there has ever been a popular movement in favour of purity before, in which fallen women were uniformly spoken of with real respect and admiration. [...] It is a change for once to strike at the strong instead of assailing the weak."²⁹ Unlike many members of late Victorian society, even those actively involved in organisations such as the Society for the Protection of Women, Stead did not condemn the prostitutes with whom he'd had contact as evil women of weak morals. Rather, he laid the blame at the door of the network of agents – the brothel owners, procurers, and even the family members of the girls in question – that had, in Stead's opinion, forced such women into an untenable position. As he put it in one of the later instalments of the series itself, "On the whole I have brought back from the infernal labyrinth a very deep conviction that if

²⁸ Ann Robson, "The Significance of 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon,'" 57.

²⁹ Letter from W.T. Stead to Mrs. Cobb, 5 August 1885, Autograph Letter Collection Vol.XI: W.T. Stead's Letters from Prison &c., 1885-1924, Women's Library, London Metropolitan University; For all that Stead drew an unconventionally placed line between good and evil, however, that line was absolute. A woman who once 'made her self an agent for the ruin of women' was, in Stead's view, forever exempt from the courtesy and indulgence with which he treated all other women, even prostitutes. He treated Rebecca Jarrett, for example, to more than a few "hard words" and even harder actions.

there is one truth in the Bible that is truer than another, it is this, that the publicans and harlots are nearer to the kingdom of heaven than the scribes and pharisees who are always trying to qualify for a passport to bliss hereafter by driving their unfortunate sisters here to the very real hell of a police despotism."³⁰

The "Maiden Tribute," even more than Stead's previous campaign on behalf of General Gordon, required his readers to abandon their passive role in order to bring about change. In the tone of a preacher addressing his congregation, Stead concludes his introduction to the series by writing:

For let us remember that – "Every hope which rises and grows broad / in the world's heart, by ordered impulse streams / From the Great heart of God." And if that ideal seems too blinding bright from human eyes, we can at least do much to save the innocent victims who unwillingly are swept into the maelstrom of vice. And who is there among us bearing the name of man who will dare to sit down any longer with folded hands in the presence of so great a wrong?³¹

The passive acceptance of social wrongs, in the moral language of the series, was as great an evil as the active committing of the same. Where in the case of the Soudan Crisis, Stead attempted to entice his audience to act, in the "Maiden Tribute" he openly demanded that they do so.

³⁰ Stead, "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon IV" *Pall Mall Gazette*, 3.

³¹ Stead, "We Bid You Be of Hope," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 1; The passage Stead quotes is from the poem "An Incident in a Railway Car," by James Russell Lowell.

c. A Desperate Venture³²

"For a month I have oscillated between the noblest and the meanest of mankind, the saviours and the destroyers of their race."

- W.T. Stead, "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon I," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 6 July 1885, 2.

Although Stead had long been interested in the progress of the Criminal Law Amendment Act and, generally, issues relating to the protection and advancement of women under the law, he was not actively involved in the Act's promotion until May of 1885. Until that point, Stead had restricted himself to an occasional note buried on the third or fourth page of the *Pall Mall Gazette* on the Act's advancement through Parliament. He made equally clear his support for the proposed amendment and his frustration at the continual delays in seeing the Act passed into law, but made no effort to affect the bill's progress until two factors combined to motivate him to action.

The first was the unsatisfactory end of the very well-publicised trial of Mrs. Jeffries, a Chelsea procuress and brothel-keeper. Jeffries' establishments purportedly catered to wealthy and influential individuals whose tastes ran in a distinctly sado-masochistic direction.³³ In early May of 1885, Jeffries stood accused of selling young English girls into prostitution in the "foreign market"³⁴ of Europe. The investigation into Jeffries' activities had been conducted largely by social reform organisations devoted to the prevention of child prostitution. Operating for the most part independently from any official policing organisation, volunteers had painstakingly compiled enough evidence to make a solid case against Jeffries. Those involved in the investigation hoped that a long drawn-out court case would bring wide-spread attention to their largely ignored cause and

³² W.T. Stead, "The Eliza Armstrong Case," *Pall Mall Gazette Extra*, 30 October 1885, 82.

³³ Bartley, *Prostitution*, 165.

³⁴ Stead, "The Eliza Armstrong Case," *Pall Mall Gazette Extra*, 82.

bring about a significant advancement of their programme. The trial concluded with remarkable speed, however, when Jeffries immediately pled guilty to all charges and received punishment in the form of an insignificant fine of £200 – a sum that was, according to Stead, but a fraction of her reputed annual earnings.³⁵ The mass of the sensational and damaging evidence collected by the hopeful social reformers was never introduced in court and the case was all but ignored by the British press and public alike. This relatively mild punishment for so appalling a crime was, Stead later claimed, due to Jeffries' connections to "princes and dukes, Ministers of the Crown, and Members of Parliament,"³⁶ all of whom had at one time or another availed themselves of her services. The trial, rather than serving to draw attention to the sexual trade in young girls as the social reform organisations involved had hoped, concluded prematurely and with little fanfare, the whole matter having been "hushed up"³⁷ by Jeffries' influential customers and connections.

The second blow came twelve days after the conclusion of the Jeffries trial, on May 10th, when the Criminal Law Amendment Act was cast down after its second reading in the House of Commons. The bill had first been drafted in 1883 by a parliamentary inquiry into the trade of English girls to European brothels. The act was composed of nine recommendations aimed at eliminating, as much as possible, the expanding juvenile prostitution trade in Britain. Shortly after its drafting, the Criminal Law Amendment Act was passed by the House of Lords. In July of 1883, the bill was introduced in the House of Commons and it was there that it stalled for the next two years, forgotten in favour of more pressing concerns. On May 22nd, 1885, the House of

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

Commons rejected the proposed amendment for a second time, even though it had by that point been revised and weakened considerably from the draft that had first been passed through the House of Lords the year previous. Stead biographer Raymond L. Schults describes the event in his *A Crusader in Babylon*, writing, "On May 22, as Parliament was preparing to rise for its Whitsuntide recess, Sir William Harcourt, the Home Secretary, moved the second reading of the bill in the Commons. Only about forty members were present, and in an atmosphere of apathy mixed with hostility, the measure was debated until adjournment and no vote was taken."³⁸ Although the bill had not been rejected by the Commons, the general feeling among both its supporters and opponents was that the Criminal Law Amendment Act was unofficially defunct.

While Stead had closely followed both the matter of the Jeffries case and the progress of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, commenting occasionally on each in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the idea of mounting an active campaign against child prostitution in the pages of the same did not occur to him without some encouragement from Benjamin Scott, the City Chamberlain of London and the chairman of the London Committee for the Prevention of Traffic in English Girls.³⁹ The Parliamentary inquiry of 1881 and the resulting draft of the Criminal Law Amendment Act had, in no small part, resulted from the ongoing efforts of Scott, his organisation, and others like it. The seeming defacto defeat of the bill on Friday, May 22nd convinced Scott that traditional avenues for legal reform had failed and that new measures must be considered. As such, on Saturday, May 23rd, he came to the offices of the *Pall Mall* to meet with Stead and, hopefully, to

³⁸ Schults, *A Crusader in Babylon*, 129.

³⁹ Stead, "We Bid You Be of Hope," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 1.

convince him to take up in government by journalism where government by government had faltered.

According to Stead's account of that initial meeting in an edition of the *Pall Mall Gazette Extra* published October 30th, 1885, Scott had come on behalf of his Committee to beg Stead's help with the matter. Scott described to Stead the disappointing results of his organisation's efforts over the years and recounted horrifying stories of girls who had been abducted or sold by parents and guardians into prostitution as a means of proving to Stead the dire reality of the situation. There was one story in particular, of the "horrible outrage committed on a child about thirteen by a wealthy customer of Mrs. Jeffries, in one of Mrs. Jeffries' brothels,"⁴⁰ convinced Stead of the need for action, due in part to its connection to the trial that had come to so unsatisfactory a conclusion two weeks earlier.

Despite being convinced of the apparent urgency of the situation, Stead was, as Schults writes, "uncharacteristically reluctant to get involved."⁴¹ Stead explained his reticence in that same issue of the *Pall Mall Gazette Extra*, writing that, "a newspaper editor has to think of many things, and the risk was enormous. I was naturally loath to imperil a great position and influence in what seemed a forbidding and forlorn crusade in favour of a lost cause."⁴² He goes on to write, however, that when he "reflected on the facts and saw that the bill was hopelessly lost unless someone took it in hand, I had no option but to risk all in a desperate attempt to rouse public opinion to a sense of the imperative necessity of forcing the bill through. I made that desperate attempt: I risked all: and I achieved my end."⁴³ Stead made up his mind to 'risk all' before Scott left his

⁴⁰ Stead, "The Eliza Armstrong Case," *Pall Mall Gazette Extra*, 82.

⁴¹ Schults, *A Crusader in Babylon*, 130.

⁴² Stead, "The Eliza Armstrong Case," *Pall Mall Gazette Extra*, 82.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

office that day and, within two days, by Whit Monday, or May 26th, 1885, was mounting his new campaign for the greater good.⁴⁴

In preparing himself to launch his new campaign, Stead turned to those members of London society who had regular contact with the clandestine child prostitution trade. Before proceeding with his investigations, he consulted some of the many social reform organisations involved in fighting the trade, the most notable of which was the Salvation Army. Stead had had some previous contact with the organisation and its leader, General William Booth. The Salvation Army had, since its earliest days, been actively involved in attempting to rescue prostitutes from their lives on the street. When Stead came to the Booth family with his half-formed plans, they were eager to help him navigate the twists and turns of London's darker underbelly. It was they who put Stead into contact with Rebecca Jarrett, a woman who was to become nearly as prominent a public figure as Stead himself in the aftermath of the publication of the "Maiden Tribute." Jarrett was a former prostitute and brothel-keeper who had come to the Salvation Army for help in January of 1885, at which time she was destitute, in ill-health, suffering from severe alcoholism, and, at thirty-five, well beyond a salvageable age in the opinion of most rescue organisations.⁴⁵

Stead, in the first instalment of multi-part "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon," described his meeting with Jarrett in remarkably benign terms. He claimed that the former brothel-keeper had been "brought back to a decent and moral life"⁴⁶ a year previous. In fact, Jarrett had been with the Salvation Army for less than three months.

⁴⁴ Stead, "We Bid You Be of Hope," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 1.

⁴⁵ Pamela J. Walker, "The Conversion of Rebecca Jarrett," *History Workshop Journal*, 58:1 (Autumn 2004), 248.

⁴⁶ Stead, "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon I" *Pall Mall Gazette*, 4.

He alluded to her struggle with alcoholism and the difficulties of starting a new life after so many years in the sex trade as a "rigorous mill through which she had passed,"⁴⁷ when it would have been rather more accurate to say 'through which she is presently passing.' Jarrett was, Stead claimed, at first reluctant to discuss her old life, both for the horror of her memories and out of devotion to her new and moral path. Yet she eventually acceded to Stead's "patient questioning" and confessed all, driven by her "conviction that it might help to secure the prevention of similar crimes in the future."⁴⁸

A rather more truthful account of that first meeting may be found in the October 29th, 1885 issue of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, which included excerpts of Stead's statement of defence at the Eliza Armstrong kidnapping trial. The full statement, even those portions that Stead was not allowed to read out in court, was published the following day in the *Pall Mall Gazette Extra*. According to that version of the story, Stead met with Jarrett at a rescue home run by the well-known reformer Mrs. Josephine Butler. Jarrett had been at Butler's home for only a month and a half. Prior to that she had spent two and a half months hospitalised with such severe symptoms of long-term alcoholism that it was beyond the means of the Salvation Army to care for her.⁴⁹ At first, Stead may well have contented himself with "patient questioning," his sympathy having been aroused by the story of Jarrett's seduction at a very young age and her years of prostitution. When she moved on to recount incidences from her time as a brothel-keeper and her occasional forays into the business of procuring young virgins, Stead's sympathy disappeared. He rained condemnation down upon her head for her past actions, telling her, he confesses in

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Rebecca Jarrett, "Rebecca Jarrett's Narrative," in Walker, "The Conversion of Rebecca Jarrett," *History Workshop Journal*, 255.

his defence statement, that she "deserved to be hanged in this world and damned in the next"⁵⁰ if she had done as she claimed. Her only chance to redeem herself, Stead told her, was to help him in his efforts to see the child prostitution trade exposed and brought to an end.

Jarrett, for all that Stead claimed otherwise in the original "Maiden Tribute" articles, was unwilling. In his defence at the Eliza Armstrong trial, where not only he but also Jarrett and other members of the "Secret Commission" were charged with kidnapping the thirteen year old girl for immoral purposes, Stead was much more forthcoming about Jarrett's reticence. Stead told the court:

[Jarrett] demurred, she shrank from it. I was very, very hard upon her. I think I may have done wrong, but when a woman tells you that she has taken young girls at the age of thirteen and beguiled them away when she was still leading an evil life, and brought them to a house of ill fame, administered sleeping potions, and then turned loose her good customer upon them unsuspectingly, a man may be pardoned if he does feel somewhat hot. I insisted; I was as ruthless as death. I said, 'No; you did that once in earnest, and you must do it again in order to stop it at all.'⁵¹

Jarrett consented so far as to at least ask Mrs. Butler and the Booths what they thought she ought to do. As all of them had already committed themselves to helping Stead in his effort to expose the child prostitution trade, they urged her to do whatever Stead asked and Jarrett finally agreed.

The problem, as Stead saw it, was relatively simple. The Criminal Law Amendment Act lacked support due to the fact that most people did not believe in the problem it purported to address. They either felt that the child prostitution trade did not exist or, if it did, that existing laws, which set the age of consent at thirteen, were

⁵⁰ W.T. Stead, "The Story of the Secret Commission: Mr. Stead's Defense at the Old Bailey," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 29 October 1885, 12.

⁵¹ Stead, "The Story of the Secret Commission," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 12.

sufficient to curtail it. Stead, therefore, had merely to prove that there was a trade and that a girl of thirteen was too young to understand what, exactly, she was consenting to. The law did not, after all, require a would-be seducer to fully explain his intentions in advance.

Stead's plan was, in its essence, as simple as he saw the problem to be. As Whyte describes the scheme, "[Stead] himself, in order to demonstrate that a vicious man could have a girl over thirteen procured for him for vicious purposes, would personate such a man, playing the part in every detail short of actually consummating the crime he would be pretending to wish to commit."⁵² This would answer those detractors who claimed the Criminal Law Amendment Act was unnecessary because the child prostitution trade did not exist or had declined since the original governmental inquiry in the matter. Because Stead intended to act fully inside the boundaries of the law, his experiment would also prove wrong those who claimed the existing system was sufficient.

Stead's investigations consumed the remainder of May, all of June, and a portion of July. By and large, his activities and those of the rest of the "Secret Commission" were limited to the conducting of interviews. Stead and his assistants collected accounts from any person they could find who might have contact with the child prostitution trade. They spoke to past and present brothel-keepers, prostitutes, procurers and procuresses, rescue workers, legal officials, and religious representatives involved in ministering to 'fallen women.'⁵³ The stories collected by the "Secret Commission" were repeated, sometimes clearly quoted in interview format and other times recast as one of Stead's own experiences, in the text of the "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon." Yet the most

⁵² Whyte, *The Life of W.T. Stead*, vol. I, 161.

⁵³ Schults, *A Crusader in Babylon*, 130.

dramatic story of the series, the one around which most of the post-"Maiden Tribute" controversy centred, did not come in the form of a second- or third-hand account, but from a situation actually orchestrated and witnessed by Stead.

d. The Conspiracy of Virtue Against Vice⁵⁴

"It is an old maxim that when evil persons conspire, good citizens are compelled to combine, if only to expose the conspirators and frustrate their designs. The only novelty in the present case is that the Government select for the prosecution, not the conspirators of vice, but the combiners for virtue. What I did was to commit the mere semblance of a crime in order to render the perpetration of actual crime more difficult, its detection more certain, and its punishment more severe."

- W.T. Stead's suppressed statement of defence, "The Eliza Armstrong Case," *Pall Mall Gazette Extra*, 30 October 1885

On June 3rd, 1885, only two weeks after Scott first came to the *Pall Mall Gazette* offices, Rebecca Jarrett 'purchased' thirteen year old Eliza Armstrong from her mother for a sum of £5.⁵⁵ Jarrett, acting on Stead's behalf, then took Eliza to a midwife, who certified that the girl was a virgin and sold Stead and Jarrett a bottle of chloroform to "make the seduction easier."⁵⁶ Eliza was drugged and taken to a brothel. Of those involved – Jarrett, acting as procuress, the mother who gave her daughter over to Jarrett, the midwife asked to ascertain the purity of a young girl and provide a soporific agent to make her rape easier, and the brothel-keeper who admitted a man carrying an unconscious child into her establishment – only Jarrett knew that Stead was not entirely in earnest. Eliza, it was hoped, was not really aware of what was going on, both for her

⁵⁴ Stead, "The Eliza Armstrong Case," *Pall Mall Gazette Extra*, 79.

⁵⁵ The truth of the exchange between Jarrett and Mrs. Armstrong is a matter of some historical debate. Jarrett and Stead always maintained that they had purchased Eliza from her mother with the implication that it was for immoral purposes. Mrs. Armstrong, however, claimed that she had been under the impression that her daughter was destined for a respectable domestic position.

⁵⁶ Schults, *A Crusader in Babylon*, 131.

own sake and to prove beyond a doubt the meaningless of a thirteen year old's consent. After a suitable amount of time had passed, Eliza was taken out of the brothel and spent the remainder of the night in more secure surroundings at the "house of a respectable lady."⁵⁷ In the morning, Eliza was turned over to the Salvation Army, who sent her to France to take up a domestic position that they had secured for her.

The apparent account of the evening that later appeared in the "Maiden Tribute" under the heading of "A Child of Thirteen Bought for £5" did not end so well. Stead began the story of the girl he called 'Lily' with the statement, "I can personally vouch for the absolute accuracy of every fact in the narrative"⁵⁸ and concluded with the vague and ominous "then there rose a wild and piteous cry – not a loud shriek, but a helpless, startled scream like the bleat of a frightened lamb. And the child's voice was heard crying, in accents of terror, 'There's a man in the room. Take me home; oh, take me home!' – And then once more all was still."⁵⁹ The implications of the two statements were equal parts affecting, as Stead had hoped his account would be, and damning, as Stead would soon learn.

The first of the four "Maiden Tribute" articles was printed in the *Pall Mall Gazette* on July 6th, 1885, to immediate and unprecedented effect. As Whyte writes in his discussion of this episode of Stead's life, "There is no exaggeration in the statement that Stead's articles made the *Pall Mall Gazette* famous 'throughout the world.' [...] Nor is it possible to exaggerate the sensation they produced in England and above all in

⁵⁷ W.T. Stead, "The Case of Eliza Armstrong, by the Chief Director of the Secret Commission," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 25 August 1885, 1.

⁵⁸ Stead, "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon I," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 6.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

London."⁶⁰ The other London papers were united in their condemnation, not of the appalling crimes described by the "Maiden Tribute," but rather of the "Maiden Tribute," of the *Pall Mall*, and of Stead himself. By the time the second chapter of the series was published the following day, it had already been suggested, both in the public forum by the London press and in governmental circles by various offended officials, that Stead should be charged with printing obscene material and that the remaining chapters could, therefore, be withheld from print. The situation so disgusted Stead that he delayed the publication of the fourth and final chapter of the "Maiden Tribute" an extra day in favour of printing an equally scathing response to the press and government that was vilifying him. In the article, entitled "To Our Friends the Enemy," he jeers at his critics, pointing out that their every blow only serves to heighten the public's interest in the matter. He writes, "Let there be no mistake about this matter. We challenge prosecution. We court inquiry. We have most reluctantly been driven to adopt the only mode—that of publicity—for arousing men to a sense of the horrors which are going on at this very moment. But having adopted this mode, the more publicity we have the better."⁶¹

The reaction of the *Pall Mall's* readership was much less coherent, although certainly as extreme. The newspaper's offices were besieged both by protestors and by crowds eager for the new day's issue. The riotous crowd was so large and out of control that men were actually shoved through the glass windows of the office.⁶² The situation was largely ignored by the London police for two days, despite entreaties by *Pall Mall* staff members who could not get through to their own office building, but they finally came and restored order on Thursday, July 9th. Every day, the *Pall Mall Gazette* sold out,

⁶⁰ Whyte, *The Life of W.T. Stead*, vol. 1, 166-167.

⁶¹ W.T. Stead, "To Our Friends the Enemy," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 9 July 1885, 1.

⁶² Schults, *A Crusader in Babylon*, 140.

despite a massively increased print run. Whyte describes how, for the July 7th edition and the second day of the "Maiden Tribute," the *Pall Mall Gazette* bought up every scrap of extra paper in the city of London to meet the new demand for their publication. By that Tuesday, Whyte goes on to write, the only paper left was "some which was destined for the *Globe*, and therefore the next day's issue of the *Pall Mall Gazette* was bought by unsuspecting Tories for the 'oldest afternoon paper in London.'"⁶³

With every passing day, furthermore, the rumours of an impending warrant for Stead's arrest or an injunction against the distribution of the *Pall Mall Gazette* multiplied, but Stead was not concerned. As he told a journalist from the *North Eastern News* during the height of the siege on the *Pall Mall* offices:

'Bosh,' said [Stead] with a smile. 'Prosecute me? I wish with all my heart that they would, and they know I do. Almost all my staff is invalidated from hard work, and a prison is really the only place where I shall be able to get any rest for a long time. But I shall not be prosecuted.' 'Why not?' 'Because people only want to prosecute me for having given publicity to these facts, but if they do so there will be at once a hundred times more publicity, and all the names implicated will come out besides.'⁶⁴

Stead's confidence in his immunity proved to be misplaced, although his eventual prosecution occurred neither as soon nor on the grounds that he had expected and would likely have preferred. Fall of 1885 found Stead, Jarrett, Bramwell Booth of the Salvation Army, the midwife who had certified Eliza Armstrong's virginity, and two others charged with kidnapping the girl for immoral purposes. Stead defended himself, maintaining throughout the trial and after that the "A Child of Thirteen Bought for £5" was, in fact, the original 'Lily,' the girl in the Jeffries' trial whose story had inspired Stead's actions in the first place. The matter was confused, however, by the fact that Stead had

⁶³ Whyte, *The Life of W.T. Stead*, vol. I, 172-173.

⁶⁴ *North Eastern News*, July 17, 1885, quoted in Whyte, *The Life of W.T. Stead*, vol. I, 171.

intentionally duplicated 'Lily's circumstances with Eliza, even going so far as to take Eliza to the same brothel that the other girl had purportedly been taken to. As Stead explained in an article published in the *Pall Mall* on August 25th, 1885:

'Lily' was not Eliza Armstrong, but [...] we took her all unwitting over the ground up to the very point at which another poor girl had actually been outraged before we picked her off the streets. In no other way could we have proved by our personal knowledge that a midwife would certify for immoral purposes, would sell chloroform for drugging the victim, or that a brothel keeper would allow a child so young to be admitted to her premises for the purposes of violation.⁶⁵

The question of the true identity of 'Lily' proved to irrelevant, however, as the kidnapping charge rested on the fact that Eliza's father, Charles Armstrong, had not given his permission, nor had he even been asked for it, before Eliza was taken away. Throughout the court case, transcripts of which were published daily in the *Pall Mall*, questions such as whether Mrs. Armstrong knew that Eliza was being purchased for 'immoral purposes' or if Jarrett had implied that Eliza was destined for a respectable position were raised and debated at length, yet failed to detract from the prosecution's key argument. In an article published in the *Penny Illustrated News* on the twenty-fifth anniversary of his conviction, Stead admitted that even he saw no hope for acquittal at the time. "The case against me was so clear," Stead writes, "I wanted to plead 'guilty' the moment that the Judge ruled that the consent of the father was essential."⁶⁶ On November 9th, 1885, Stead, Jarrett, another of Stead's agents, and the midwife were convicted of the kidnapping of Eliza Armstrong. The remaining co-defendants were acquitted of any wrong doing.

⁶⁵ Stead, "The Case of Eliza Armstrong," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 1.

⁶⁶ Stead, "Why I Went To Prison," *Penny Illustrated News*, 11.

e. Raising the Neighbours

"But," I said in amazement, "then do you mean to tell me that in very truth actual violation, in the legal sense of the word, is constantly being perpetrated in London on unwilling virgins, purveyed and procured to rich men at so many a head by keepers of brothels?" "Certainly," said he, "there is not a doubt of it." "Why," I exclaimed, "The very thought is enough to raise hell." "It is true," he said: "and although it ought to raise hell, it does not even raise the neighbours."

- W.T. Stead and Vincent Hughes (unnamed), "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon I," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 6 July 1885, 3.

The "Chief Director of the Secret Commission" was not officially revealed to be Stead until long after the entire series of articles had been published. Stead's name did not appear anywhere in the text of the original articles. Instead, he wrote in the first person, referring to himself only as 'I.' On those occasions when he quoted someone who, in conversation, had referred to him by name, he replaced the name with a dash, as he did with the rest of those whose identities he sought to protect.

In the fourth and final chapter of the "Maiden Tribute," for example, Stead described a conversation between himself, one of his Secret Commission 'agents,' and a police officer. The police officer had demanded the name and address of the agent, which Stead refused to give, but offered his own as a substitute. The police officer had encountered the two men while they were attempting to rescue a young German girl from her procurer and had drawn the obvious conclusion. Although the police officer persisted, Stead held firm and would give only his own information, not that of his agent. As Stead then wrote, "Having taken the name and address of the willing ---- [referring to Stead], Sergeant ---- departed, no wiser than when he came, and evidently fancying we were a pair of scoundrels."⁶⁷ Although Stead's identity as the author of the "Maiden Tribute" could hardly be described as a close-kept secret, these gestures to the tradition of

⁶⁷ Stead, "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon IV," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 3.

anonymity, even in the context of an article written in the first person, were not the actions of a man driven by "an unwholesome greed for notoriety." Contemporary critics who, like Hirst, dismissed Stead's decision to write the "Maiden Tribute" in the first person as an act of egoism failed to recognise Stead's deeper and certainly more significant motivations. In much the same way as Stead's personal affection for dynamic individuals was the least of his reasons to focus on the character of General Gordon in his reporting on the Soudan Crisis, Stead's ego was only a minor consideration in his choosing to write the "Maiden Tribute" the way that he did.

In reporting on the Soudan Crises, Stead, as he discussed in his article "The Ideal Editor," was faced with the challenge of making grand ideologies and events taking place half a world away seem vital and interesting to his audience. As such, he developed the character of General Gordon as a means of evoking an emotional reaction in his readership. The challenge Stead faced in writing the "Maiden Tribute" was very different, although his goal, to evoke an emotional reaction from his readership, remained the same. From the first, the greatest deterrent to the Criminal Law Amendment Act had been the indifference of both the government and the public to the issue of prostitution. Rather than having to insert some element of the familiar into the exotic, as he had with the Soudan, Stead had to make something exotic out of the familiar in order to shock his readers out of their complacency. This he did by creating the character of the "Chief Director of the Secret Commission," a being quite apart from Stead, the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

The Director was shown, in the introduction of the "Maiden Tribute," to be very much like the average reader of the *Pall Mall*. He claimed that he had a passing interest

in the progress of the Criminal Law Amendment Act and was generally in support of its passing, but that he was initially uninterested in becoming more actively involved until Scott came to ask for help. No doubt like many of the readers of the *Pall Mall*, the Director considered the situation regretful and certainly due attention, but not so dire that he should risk his position. As Stead explained in his later statement of defence during the Eliza Armstrong trial, "I was slow, I admit it with shame, to accept [Scott's] suggestion. The responsible conductor of a London journal has to consider many things before he takes a course which may ruin the property of his employers, which may entirely blight his own career, and which may after all do no good."⁶⁸ Only after speaking at length with Scott and with other individuals so situated as to be aware of the truth of things did the Director reconsider.

This introduction created in the public eye the image of a common, ordinary man. The rest of the series described his descent into the London Labyrinth, where he acted as the eyes, ears, and conscience of the legion of common, ordinary readers of the *Pall Mall Gazette*. In his account, the familiar streets of London became a nightmarish landscape populated by mythical monsters and vile seducers. As Stead wrote in the first chapter of the "Maiden Tribute," while describing the investigations of the Secret Commission:

It seemed a strange, inverted world, that in which I lived those terrible weeks – the world of the streets and of the brothel. It was the same, yet not the same, as the world of business and the world of politics. I heard of much the same people in the house of ill fame as those of whom you hear in caucuses, in law courts, and on the 'Change. But all were judged by a different standard, and their relative importance was altogether changed. It was as if the position of our world had suddenly been altered, and you saw the most of the planets and fixed stars in different combinations and of altogether different magnitudes, so that at first it was difficult to recognise them. [...] After a time the eye grows familiar with the foul and poisonous air, but at the best you wander in a Circe's isle, where the

⁶⁸ Stead, "The Story of the Secret Commission," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 11.

victims of the foul enchantress's wand meet you at every turn. But with a difference, for whereas the enchanted in olden time had the heads and the voices and the bristles of swine, while the heart of a man was in them still, these have not put on in outward form 'the inglorious likeness of a beast,' but are in semblance as other men, while within them is only the heart of a beast – bestial, ferocious, and filthy beyond the imagination of decent men.⁶⁹

Walking among these monsters in men's skins, Stead, or rather the "Chief Director," served as the moral rule against which all that surrounded him might be measured.

The idea of evil being hidden beneath an innocuous facade was one of the most dominant themes of the "Maiden Tribute," reinforcing the image of a "strange, inverted world" existing just below London's familiar landscape. This was a very common theme among works dealing with sex and sexuality in the Victorian period. Historian Steven Marcus, in his *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth Century England*, argues that this theme in Victorian sex literature was a demonstration of a Victorian reality: the absolute separation of ordinary life and the world where "a real secret social life was being conducted, the secret life of sexuality."⁷⁰ Many of the characters that populated Stead's 'Modern Babylon,' although privately immersed in immoral and illegal vice, often presented a thoroughly respectable public face to polite society. This was true not only of Stead's 'Minotaurs,' the dissolute upper-class men who were the consumers of the child prostitution trade, but also of the agents, both male and female, that made such a trade possible. Procurers and brothel-keepers, Stead claimed, acquired unsuspecting girls under the guise of offering them respectable jobs as maids, nannies, or other domestic help, only to reveal the truth of their new situations once the girl was away from her family and without the money or the resources

⁶⁹ Stead, "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon I," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 2-3.

⁷⁰ Steven Marcus, *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth Century England* (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985), 101.

to resist her new lot in life.⁷¹ Apparently "highly respectable mid-wives,"⁷² in their evening hours, could be found certifying the virginity of young girls, tending to those same young, although no longer virginal, girls who had fared particularly poorly at the hands of their so-called seducers, and even performing abortions.⁷³ Those members of society supposedly responsible for suppressing illegal vice were themselves steeped in it. As Stead wrote in the fourth chapter of the "Maiden Tribute," in which he argues against the increase of police power proposed by one section of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, "An ex-officer of long standing assured me that 'policemen and soldiers between them ruin more girls than any other class of men in London.'"⁷⁴ Even worse, it was quite common for the police to be in league with those same perfidious procurers and brothel-keepers who would stop at nothing, and certainly not at a point of law, to coerce virgins into their establishments. Not only would the police not prevent such people from going about their business, Stead asserted, but they almost certainly may be counted on to stand in the way of any rescue attempts by organisations like the Salvation Army or Scott's Committee for the Prevention of Traffic in English Girls.⁷⁵

Perhaps the most notable example of Stead's Janus-faced theme was that of "Mdmes. X and Z," two young ladies who purportedly ran a "wholesale firm" in London's West end.⁷⁶ According to Stead, Mdmes. X and Z distinguished themselves from the other procuresses with whom he'd had contact in the course of his investigation by dealing only in maidens. They did not run a brothel of any kind, nor did they operate

⁷¹ Stead, "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon I," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 4.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 5.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Stead, "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon IV," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 2.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ W.T. Stead, "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon II," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 7 July 1885, 3.

as procuresses of a more general type, but rather devoted the whole of their energies to the recruitment of virgins for their "ever-widening circle of customers."⁷⁷ As noteworthy as their specialised approach to their business was, however, it was Stead's description of the women themselves that truly distinguished them from others of their profession. They were both, in Stead's estimation, quite young, energetic, and intelligent. They had both, some years previous, been themselves seduced in much the same way as they now arranged the seduction of other girls. After her own seduction, Miss X "began to look around to find maids for customers and customers for maids,"⁷⁸ having realised the money that could be made with relative ease in such an endeavour. She brought Miss Z into the firm at the point that her business had expanded beyond her ability to see to it single-handedly. Yet, for all that the business of procuring maidens was their central preoccupation, for both women it comprised the secret half of an otherwise respectable life. Miss X, who was the younger of the two, lived "in all the odour of propriety if not the sanctity with her parents."⁷⁹ Miss Z, on the other hand, lived alone, her rooms acting as the firm's office and mailing address, but held a respectable day job in a sewing room. She was, ironically, employed to "[look] after the morals and manners of some score young apprentice girls who come up from the country to learn the business."⁸⁰ The other procurers and brothel-keepers mentioned in the "Maiden Tribute" were full-fledged citizens of the London Labyrinth, but they employed deception only in the carrying out of their profession. Mdmes. X and Z, on the other hand, had embraced deception as a way of life. They were leading seemingly innocuous, respectable lives, but, as a matter of

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

course, produced at least five maidens a week into the waiting hands of would-be seducers.

The most evocative part of the "Maiden Tribute" was not, however, in what Stead actually described, but in what he very carefully left out of his account. Stead assured his readers that for every shocking story he recounted, there were tens and hundreds of stories, of equal or greater horror, that he had heard of but did not include. At the end of his account of the "Child of Thirteen Bought for £5," Stead wrote: "That was but one case among many, and by no means the worst."⁸¹ In his description of corrupt policemen working with London procuresses, he assured his readers that, though he only recounted a couple of examples of such things, "for one which we find there may be many."⁸² Where Stead's explicit descriptions served to rouse the sentiment of his readers, his decidedly vague references to other horrors encouraged his audience to imagine the worst. In doing so, he left spaces in his narrative into which readers could readily insert themselves, inviting them to become active participants rather than passive audience members of the tale unfolding before them. If Stead was one of Carlyle's heroes of letters, he was inviting his audience to become heroes of a more traditional sort. In keeping with his views on the leadership role of the press in society, Stead saw to it that "the truth [was] spoken courageously in the cause of the helpless and oppressed."⁸³ In an article entitled "The Truth About Our Secret Commission," published in the place of the expected fourth chapter of the "Maiden Tribute" on July 9th, 1885, Stead wrote:

"It is unutterably painful to read of these crimes," says a horrified society, which finds it infinitely easy to allow them to be perpetrated by those who have the entry to all its drawing rooms, but how much more painful must

⁸¹ Stead, "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon I," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 6.

⁸² Stead, "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon IV," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 2.

⁸³ "Of Good Cheer Indeed," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 10 July 1885, 1.

it have been, think you, to have to see the victims face to face, to see their tears and hear their sobs, and to watch the toils closing round the doomed without being able to interfere against an individual without betraying the interests of the investigation undertaken in the interests of the whole? In the whole of that horrible pilgrimage, however, one thought sustained me. Yet a little while, and the day would come when I should be able to declare trumpet-tongued over sea and land the whole infernal truth in the ears of a startled world. If only they knew of these things the conspiracy of silence would perish, and the good forces of the world would at last be set free to combat the evil in the one field in which the latter has had all its own way.⁸⁴

With the publication of the final chapter of the "Maiden Tribute" the following day, Stead had discharged his responsibility to 'speak courageously,' and it was thereafter the responsibility of his readership to take action.

f. Imperfectly and With What a Faltering Pen

"Within a very few days or weeks of the time when the *Pall Mall Gazette*, containing the story of Lily, arrived in South Australia, an Act raising the age of protection to sixteen, which for two years had been waterlogged and blocked, was revived and passed through Parliament without any difficulty, and that because there was set forth, however imperfectly it might be, and I know well how imperfectly it was, how imperfectly and with what a faltering pen, some faint outline of the truth about this matter. But I could not get to know the truth about this matter. I do not know one-half the truth, and of the half that I know I have not published one quarter. But here was a story, a simple tale, that the common people could read and understand, which I wrote as it were with my very life's blood, before the eyes of all men."

- W.T. Stead, "The Armstrong Case, Tenth Day: Mr. Stead's Speech to the Jury," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 5 November 1885, 12

The truth of Stead's revelations regarding child prostitution has always been in question. Even before all four chapters of the "Maiden Tribute" had been published, Stead was accused of everything from muckraking to outright fabrication. When, during the Eliza Armstrong trial, Jarrett's account came into doubt, the imprecations against the entire "Maiden Tribute" redoubled. On the day the guilty verdict was returned, the *Pall*

⁸⁴ W.T. Stead, "The Truth About Our Secret Commission," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 9 July 1885, 2.

Mall Gazette addressed the accusations of its critics in a brief article entitled "The Verdict and the Revelations." The note took up scarcely more than an inch of column space and was buried on page eight of the November 9th issue, as though the matter barely merited attention. The *Pall Mall* stated, quite simply, that critics of the "Maiden Tribute" had recently made an attempt to discredit the series by implying that it was entirely based on Jarrett's questionable testimony. "There were," the article goes on to say, "fifty-seven columns of closely printed matter in the 'Maiden Tribute.' If every line for which Rebecca Jarrett is directly or indirectly responsible were expunged, there would remain fifty-four columns intact."⁸⁵

In the 120 years since the series first appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, historians have attempted to determine what in the series was truth and what was exaggeration, with decidedly mixed success. Judith Walkowitz, in her *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State*, disclaims the "Maiden Tribute" on the basis that "the evidence for widespread involuntary prostitution of British girls at home or abroad is slim."⁸⁶ Despite Stead's claims to the contrary, Walkowitz argues, the records of the governmental commission into the subject and even those of social reform groups show only a very limited trade in British women to foreign brothels. Even less proof may be found of what Stead claimed was a widespread and thriving juvenile sex trade. "There undoubtedly were some child prostitutes on the streets of London, Liverpool, and elsewhere," Walkowitz writes, but "their numbers were grossly exaggerated by the purity

⁸⁵ "The Verdict and The Revelations," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 9 November 1885, 8.

⁸⁶ Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 247.

propaganda. Nor were most of these young girls victims of false entrapment, as the vignettes in 'The Maiden Tribute' would suggest."⁸⁷

Marcus, in his *The Other Victorians*, attributes a far greater degree of truthfulness to Stead's account. He does not address the "Maiden Tribute" directly, but considers it in relation to his extended discussion of *My Secret Life*, a multi-volumed and pornographic sexual autobiography of an anonymous Victorian gentleman published in the late nineteenth century. *My Secret Life*, Marcus argues, seems far more authentic than the better-known sexual autobiographies of the period, which tended to be a mix of "pornographic fantasy" and "sexual self-glorification."⁸⁸ Unlike those impossible accounts of "unblemished and inhuman sexual triumphs,"⁸⁹ *My Secret Life* included unsuccessful sexual encounters, extended discussions of the author's secret anxieties, and even several embarrassing episodes of impotence, all of which, according to Marcus, lends the account an air of honesty.

In what Marcus calls the "most brutal and disgusting" encounters of the book, the author of *My Secret Life* "on occasion experienced a peculiarly intense desire to deflower a young virgin, the younger the better."⁹⁰ With what was a characteristic attention to detail, the author carefully recorded, not only the actual act, but also the process and cost of acquiring a suitable girl. The proceedings as recorded in *My Secret Life*, Marcus writes, agree with Stead's account in the "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon." In a style strikingly reminiscent of the "Maiden Tribute," the author of the book even described the conversations he had with the agents, mostly women, who had procured the girls for him.

⁸⁷ Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, 247.

⁸⁸ Marcus, *The Other Victorians*, 115.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 156-57.

Although *My Secret Life* can by no means be considered a reliable source and was no doubt at least as exaggerated as Walkowitz argues the "Maiden Tribute" was, the commonalities between the two diametrically opposed accounts suggests some degree of truthfulness in both.

The question of the truth of the "Maiden Tribute" is a difficult one. Even Stead, upon occasion, seemed to confuse the matter; at various points in his life during and after the "Maiden Tribute" campaign, Stead alternately claimed that 'Lily' was *not* Eliza Armstrong, that she *was* Eliza Armstrong, and that, in fact, the "Child of Thirteen Bought for £5" was equal parts the rumoured story of Mrs. Jeffries' young abductee and Stead's experimental replication of the abduction with Eliza.

In all likelihood, the "Maiden Tribute" was a liberal mix of fact, fiction, and inference, and it was little wonder, then, that even Stead later had trouble telling the three apart. Yet his occasional failings of fact did not, in Stead's mind, invalidate the truth of his overall account of child prostitution in London. Any lapses into fiction were excusable in the account of a higher truth and in the pursuit of a greater good. Seth Kovan, in his book *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London*, describes the Evangelical notion of 'truth' in similar terms. To the Evangelical organisations of Victorian London, Kovan argues, "Truth consisted of that which could lead a person to God's saving grace. [...] For Evangelicals, truth could be quite different from fact because facts, not animated by God's love, in themselves lacked the power to save."⁹¹ The half-truths and outright fictions of Evangelical publications about poverty in London were true

⁹¹ Seth Kovan, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 95.

in that they inspired positive action. By that measure, Stead's "Maiden Tribute" was undeniably true, even if it was not precisely factual.

Evangelical literature, Kovan goes on to write, had a kind of circular narrative; "the same story might appear in a novel or a 'true narrative' and then would appear verbatim later in a nonfictional article."⁹² The same kind of cyclical storytelling appears in the "Maiden Tribute" and Stead's subsequent articles on the same topic. The most obvious example of it is the story of the thirteen year old girl sold or coerced by her mother into a life of prostitution that reappears a number of times and in relation to a number of different characters. That was the story of Mrs. Jeffries' abductee, of Eliza Armstrong, and of the character 'Lily.' The story appears again in Stead's discussion of how brothel-keepers go about acquiring virgins for their clientele. "Another very simple mode of supplying maids," a brothel-keeper of Mile-End-Road informed Stead, "is by breeding them. Many women who are on the streets have female children. They are worth keeping. When they get to be twelve or thirteen they become merchantable."⁹³ In actual fact, the plot of the young girl encouraged into prostitution by her mother was the story of Rebecca Jarrett's own experience. Although Stead never explicitly described Jarrett's introduction to life on the streets, writing instead that she came to it "in early life" and what a "grim and dreadful story it was,"⁹⁴ the details were the same. She, at the age of thirteen, had turned to prostitution to support herself and her mother. Later, she and her mother together had set up a brothel. Like the Evangelical tracts Kovan

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Stead, "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon I," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 4.

⁹⁴ Stead, "The Story of the Secret Commission," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 11.

discusses, Stead's story was a 'truth' based on, but not limited to, "authenticated facts"⁹⁵ and repeated as often as seemed effective.

From the perspective of the history of sexuality or gender relations in society, the debate over the truth, or, rather, the factual basis of the "Maiden Tribute" is important and necessary. From the perspective of journalistic history, however, the questionable factual basis of the "Maiden Tribute" is far less important than the undeniable effect of the series. Although the "Maiden Tribute" was not, as some historians suggest, an entirely unprecedented event in the history of Stead and the British press, it was the most famous of Stead's campaigns and arguably represented the peak achievement of his particular brand of journalism. The traditional power structure of the Victorian era journalism located the authority of the press in the newspaper as a whole, not in a specific individual. Anonymous journalism ensured that the newspaper itself – the *Pall Mall Gazette* – was the only visible author. Readers were expected to trust and respect the publication, not the individual journalists who contributed to its making. When, over the course of his "Maiden Tribute" campaign, Stead abandoned anonymity for celebrity, he effectively inverted the traditional system of press power. Stead's authority was no longer hidden behind or reliant upon his position as editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, but was instead located in his own individuality, or at least in the public personality that he had created for himself.

The myth of Theseus and the Minotaur, upon which Stead based his narrative of the child prostitution trade of London, was a particularly appropriate metaphor, not merely for the initial investigation, but for all that happened in the wake of the publication of the "Maiden Tribute" as well. Stead was Theseus, fighting the London

⁹⁵ Kovan, *Slumming*, 96.

Minotaur for the daily maiden tribute, and he had neither the time nor the patience to wait for anyone else to recognise him as such. He had no compunction about casting himself as the hero of the piece. Eliza Armstrong, not entirely at the fault of Stead, was inadvertently cast in the role of Ariadne and was accidentally cast adrift in the wake of Stead's crusade against child prostitution. With General Gordon, Stead and, thereby, his readers could do no more than watch and celebrate their hero from afar. There was an insurmountable distance in the *Pall Mall Gazette's* reporting of the Soudanese crisis – both ideological, with the constraint of a third person narrative, and literal, given that the significant action took place in Egypt. In the "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon," Stead was the hero and, through him, so too were his readers. He offered to his audience not the celebration of a heroic figure, but the tortured perspective of the hero himself as he fought a secret war in the streets of London. Stead abandoned the omnipresent editorial *we* in favour of an unequivocal *I*, and that shift from third to first person narrative collapsed the distance from insurmountable to insignificant. The authority of the "Maiden Tribute" derived from the assurances of Stead, in the guise of the "Chief Director," that he personally had witnessed or verified all the facts therein.

As he had in the case of Gordon, Stead declared that inactivity was itself a kind of activity. In the moral vocabulary of the "Maiden Tribute," he decried the wilful ignorance of evil as equally sinful as evil itself. No one, in the wake of the publication of the "Maiden Tribute," could claim true ignorance of the evils of 'Modern Babylon'; therefore any subsequent denial or inactivity must be seen as an evil. The authority of those statements came, however, not from the *Pall Mall Gazette*, but from Stead himself. The creation of Stead as a celebrity journalist over the course of his arrest, trial, and

subsequent imprisonment for the kidnapping of Eliza Armstrong translated into a very direct power, not of the press, but of the person of W.T. Stead. In his "Government by Journalism," Stead declared the editor to be the "king of an educated class." In another article, he called the editor's desk of the *Pall Mall Gazette* specifically the "true throne in England."⁹⁶ Yet when Stead left the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1889, he did not see himself as abdicating the throne to the new editor, E.T. Cook. He was instead moving the seat of power to a new home in the offices of the *Review of Reviews*.

⁹⁶ *Washington Evening Star*, 24 December 1892, quoted in Ray Boston, "W.T. Stead and Democracy by Journalism," *Papers for the Millions: The New Journalism in Britain, 1850s to 1914*, Joel H. Wiener, ed. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 91.

5. The Unsinkable Titan: Remembering W.T. Stead

"I hope you will not consider that this narrative is written in any way in a boastful spirit. I am quite sure that its accuracy would be confirmed both by friends and foes so far as relates to my public action in this matter. I have endeavoured to set down the truth and to endeavour to let you see both the mischief that I have done and the good that I have tried to do. I am afraid you will say that the former largely out-balances the latter, and up to the present I am not disposed to deny that. I only say that the end is not yet."

- W.T. Stead, "The Great Pacifist: An Autobiographical Character Sketch," published post-mortem in *Review of Reviews* XLV (June 1912), 616.

In 1886, Stead wrote an article for the *Pall Mall Gazette* entitled "The Sinking of a Modern Liner." Like so much of Stead's work, the piece was designed to direct the attention of his readership to what he deemed a dangerous or inappropriate situation – in this case, the inadequate and often ignored safety codes for the new class of luxury passenger liners belonging to companies like White Star Lines. The article, which was written from the perspective of a survivor of a fictional shipwreck between an passenger liner and another ship, had little effect and Stead had not really been interested enough to pursue the matter with the kind of verve he had devoted to child prostitution the previous year. "The Sinking of a Modern Liner" was, however, a particularly sensational and affecting piece, complete with a cast of well-drawn and sympathetic characters.

The protagonist of the article, who related his story in the "Maiden Tribute"-style first person, meticulously described a number of lively scenes from every class of passengers that might be expected to be found on a ship of that kind. He introduced to the reader any number of interesting characters, from the noble and dutiful ship's crew to the sometimes rude and rough men of the steerage class to the indulgent father and loving teenaged daughter who, each evening, could be found strolling the first-class deck.

An ominous note intruded when the narrator, with a typically Stead-like attention to detail, noted that the ship had only enough lifeboats to accommodate perhaps a third of the passengers in the event of an emergency. That emergency, of course, was not long in coming. An unmarked ship emerged out of the night and, seemingly out of control, struck the side of the liner, crushing it inwards. In the panic that followed, which Stead described in chillingly realistic prose, the narrator watched each of the liner's eight lifeboats filled and cast away. When the last boat was cut loose, there remained seven hundred doomed souls on the increasingly tilted deck of a fast-sinking ship. The narrator himself, in the last convulsions of the dying vessel, fell overboard. "I felt a mighty convulsive movement," Stead wrote, in the guise of his imaginary survivor. "The sea seemed to flash down on me in one mass, as if the wall of water fell from a high crag. Then I heard a humming noise in my ears, and with a gasp I was up amid a blackened wriggling sheet of drowning creatures."¹ Stead concluded the article by stepping out from behind his fictional narrator and stating, in his own voice, that "this is exactly what might take place, and what will take place, if the liners are sent to sea short of boats."²

In June of 1912, the article was reprinted in the *Review of Reviews*, the magazine that Stead had founded after leaving the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1890. Already a dramatic piece, the article took on a particularly macabre note in the reprinting. Only two months earlier, Stead had perished on the ill-fated maiden voyage of the *R.M.S. Titanic*.

The sinking of the supposedly unsinkable *Titanic* was a shock to both the British and American audiences. Media historian Steven Biels, although somewhat dismissive

¹ W.T. Stead, "The Sinking of a Modern Liner," *Review of Reviews*, XLV (June 1912), 637.

² *Ibid.*, 635.

of any efforts to ascribe true importance to the disaster,³ does concede that the wreck constituted "an event of deep and wide resonance [...] a kind of 'social drama' in which conflicts were played out."⁴ Although Biels is specifically discussing only the reaction of the American press to the *Titanic* disaster, the statement holds true for Britain as well. Many of the same debates that, according to Biels, raged on in the American press were mirrored in the newspapers of Britain. Safety issues, legal issues, gender issues, class issues, and race issues were discussed with as much ferocity in London's dailies as in the New York papers. Those more abstract debates were, however, always kept accessible to the most common of readers through the careful and frequent reference to the various individuals who had met such a tragic end in the frigid Atlantic waters just off the coast of Newfoundland.

In the American papers, the lead parts of the "social drama" were given to characters like millionaire John Jacob Astor, banker Benjamin Guggenheim, Major Archibald W. Butt, and other notable American passengers who had been heading home to New York and beyond. In the British reports of the accident, however, the lead role was almost unanimously assigned to a single man: W. T. Stead. J.L. Garvin, who was in 1912 occupying Stead's old position at the *Pall Mall Gazette*⁵ wrote in a special memorial edition of the *Review of Reviews*, "Walking in Oxford Street at midday, when the loss of the *Titanic* was certain, the only name I heard mentioned by the groups on the pavement

³ Biels scoffs at the claims of historians such as Walter Lord and Wyn Craig Wade who claim that the *Titanic* may be seen as, in one way or another, the end of an era.

⁴ Seven Biels, "The Unknown and the Unsung: Contested Meanings of the *Titanic* Disaster," *Print Culture in a Diverse America*, James P. Danky and Wayne A. Wiegand, ed. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 203.

⁵ Garvin had, very literally, taken over Stead's editorial seat at the paper. As he wrote in his tribute to Stead, "One of my first acts [as the new editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*] was to have the very chair he occupied sought out and used again, and I shall never sit in it without feeling that there is some shadow of him near." (J.L. Garvin, "The World Pays its Tribute," *Review of Reviews*, 487).

was his, and that was in itself significant of the extent to which he had made his name a national and international word."⁶ When the *Times* published a series of obituaries of notable figures who had perished on the *Titanic*, Stead's was the longest and was given pride of place at the very top of the leftmost column of text on the page.⁷

In the immediate wake of the disaster, much of the reporting on the wreck of the *Titanic* was focused on the loss of significant individuals like Stead. Within a month, however, the obituaries and eulogies had given way to the active, crusading kind of journalism that had been the mainstay of Stead's own career. Rather than composing endless memorial notes, the British press, most notably Stead's own *Review of Reviews*, turned its attention the questions of how such a disaster had happened, whose fault it was, and how it could be prevented from happening again. Even in the May 1912 memorial number of the *Review of Reviews*, which reprinted or published for the first time a collection of eulogies and reminiscences of Stead by those who had known him best, the beginnings of a new campaign was being mounted. A month later, the new editor of the *Review of Reviews* added to Stead's "this is exactly what might take place, and what will take place, if the liners are sent to sea short of boats" a note of his own: "And after twenty-six years of 'progress,' the Board of Trade is responsible for the loss of sixteen hundred lives on the *Titanic*, because there were not enough boats!"⁸ The public character of Stead was being used in much the same way that Stead himself had once made use of the character of General Gordon after the latter's death. The campaign for

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ "The Sinking of the *Titanic*: Some Notable Victims," *The Times*, 18 April 1912, 12.; The 1931 *Guide to Reading the Times*, published by the paper itself, explains that the *Times* is designed to be read top to bottom, left to right. The article placed at the top of the leftmost column on a page was the first one a well-trained reader turned to upon opening the paper. (*Reading The Times* (London: The Times Publishing Company, Ltd., 1931), 7.)

⁸ Alfred Stead (unsigned editor's note), "The Sinking of a Modern Liner," *Review of Reviews*, 635.

revised maritime safety laws was being mounted, by his own magazine, under the flag of Stead's name. It was, in light of Stead's career, a singularly appropriate tribute to his life.

Ironically, the "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon," which arguably represented the pinnacle of Stead's editorial power, also marked the beginning of the end of Stead's career in daily journalism. Although he continued to edit the *Pall Mall Gazette* during his three month imprisonment, the constraints of his position meant that the bulk of the day-to-day editorial decisions during that period were left in the hands of Stead's assistant editor, E.T. Cook. One of the conditions of Stead's converted sentence was that he would not be allowed to use his time at Holloway Gaol to compose articles that would continue to incite public furore on the topic of the "Maiden Tribute," Eliza Armstrong, or his own position.⁹ Furthermore, Henry Yates Thompson, the proprietor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, began in this period to take a more active role in the running of his paper when, previously, he had been content to leave matters largely in Stead's capable hands. Although he could hardly fail to be pleased at the widespread recognition and the more tangible measure of the jump in circulation that Stead's "Maiden Tribute" had brought to the *Pall Mall*, the series itself and the actions of his editor unnerved Thompson. He used the opportunity of Stead's imprisonment to put definitive limits on Stead's editorial freedoms and to begin building a professional and personal relationship with Cook, the man who ultimately was to succeed Stead as the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

⁹ Letter from E.T. Cook to Stead, 15 November 1885, FW95: Letters re Life of Stead, Whyte Papers, University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne; in his letter, Cook described to Stead the negotiations that had taken place between Henry Yates Thompson and the Governor of Holloway Gaol. Cook wrote, "The Governor and Ald Waterlow told you I suppose the arrangements ultimately made. They were the result of a lot of haggling. Ald. W. first held out for 1 visit a week only, HYT for 1 a day, and ultimately the compromise of 3 a week was made. [...] We had to pledge our words to Waterlow and the Governor that nothing should appear in the paper bearing the *external* marks of your authorship."

In 1886, Cook wrote in a private letter to Stead, "*You are the paper.*"¹⁰ By 1889, however, Stead's status at the *Pall Mall* had so declined that, in a letter imploring his assistant editor not to publish an article supporting the Infectious Diseases Bill then being discussed by Parliament, Stead wrote, "recognising my altered position at the paper, it is impossible for me in face of your strongly expressed conviction to do more than ask that the paper shall remain silent, so long at least as I am connected with it, on a subject on which I feel so strongly."¹¹ Stead had consistently opposed the Infectious Diseases Bill and similar pieces of legislation in the pages of the *Pall Mall Gazette* from the earliest days of his editorship. The ever increasing limitations on his editorship having finally become unbearable, Stead left the *Pall Mall* later that year to found his own publication. The first issue of the *Review of Reviews*, the monthly magazine of which Stead was proprietor, editor, and major contributor, came out in January of 1890.

Stead's career in the last twenty-three years of his life was quite as remarkable as the nine years he spent editing the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Freed from the relentless pace of daily journalism, Stead's interests seemed to multiply and he became known as the most ardent supporter of a wide range of causes. In the Boer War era, Stead gained the reputation of a spokesperson for peace, which position he maintained until his death just prior to World War I. Among other things, Stead published a number of pro-peace pamphlets, largely at his own expense, and arranged opportunities for international comingling between British, European, and North American representatives of a number of professions, including journalism. He attended the first Hague Conference, at which,

¹⁰ Letter from E.T. Cook to W.T. Stead, January 1886, Frederick Whyte Papers, FW95: Letters Regarding the *Life of W.T. Stead*, University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne; emphasis original.

¹¹ Letter from W.T. Stead to E.T. Cook, 9 August 1889, Frederick Whyte Papers, FW95: Letters Regarding the *Life of W.T. Stead*, Whyte Papers, University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

according to one of his eulogists, Stead worked tirelessly to convince the many international delegates with whom he spoke of the value of his particular way of thinking. "I was intensely amused at the first Hague Conference," Dr. E.J. Dillon wrote in his May 1912 tribute to Stead, "to see him approach fifth-rate delegates, inspire them with unbounded faith in themselves, and induce them to come forward with some proposal of his own which they imagined they had themselves put together."¹² Dillon then added, "He worked as hard as though he were responsible for the success or failure of the gathering."¹³ Indeed, Stead approached the Hague Conference and, more generally, his efforts to promote peace as he had approached all his previous campaigns: as though he alone could see the right path to a better future and, therefore, he alone could guide the world down it.

Unfortunately for his fellow proponents for peace, Stead's post-*Pall Mall Gazette* campaigns fell short of the success he had achieved with the "Maiden Tribute." This may have been, in part, due to his whole-cloth withdrawal from daily journalism. With but one brief exception,¹⁴ after leaving the *Pall Mall*, Stead devoted all his journalistic energies to the production of monthly reviews. In an 1892 interview with the *Washington Evening Star* on the new *Review of Reviews*, Stead explained:

the daily has such a short life that its area of influence must be a limited one. It dies the day it is born, and it can never reach the world at large. [...] The daily is a revolver. It is good for six shots at a short range, and it does its works admirably. The weekly is like a rifle. Its range is longer,

¹² Dr. E.J. Dillon, "The World Pays its Tribute," *Review of Reviews*, 484.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 485.

¹⁴ The exception to this was Stead's attempts to found his own daily, to be entitled the *Daily Paper*. For the whole of the decade following his departure from the *Pall Mall*, Stead worked to raise the necessary funds to begin production on his *Daily Paper*. His intention was to create a paper that would engender a sense of connection and serve as the base for an organic kind of social welfare system among its readership. The experiment was a resounding failure, to Stead's great disappointment, with one still-born attempt in the 1890s followed by a second attempt in 1904. The 1904 *Daily Paper* ran for only a month, from January 6th to February 9th, before shutting down. (Whyte, *The Life of W.T. Stead*, vol. II, 234-235)

but it is effective for that distance only. The monthly is the modern . cannon. It carries 500-pound shots for miles, and when they go forth the atmosphere of the whole earth quivers.¹⁵

Yet Stead's successes at the *Pall Mall Gazette* had been intimately linked with the form of the daily; his power lay in his ability to rouse the passions of his readership on a particular topic and, each day, to encourage them to ever greater heights. The *Review of Reviews* cannon, though mighty, had but one shot a month, where the *Pall Mall* revolver had been capable of loosing an unceasing hail of well-aimed bullets.

The mixed successes of Stead's later campaigns may also have been due to his open involvement in and promotion of spiritualism and other matters of the occult. Stead's credibility was greatly damaged in some quarters by what more than one critic dismissively called his "spooks."¹⁶ Earl Grey once wrote about the first time he had met the then editor of the *Northern Echo*. "He was perfectly sane in those days," Grey wrote at the conclusion of an otherwise flattering passage, "That dreadful craze of his about departed spirits had not begun to show itself."¹⁷ Many of Stead's critics latched on to his preoccupation with the dubious field of spiritualism as proof of a general unreliability.

Still, despite numerous setbacks and frequent criticism, Stead continued unceasing his efforts to promote those causes he considered good and necessary, and his methods for doing so reflected, as they always had, his belief in the importance of the individual character in news reporting. Every issue of the *Review of Reviews*, from the first in January of 1890 to the last composed under Stead's editorship in April of 1912, contained one of Stead's "Character Sketches." The subjects of the sketches often reflected Stead's cause of the moment and consisted of several pages of description of the

¹⁵ Whyte, *The Life of W.T. Stead*, vol. II, 55.

¹⁶ Hirst, *Early Life & Letters of John Morely*, vol. II, 93.

¹⁷ Quoted in Whyte, *The Life of W.T. Stead*, vol. I, 39.

subject's life, business, political views, and political opinions. The monthly feature served, as Whyte put it, to "[reveal] to the keenly-interested public the previously unknown feathers of many men now familiar to us all."¹⁸ In the meantime, Stead's own celebrity, which had begun with the Maiden Tribute, continued to grow, expanding until he was as well-known a figure in Europe and North America as he had been in Britain.

It was that international celebrity, along with his peace campaign, that found Stead on the *Titanic* in April of 1912. He had, on March 17th, received a telegram asking him if he would "come [to] New York and address the Great Men and Religious Congress in Carnegie Hall April twenty-second [...] along with President Taft? We pay expenses. Subject World Peace."¹⁹ The invitation came from the conference organiser, Fred B. Smith. Although it was rather short notice, the topic was one of Stead's abiding passions and he was flattered to be invited in the company of Taft, a man Stead greatly admired. A journalist for the *Daily Chronicle* wrote, following confirmation of Stead's death on the *Titanic*, about the last time he had seen Stead, which had been at the *Review of Review* offices the afternoon before he sailed. Stead, he wrote, was:

bubbling over with energy. He was sitting with his feet on a round table strewn with books and papers, dictating his letters to his secretary and smoking a big cigar. (His one vice, which he took to late in life, was smoking.) He looked full of vigour, his grizzly hair more ruffled than usual, his grey beard in picturesque disorder, his steel-grey eyes full of fire. He had all his old vivacity. 'I am going to speak for peace on the same platform as Mr. Taft,' he said. [...] Never did he look forward to any mission with greater enthusiasm and confidence.²⁰

Conveniently, or not as it turned out, Stead had just had an adequately large hole open in his schedule, and he immediately accepted the invitation to speak. The news that he

¹⁸ Whyte, *The Life of W.T. Stead*, vol. II, 311.

¹⁹ quoted in Whyte, *The Life of W.T. Stead*, vol. II, 312.

²⁰ *Daily Chronicle*, 17 April 1912 in Frederick Whyte Papers, FW94: Letters Regarding the *Life of Stead*, University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

would be travelling aboard the *Titanic* on the ship's maiden voyage only increased his enthusiasm. Shortly before his departure, he told the editor of the *Daily Chronicle* that he would write an article for that paper on his experiences on "the first trip on the mammoth *Titanic*."²¹

The eulogies published in the immediate wake of Stead's death were of a kind with the *Daily Chronicle* article. They were filled with the sort of blatant emotionalism that had been the mainstay of Stead's own work; it was a very public kind of mourning for a very public man. Stead's relatives, friends, colleagues, and even his fervent dissenters all contributed to the body of memorials published in various newspapers and periodicals in April and May of 1912. The pieces were as varied as their authors and, taken as a whole, provided an appropriately well-rounded account of Stead's wildly diverse interests. Despite the disparate perspectives of the various tributes, however, there existed a common core image of a man who was journalist, premier, preacher, and, sometimes, a strange blend of all three.

While Stead was certainly respected for the success of his many campaigns and his efforts at leadership through journalism, it was for his contributions to the development of British journalism that he was most remembered. Much of what Stead achieved in his life would have been impossible had it not been for his unique approach to journalism. Nearly every memorial makes reference to the changes Stead brought to British journalism, with varying degrees of admiration. Though he saw himself as less a journalist than a preacher, it was as a journalist and through the press that he made his preaching heard. When Matthew Arnold, bastion of high literature and the 'worthy' press, raged against the destructive, crass "New Journalism," it was Stead's journalism he was

²¹ *Ibid.*

condemning. The *Times*' obituary enumerated in concise terms Stead's contributions to the field of journalism. Using the kind of solid, unemotional prose that Arnold vastly preferred to Stead's typical journalistic style, the *Times* wrote, "The influence of W.T. Stead on daily journalism was great. He struck the personal note. He acclimatised the 'interview.' He developed 'crossheads.' He extended the scope of the special article and signed contribution. He introduced pictorial illustration. All these were the outward signs of the current of fresh vigour and greater vividness of presentment which were an expression of his personality."²² The sentiment was perhaps better expressed by E.T. Cook, who, unlike the *Times*, not only recognised the changes Stead brought to British journalism, but also approved of them. The *Times*, although tactfully non-committal on the subject in its obituary to Stead, embraced and embodied everything that Stead's journalism rejected. Cook, in his *Contemporary Review* tribute to his former chief, wrote, "'The Gospel According to the P.M.G.,' as preached by Mr. Stead, has had great and far-reaching influence. This is a country governed by public opinion, and Mr. Stead was a potent moulder of public opinion in the political and social sphere."²³ Each of the journalistic innovations listed in the *Times* article were devised by Stead to recreate the newspaper as a more dynamic, more engaging, and, above all, more affecting space.

The focus on Stead's contribution to the field of journalism, however, may have been a function of the fact that he was being memorialised largely by his colleagues in the press. Stead, throughout his life, declared that he saw himself more as a leader, both secular and religious, than a journalist. The press, as he saw it, was his means and not his end. He no doubt would have been gratified to read Viscount Esher's statement that,

²² "The Sinking of the Titanic: Some Notable Victims," *The Times*, 12.

²³ E.T. Cook, "W.T. Stead," *Contemporary Review*, CI (May, 1912), 617.

"Owing to circumstances, my life has run along lines which enable me to state without exaggeration that no events happened of material importance to the country since the year 1880 which have not been influenced by the personality of Mr. Stead."²⁴ Stead's leadership by journalism had proved quite effective, not only in the cases of Gordon and the Maiden Tribute, but also regarding any number of other matters. His "War against War" campaigns, although unsuccessful in his own mind, were remarkably effective when viewed somewhat more objectively. Although world peace proved elusive even for Stead, he did more than his part to discourage violent conflict during the increasingly turbulent atmosphere of pre-World War I Europe.

Many of Stead's memorialists write, as does J.A. Spender, that they do not think "it will be possible for any historian hereafter to write the history of these times without frequent mention of Stead's name."²⁵ Despite these predictions, most recent historians have managed with minimal reference at best. The historiography of Stead's life and career is episodic; historians discuss Stead's contributions to the development of specific events in a disconnected way, without an awareness of the overall context of Stead's editorial career. Their conclusions regarding Stead are necessarily affected by the bias of their research interests. With one exception, all the full-length biographies of Stead were written in the first fifteen years after his death and were intended less as historical analyses than as a record of his life. Since the publication of Estelle Stead's *My Father* in 1913 and Whyte's *The Life of W.T. Stead* in 1925, only Schults' *A Crusader in Babylon*, which is not very widely read, and a handful of articles published in various journals and collections have been added to the historical literature on Stead. This thesis, focusing as

²⁴ Viscount Esher, "The World Pays its Tribute," *Review of Reviews*, 479.

²⁵ J.A. Spender, "The World Pays its Tribute," *Review of Reviews*, 488.

it does on only two years of Stead's eventful editorial career, does little to fill this gap in the historiography of Victorian Britain. A more encompassing examination of Stead's life, although needed, was beyond the scope of this discussion and must wait for a broader study of the topic.

The true memorial to Stead was not merely in what was written about him, however, but in all the ways that his specific kind of active journalism had been absorbed into the press culture of Britain. As *The Times* put it on May 13th, 1912, in a note addressing the memorial number of the *Review of Reviews*:

It was an appropriate thought – a thought which is well in harmony with Mr. Stead's fidelity to principles – to publish, now that his life's work has been brought to a close, the text of the original programme of the review as it appeared in the first number. [...] How far this doctrine has made progress and how far it has found its way into the minds of others with the influence of Mr. Stead's force of character behind it, may be inferred from the sense of loss expressed by many public men.²⁶

In the same issue of the *Review of Review* as the collected memorials and tributes to Stead was published an article entitled "The Life and Death of the 'Titanic': the Ignorance of Senator Smith and the Knowledge of Mr. Ismay." The article asserted that the sinking of the "unsinkable Titan"²⁷ had "shattered absolutely the sense of security in ocean travel amongst the travelling public."²⁸ The sinking of the liner, a tragedy in and of itself, had also destroyed the public's innocent faith in the adequacy of maritime safety measures, a destruction which, although painful, was utterly necessary. Change was needed, the article declared, and change would be had, for should not every passenger on a British vessel "have as good a chance at life in the case of a disaster as it was humanly possible

²⁶ "The Late Mr. W.T. Stead: Memorial Number of the 'Review of Reviews,'" *The Times*, 13 May 1912, 5e.

²⁷ "The Life and Death of the 'Titanic': the Ignorance of Senator Smith and the Knowledge of Mr. Ismay," *Review of Reviews*, XLV:269 (May 1912), 502.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

to secure?"²⁹ The article closed with a blatant appeal to the memory of Stead, forwarding this new cause under the flag of his loss as Stead had once promoted another cause under the banner of Gordon's sacrifice at Khartoum. The last paragraph of the piece read:

We feel strongly that, just as "two keels to one" should be this country's motto in naval construction, "every passenger a chance for life" is the goal towards which we must strive in mercantile matters. The founder of the REVIEW OF REVIEWS was responsible for making the British Navy efficient, and we can think of no more suitable memorial to him than to work for the efficiency and honour of the British Merchant Service.³⁰

As had been the case with Gordon, Stead's death served only to increase the power and effectiveness of his public character to evoke emotion and inspire change. Although the *Titanic* proved all too fallible, W.T. Stead himself was unsinkable. Like Gordon and other heroes of popular imagination, he lived on, nearly as vibrant in death as he had been in life.

In his memorial, Garvin wrote that Stead's "grave is no doubt where he might have chosen it, midway between England and America, under the full stream of their intercourse."³¹ Of course, Garvin's description of Stead's resting place was not entirely accurate as the *Titanic* went down just off the coast of Newfoundland, distinctly on the North American side of the Atlantic Ocean. Still, the statement was perhaps the most appropriate tribute to Stead possible: an equal mix of artistic licence and blatant appeal to sentimentality.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 504.

³⁰ *Ibid.*; the mention of the phrase "two keels to one" and the British Navy is a reference to one of Stead's earlier campaigns at the *Pall Mall Gazette*, which was begun with a series of articles entitled "The Truth about the Navy, by One Who Knows." The articles exposed what Stead felt was the dangerous underfunding of naval expansion programs. He, writing as "One Who Knows" rather than as the editor of the *Pall Mall*, suggested that the British government should adopt a rule of two keels to one – for every single boat added to an enemy fleet, Britain should increase its own navy by a strength of two. The phrase was adopted as the watchword of British policy regarding its navy until World War I.

³¹ Garvin, "The World Pays its Tribute," 488.

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