

Contemporary Publishing and the Culture of Books

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‘The Review and the Reviewer’

Claire Squires, University of Stirling

Biography

Professor Claire Squires is the Director of the Stirling Centre for International Publishing and Communication at the University of Stirling, Scotland. Her research focuses on contemporary book cultures, including literary festivals and book prizes, editorial, marketing and communication processes within publishing, and aspects of diversity and politics relating to book industries. Her publications include *Marketing Literature: The Making of Contemporary Writing in Britain* (2007) and as co-editor with Andrew Nash and I. R. Willison, the *Cambridge History of the Book in Britain Volume 7: The Twentieth Century and Beyond* (2019).

Introduction

‘Reviewing,’ writes Gail Pool in *Faint Praise*, one of the few extended studies on the review and the reviewer in the contemporary period, ‘is a slippery subject. It’s even a slippery word. The term reviewing refers at once to a literary field and a business, a system and an individual endeavour, a process and a multitude of very different products’ (2007, p. 7). The slipperiness identified by Pool is furthered in Graham Law’s overview of the process of reviewing, which places the multi-faceted subject in historical context. ‘The long history of relations between volume and serial publication,’ comments Law, ‘has produced no more complex and conflicted area than that of critical intervention in patterns of book consumption through the medium of the periodical.’ (2010, p. 1092).

This chapter sets out to address the role of both the review and the reviewer within the wider framework of the circulation of books, assessing their roles and relationships to publishers,

authors and (prospective) readers. It does so both within the context of an historical overview, but also concentrates upon the review and the reviewers in the twenty-first century, including in the now thoroughly digital period.

In so doing, it examines key themes and aspects of the historical development of reviewing, its role in the circulation and reception of books in a variety of market sectors, and in gatekeeping and constructing cultural value. It also considers the economics of reviewing, the review as form, and its role in the marketing and publicity of books. In addition, the chapter addresses the sometimes problematic positioning of reviewing with regards to a range of identities (both of the reviewer and the reviewed). There is a concluding examination of the changes being brought to reviewing by digital technologies in their enabling of widespread, ‘amateur’ reviewing across a range of platforms, and their concomitant role in building communities around reading practices, and in creating data for algorithmically-led marketing processes. The chapter’s focus is predominantly upon the reviewing environment in the UK, though it brings in examples from across the Anglophone world.

Definitions

Before turning to a history of reviewing, and given the ‘slippery’ nature of the reviewing that Pool identifies, this chapter begins with some definitions. These definitions are further amplified in the sections which follow, including through its historical development and current transmogrifications.

Pool begins her definitions by contemplating the purpose of the review for the (potential) book reader. As she outlines:

Many of us – even reviewers – turn to reviewers both to help us decide what to read and to find out what is out there to be read: we read reviews in our areas of interest, looking for recommendations, and we read reviews of books we have no intention of reading, whether to arm ourselves for the cocktail party circuit or because we truly want to be informed. We may also of course read reviewers because we take pleasure in the play of ideas, or in reading about reading, or in the well-written review as a literary form. But essentially we want consumer advice and cultural guidance. (2007, p. 4)

In a few sentences, she sketches a variety of purposes: ‘recommendations’; shorthand descriptions; for entertainment or edification; and, primarily, for ‘consumer advice and cultural guidance’. The role of the review, she therefore states, is first and foremost one which is simultaneously linked to the business of publishing, and to its aesthetic output. Immediately, then, the review is placed in a potentially conflicted position, with a role in the weighing up of the cultural worth of books, but also in their marketing and promotion. Reviews ‘influence reading,’ she also remarks (2007, p.3); this is reading in both cultural and economic formations.

A key distinction to be made, at least with regards to the pages of newspapers, is that the review is neither the literary feature nor the interview with an author. Book review space is under pressure, Edna Longley describes with regards to the end of the twentieth century, with ‘The preview and the interview try to usurp the review’ (1998, p. 200). Stefan Collini is even more concerned about a potential loss of space, as “‘features people” increasingly replace “literary people” as editors of the books pages, so the proportion of space devoted to self-advertising “personalities” and show-biz ephemera rises’ (1998, p. 174). The focus of the review is thus on the contents of the book itself, rather than on details of the author-biography.

The book review’s mode is also predominantly contemporary, focusing on new titles, or even, in pre-publication reviews, in titles soon to be released. For Pool this is a key distinction between literary journalism and criticism, with the former concentrating on new books (and hence more clearly linking to immediate marketing and promotion of frontlist titles). Pool derives her distinction at least in part from Virginia Woolf, who places in historical context a ‘split in the field of criticism’ at the end of the eighteenth century, whereby, “‘The critics,” [Woolf...] wrote, “dealt with the past and with principles; the reviewer took the measure of new books as they fell from the press.”’ (2007, p. 9).

It might seem that the roles of reviewer and critic fall, respectively, to the (literary) journalist and academic respectively, but in a volume of essays devoted to the inter-relationships between literary journalism and literary criticism (or *Grub Street and the Ivory Tower*, as the book title puts it (Treglown and Bennett 1998)), Collini nuances such a ‘conventional distinction’ (1998, p. 151). He notes the predominant focus of academic critics on ‘literature’

(and thereby excluding general works of, for example, economics and philosophy, which the book reviewer might address). However, while recognising that “‘Literary scholarship’” refers to the disciplined study of a particular subject-matter’, he does so by pointing out the frequency with which academics have also (and continue) to act as book reviewers in the newspapers and mainstream media, as well as non-academics contributing to ‘literary scholarship’ (1998, p. 152). Indeed, there are frequent examples, some of which are discussed later in this chapter, of reviewers who have acted as book reviewers, as well as reviewers who are related to other aspects of bookish life; quintessentially, writers of books themselves.

The mid-century editor and literary critic Cyril Connolly paints a picture of the professional literary journalist in contrast to the salaried university academic. The literary journalist, writes Connolly:

‘cannot afford to be obscure; he is not subsidised [unlike the “university teacher”]; he has to compress his views into a few hundred words; he must grade, explain and entertain all at once, and his work is immediately forgotten, totally ignored except for those who write in to correct a name or a date.’ (Connolly, cited in Taylor 2016, p. 212)

Beyond the obvious mid-twentieth century gendering of this generic professional book reviewer (gender and other forms of identity in the reviewing process are addressed later), Connolly hints at the economics of professional book reviewing – a recurring theme throughout this chapter – as well as to the form of the review itself. It is both brief but also, as with Pool’s comments above on what readers turn to reviews for, suggests the multiplicity of roles that the effective review must perform – to ‘grade, explain and entertain all at once’. The explicatory role relates to the review’s focus on new books, and the broad distinction between journalistic and academic criticism. Pool supports Collini’s statement that it is largely (but not always) the case that reviewing focuses on ‘new books and a lack of theory’ (at least an explicit one), arguing that reviewers are ‘working not with a canon but with unknown quantities and need to find ways to discern which titles might have value. Because reviewers are dealing with new books, they’re writing for an audience that hasn’t yet read the books they’re discussing, which is why not only an evaluation, but also an accurate description is such a necessary part of the review; without description, no assessment can make sense’ (2007, p.10). That said, because of the assumption that a reader of academic

criticism might have already read the book under consideration, an academic essay might well reveal key twists of a novel and its ending in a way that a reviewer of a new book would not be able to do without warning of major ‘plot-spoilers’. Reviews which risk giving away key aspects of the story relate particularly to the novel (or perhaps a narrative-driven non-fiction title), whereas reviews of other forms of non-fiction might more thoroughly explain the contents of the title at hand. Such a digested version in itself means that the reader of the review has a strong sense of the contents of the book without needing to read it. (A range of additional strategies are put forwards by Pierre Bayard in his book *How To Talk About Books You Haven’t Read*, which starts with an epigraph from Oscar Wilde, ‘*I never read a book I must review; it prejudices you so.*’ (2008, p. v).)

Beyond the tantalising challenge presented by Bayard’s book to reviewers, a less cynical approach to the form of the book review should also take into consideration the two other roles in Connolly’s tripartite, that of grading and entertaining. The entertainment role, states Collini, is one which makes ‘requirements of brevity, “liveliness”, and “punchiness” because of both ‘commercialism and of the properties of the media themselves’ which, he argues, ‘make it extremely difficult to present a case that is complex, extended and nuanced’ (1998, p. 173).

A more positive account than Collini’s jeremiad on the need to entertain is to be found in Lorna Sage’s chapter in the same volume. As both an academic and a regular book reviewer, Sage writes evocatively of the commercial art of book reviewing. Regular reviewers, she says:

write on the run, in the present tense [...] You swap words for money, you reprocess reading into writing and commentary. You describe, paraphrase, quote, reperform, ‘place’ and help sell (or not) the books you’re reviewing [...] What literary editors like is an excited, vivid, dramatized response, whether it is positive or negative is less important than its power to arouse interest, to make the book in question twitch and show signs of life [...] To write reading you must spot and exaggerate and semaphore all the signs, insert yourself between author and real reader, make over long texts into short alliterative sentences, perform reading as surrogate and advocate, and at all costs help to keep the trade in words alive. (1998, pp. 262-3)

Sage's commentary constructs the book review as both a piece of writing in its own right, that operates within particular conditions and constraints (including those of the publication it sits within, and the directives of its literary editor), but which also performs a vital communicative function between author – or their book – and reader. In addition, the review sustains the literary world, in both its aesthetic and market orientations ('to keep the trade in words alive'). She encapsulates the need to entertain, but also the review's potential role in book sales – if it makes the 'grade' (to make a noun from Connolly's verb). For, as Pool also asserts, the 'central ingredients of a review [are...] description and an assessment' (2007, p.138).

Reviews have their role, then, in both judging literary quality and in selling books. The former role sees it as one of the early points of (potential) canon formation. Pool argues that 'Reviewers' assessments indirectly help determine which books will win awards and which authors will be published' (2007, p. 3). Literary awards are themselves a proxy for literary value, and their decision-making processes frequently contested (see, for example, English 2005). However, they also have a role in canon formation, with their winners frequently finding their way onto university literature or schools curricula (Allan and Driscoll 2013). Indeed, in the situation where literary editors seem to have overlooked a title and not elicited a review for it, it can cause consternation when it then goes onto prize success, as McDowell illuminates in the case of Graeme Macrae Burnet's Man Booker shortlisted *His Bloody Project* (2016). However, favourable reviews from key publications and reviewers such as the *New Yorker's* James Wood or the *New York Times Book Review's* Michiko Kakutani can set agenda for books, opening their pathway to critical success (Taylor 2016, p.409).

Yet reviewers also react to publishers' marketing and promotion. This might take the form of a gatekeeping or sieving activity, in which heavily promoted titles are reviewed so readers know whether to invest their time and money in them (Pool 2007, p. 22). In this sense, the reviewer sits both in literary judgement, but also as a buyer's guide, particularly in an age of proliferating numbers of titles available. Their role is one of recommendation: to value, or not; to buy, or not. Although it is hard to determine their precise effect, Pool reports on publishers' publicists who see certain "selling review[s]" which kickstart word-of-mouth success and "buzz" around a book, from which other reviews flow as well as 'interviews, profiles, and television appearances' (2007, p. 114, 113).

Reviewers – and in particular literary editors – also react to publishers’ marketing and promotion, and existing literary judgements, by upholding conventional patterns. This might occur in terms of according space to authors who already have significant marketplace presence, or by, as Pool puts it, ‘sustain[ing] artificial cultural divisions’ which privilege some publishers (particularly larger ones), authors, identities and genres over others. As multiple review platforms focus on the same titles from a narrow band of publishers, rather than ‘expand[ing...] not only readers’ awareness but the cultural mainstream itself’, Pool argues that ‘[w]hat is confirmed is not the value of the books but the consistency of the system and the discouraging conformity of the trade’ (2007, pp.31-2).

The implications of these concentrations are addressed in more detail later in this chapter. After this preliminary scoping of key principles in the work of the review and the reviewer, the next section addresses their history and development.

The history and development of reviewing

Ending his short introduction to the subject of book reviewing in the *Oxford Companion to the Book*, Law comments that new reviewing platforms brought about by twenty-first century digital developments ‘seem no more likely to succeed in passing unscathed between the Scylla of ideological prejudice and the Charybdis of economic self-interest’ than the centuries of reviewing that preceded them (2010, p. 1092). These contemporary digital manifestations of reviewing are explored later in this chapter. But how did the book review and the role of the book reviewer develop historically?

As Law describes, within a British context, literary reviewing – beyond the mere listing of new titles available – was a mid-eighteenth century development, in line with the expansion of the publishing industry, and was spearheaded by the *Monthly Review* (1749) and *Critical Review* (1756) (2010, pp. 1091-2). It was in this period that, as Antonia Forster puts it, ‘the business of criticism and its place in the history of the book was established’ (2009, p. 631). The founder of the *Monthly Review* articulated the role of the reviewer in 1749 ‘in simple, practical terms to a reading public unused to the phenomenon of purchasing literary judgements or descriptions of books’, meaning that the *Review* was placed ‘in a mediating position between the booksellers and the reading public’ (Forster 2009, pp. 632, 633). As such, from the early days of the review, it was a contested site: was its purpose to provide

readers with notification and information of new titles, or to be more selective and evaluative?

As the number of such periodicals grew at the turn of the nineteenth century with the emergence of quarterlies such as the *Edinburgh Review* (1802) and *Quarterly Review* (1809), the relationship between booksellers and periodical publishers was close. Publishers would ‘puff’ their own books, particularly through the use of anonymous reviewers, and included paid advertisements for new titles alongside reviews. A move was also made from any attempt to review comprehensively, to a mode of selection, embedding ‘considerable intellectual prestige over several generations’ in the quarterly (Law 2010, p. 1091-2). The reviews were lengthy, and functioned as substantial paraphrases of titles, meaning that readers could ‘keep up to date with the key arguments of new books without necessarily reading the books for themselves’ (Fyfe 2009, p. 591). The review later spread into the general periodical in publications such as *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* (1802), as well as with new literary reviews such as the *Athenaeum* (1828), which focused on shorter, less essayistic reviews.

As the nineteenth century proceeded, with its increasing professionalisation of authorship, its growing publishing output (both books and periodicals), and rising levels of readership, so did the forums for book reviews, to the degree that reviews of reviews such as *Tit-Bits* (1881) and *Review of Reviews* (1890) began to be published (McKitterick 2009, p. 563; Fyfe 2009, p. 592). A parallel set of publications oriented at both the book trade and librarians were established (e.g. *Publishers’ Circular* (1837), the *Bookseller* (1858), *The Best Books* (1887), the *Bookman* (1891), and the *Library Review* (1892)), emphasising both the principles of newness and selection (McKitterick 2009, p. 562, pp. 564-5). By the end of the nineteenth century, *The Times* published the weekly *Literature* (1896), a pre-cursor to the *Times Literary Supplement* (1902). *Literature’s* editor H D Traill did much in the announcement in *The Times*, and via *Literature’s* leaders, to establish what he saw as the role of the book review and the literary critic. These opinion pieces insisted on ‘authoritative neutrality’ which was deemed crucial in a ‘marketplace of culture’, and as Kijinski further argues, ‘construct[ed] a case for the indispensable, and utilitarian, cultural function of the professional man of letters who guides the reading of a public that has an unprecedented number of books available to them but who are also beset by the commercial machinery of mass culture which would degrade standards of literary judgment in the interests of profit’ (2010, pp. 359, 358). The rise

of the professional literary critic, however – seemingly autonomous from the burgeoning literary marketplace – was in fact intimately connected to it. The disinterested stance of the critic did not occlude the fact that such a role was dependent on the need to make distinctions in a period of mass-market production.

Into the twentieth century, literary reviewing was an important supplement to many authors' incomes, who could not live on income from their book-length writing alone. Aldous Huxley made money from reviewing for the *New Statesman* and *Nation*, and in 1919 joined the *Athenaeum* as a staff writer. For Virginia Woolf, until 1925, 'literary journalism was [her...] main source of income' (Nash and Squires 2019, p. 101). Indeed, the numbers of literary and cultural magazines grew again between the two world wars, providing opportunities for authors both to earn money by writing literary reviews, but also for them and their publishers to receive reviews of their output. The inter-war period also saw the development of positive reviews being integrated into book cover design, not least via Victor Gollancz's typographic covers, (Nash, Squires and Willison 2019, p. 23). Such (excerpted) reviews in the paratexts of books made evident the role of the review in the marketing and promotion of books, leading historian D J Taylor to typify the period as 'the era of the light essay, of the overexcitable dust jacket with its constant imitations of "genius"; of the "puff" or over-the-top review in which all pretence of objective standards went out of the window and the potential reader was assured that his soul would "scream with delight"'. Gollancz's company also 'extracted and arranged reviews' in advertisements, in order "'to create the suggestion that no one could afford not to read this book'" (Taylor 2016, pp. 83, 84). The link between the review and book sales was cemented.

Another development – or at least intensification of earlier practice – is noted by Taylor in the 1920s: that of "'star reviewer'", named as author of the article rather than being 'clothed in decent anonymity', which then became 'an essential part of the literary culture of the day' (2016, pp. 84, 85). Named reviewers were frequently novelists: Arnold Bennett (*Evening Standard*), J B Priestley, Frank Swinnerton (both at the *Evening News*), Compton McKenzie (*Daily Mail*) and Hugh Walpole (*Daily Sketch*). Big-name reviewers were trusted by book buyers and borrowers, creating a direct impact on sales and onward publicity for titles. Other publications, however, clung to a principle of anonymity, most notably the *Times Literary Supplement* (TLS), which retained it from its first publication in 1902 until as late as 1974. Articles were subsequently "'deanonymised'" as part of a digitisation project, revealing

patterns which were discussed in the publication's 5000th issue in 1999, as Ruth Scurr later commented on the *TLS*'s website:

Calculating the number of female reviewers in the paper's first thousand issues from 1902–21, McVea and Treglown wrote: 'It is of interest, though it is not a surprise, that of 1,036 contributions in these early years, the number of women (seventy-six) was exceeded by the number of clergymen (eighty-one) and almost matched by those of men educated at a single Oxford college, Balliol (sixty-seven)'. (2018)

The issue of gendered reviewing is one to which this chapter later returns. The named (and largely male), star reviewers in the interwar period attracted concomitant pay. Arnold Bennett, reveals Taylor, had the 'phenomenal' income in 1929 of £22,000, including 'journalism paid at a rate of two shillings a word', and an annual payment of £3000 a year for his weekly *Evening Standard* page. Not all reviewers were so healthily recompensed, however, with fees for 600-700 word reviews cited between £1 and £5 (Taylor, pp. 138, 145). For the literary journalist John Hayward in the 1930s, he 'calculated [...] he wrote a review at the rate of one every two days' (Taylor 2016, p. 140). Taylor links such conditions to George Orwell's penning of one of the most quoted essays on the book review, 'Confessions of a Book Reviewer' (1946). 'In twenty years of reviewing,' notes Peter Davison in a note to Orwell's essay, Orwell 'reviewed just over 700 books, plays, and films. His busiest year was 1940 when he reviewed 135 books, plays and films in 67 reviews' (n.d.).

In his essay Orwell draws a picture of the book reviewer as a desperate hack, for whom 'the prolonged, indiscriminate reviewing of books is a quite exceptionally thankless, irritating and exhausting job'. His portrait of the reviewer opens, 'In a cold but stuffy bed-sitting room littered with cigarette ends and half-empty cups of tea, a man in a moth-eaten dressing-gown sits at a rickety table, trying to find room for his typewriter among the piles of dusty papers that surround it' (1946). Orwell continues to enumerate satirically the financial pressures on the freelance literary journalist, the small amount of time the world-weary reviewer has for each book, the press of the deadline, the limited scrutiny accorded to each title, and the stock phrases used to describe them.

Indeed, after the Second World War, there was a decline in the number of 'traditional literary and political weeklies', meaning fewer opportunities for paid reviewing, with many of the

highest profile reviews undertaken by salaried academics rather than freelance writers (Nash and Squires 2019, p. 125). Taylor saw this shift as a direct response to ‘the collapse of the middlebrow literary magazine’ meaning that ‘the world of belles-lettres was growing more restricted, more likely to be colonised by moonlighting academics on institutional salaries’ than freelance literary journalists. Although fees for star reviewers were to some degree sustained, in the post-war period circumstances became yet more difficult for writers in terms of the number of books necessary to be read and reviewed to make decent money, with the novelist Anthony Burgess calculating ‘he had read 350 new novels in the space of two years’ for the *Yorkshire Post* (Taylor 2016, pp. 247, 255).

The immediate post-war period of austerity, paper-rationing and limited page space eventually gave way to a regrowth in book reviewing in the 1960s and 70s. It was ‘metropolitan in character’, a ‘professional golden age’, and saw the rise and rise of the newspaper and magazine staff literary editor, who oversaw the work of the freelance literary journalists and reviewers. Such roles were increasingly taken on by women, too: Claire Tomalin at the *New Statesman* and Miriam Gross, who moved on from a role at the books pages of the *Observer* to become literary editor of the *Sunday Telegraph* (Taylor 2016, pp. 305, 307, 308). A coterie of younger reviewers in the 1970s formed a ‘distinctive literary scene’, comprised of novelists and academics including Martin Amis, Julian Barnes, Ian McEwan and Lorna Sage (Taylor 2016, pp. 324-5). This ‘golden age’ was economic in character as much as intellectual; as in the 1920s and 30s it provided some writers with steady salaries which continued into the final decades of the twentieth century. Taylor comments that in the final two decades of the twentieth century, a freelance with an annual contract from one newspaper, plus commissions from others, could potentially gain £15,000 to £20,000 a year. In this ‘boom’ period of multiple broadsheet newspapers, a star reviewer such as novelist Anthony Burgess earned £600 a review for the *Independent* in the late 1980s (2016, p. 426). However, as Nash and Squires explain, ‘the slump of newspaper sales thereafter curtailed a once steady source of income’, as the ongoing story of the review, and the reviewer, unfolds in its twenty-first century manifestations (2019, p. 133).

Landscapes of twenty-first century book reviewing

One narrative of book reviewing as it reaches the twenty-first century, then, is of decline, challenge and loss of space. From an economic heyday in the 1970-90s and the interwar

period, book reviewing became a less and less lucrative profession, with Taylor reporting in 2014 that the *Independent* was offering only £100 for a book review – an amount which was less than what was offered when the newspaper was established in 1986 (2016, p. 430). For writers, reliant on book reviewing as an additional source of economic to supplement that from book advances and royalties, the fall in reviewing fees was only one strand in an overall picture of worsening revenue derived from the writing life (Marsden 2018).

The rapidly developing digital environment would be cruel to the traditional newspaper, with plummeting sales and, therefore, depleting advertising revenue. The space allocated to book reviews in traditional, mainstream printed media particularly suffered, as discussed in the ‘Definitions’ section earlier, and found itself competing with other forms of exposure given to writers, through biographically-led approaches. Already by the end of the twentieth century in the Irish context, Longley noted that ‘crude slices of book-life now get on to the literary pages of the *Irish Times*’, with the ‘space for “reviews” [...] shrinking’ (1998, p. 217). Within a small-nation context such as Ireland’s, Longley describes how this shrinkage presents particular challenges: to what extent the small number of editors (including the novelist John Banville) and their tastes then focus on Irish writers, or even books published in Ireland (as many of the more critically and commercially successful Irish writers are published via London publishers); or on writers from elsewhere in the world; and new or established writers. To what extent, the argument continues, should the Irish newspapers be promoting the small-scale publishing industry in Ireland and showcasing its products, to what extent focusing on the established voices of Irish literature, and to what extent should it act as a window onto the wider world of literature? Limited page space throws such questions into sharp relief. The choices made are then heavily scrutinised, as Longley describes Banville ‘accused of devoting both too much and too little space to Irish, and especially Irish-published, books’ (1998, p.216).

Limited space also means that sieving decisions taken by literary editors have further political and ideological ramifications. Pool’s description of literary editors’ gatekeeping decisions, described earlier in the chapter, showed how they reinforce cultural hierarchies, often prioritising larger publishers at the expense of smaller presses. The fight for review coverage for smaller publishers is particularly acute. The retrospective lifting of the *TLS*’s anonymity discussed earlier in the chapter revealed the overwhelming bias towards male reviewers over its lifetime. Such patterns did not cease with named reviews, however. As Scurr comments on

the 1999 issue in which McVea and Treglown discussed the *TLS* archive, ‘McVea was one of only four women among forty-two contributors to issue No. 5000’ (2018).

Inequities in reviewing (both in terms of the reviewer and the identity of the author of the book under review) led to the foundation of VIDA: Women in Literary Arts in 2009. Part of its core activity is an annual count of book reviews in some of the most prestigious of newspapers, journals and magazines (e.g. the *New York Review of Books* and *New York Times Book Review* in the US). In the UK in 2016, the *TLS* had only 38% of reviews by women, with only 29% of books reviewed by women. The *London Review of Books* proved even more imbalanced, with only 18% of book reviewers written by women, and 26% of books reviewed by women (Nash and Squires 2019, p. 140). VIDA opened its count out latterly to become more intersectional, to include counts of gender, race and ethnicity, sexuality identity, and disability. In Australia, the Stella Count has undertaken similar work, with accompanying academic analysis, particularly in the context of declining review space (Harvey and Lamond 2016). The experience of Lesley McDowell, one British reviewer, illustrates more qualitatively some of the issues of gender in reviewing, explaining that she ‘carved a niche’ career by reviewing books by women, ‘In order to make sure I could get enough books to review to pay the bills, I looked for the titles I thought editors would give me, and what wasn’t being covered very much [...] surprise, surprise, it was novels by women! Most books reviewers were male, and they tended to choose titles by men’. She then articulates how books by women are more likely to be reviewed by women, and also that ‘To be a major reviewer, you have to concentrate on the boys’ (McDowell 2012).

Twenty-first century digital technologies would exponentially increase the amount of space, number of platforms, form of review activities, and, it might therefore be assumed, work towards addressing such inequities. Indeed, Murray has argued that ‘Rather than fighting for equal representation within an admittedly prestigious, though undoubtedly shrinking, sector of print culture, feminist attention might be better focused on the potential of the burgeoning *digital* literary sphere’ (2018, p.117). Such a turn, though, risks placing online reviewing within a range of what Driscoll terms feminised, ‘middlebrow literary institutions’, which are ‘placed in a subordinate, inferior position in the literary field’ (2014, p. 31). Embracing the opportunities of the digital technologies discussed at the end of the chapter should sit alongside a call for equity in traditional, mainstream reviewing practices.

Yet even without the unfurling of opportunities afforded by digital technologies, the landscapes of twenty-first century reviewing were already more plural than a narrow focus on traditional newspaper reviewing would suggest. A plethora of other printed platforms provide review space for books falling within their respective niches, from pre-publication forums such as the long-established publishing trade journal *The Bookseller*, to specialist and regional magazines such as *Astronomy Now*, *Horse and Hound*, *The Ringing World* and *Cumbria Life*, which focus on reviewing books with subject matter, location or authors related to their readers' interests. Such reviews vary from lengthy analyses of the books at hand, to simple notices of publication, short round-ups, and one-word or quantitative, starred reviews. Some newspaper 'review the reviews', examining the convergence or disparity of opinion of widely reviewed titles.

Radio and television have given opportunities for the discussion of book titles, from more highbrow cultural discussion programmes – such as BBC Radio 4's *Front Row* and on television (until 2014) BBC 2's *The Review Show* (variously named *Newsnight Review*, *The Late Review* and *The Late Show*) – to media book clubs. The TV producer Amanda Ross drew inspiration from the US's extraordinarily successful Oprah's Book Club segment (1996 onwards) on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* to formulate *The Richard & Judy Book Club* (2004 onwards), a mediatised UK book club in which a set of books were chosen each season for discussion, often with the author present. A particular feature of *The Richard & Judy Book Club* was its focus on new books, thus feeding into the immediate marketing and promotion of frontlist titles (Cousins and Ramone 2011; Fuller and Rehberg Sedo 2013). While led by their celebrity presenters, such shows encouraged their audiences to read, review and discuss themselves, leading to – in an extension of Fuller and Rehberg Sedo's conceptualisation of 'mass reading events' – an idea of 'mass reviewing' that also comes into play with digital technologies.

In addition to pre-publication reviews in trade publications, the practice of publishers, literary agents and authors seeking pre-publication endorsements – normally from other authors with profile in the particular market sector or genre – might also be seen as a form of review, although one that is short and always positive, and elicited in order to put on the cover of the book before reviews are available, as well as in other marketing materials (press releases, advance information sheets, website copy, in social media). In his study of US endorsements, Maguire writes that, 'In soliciting public endorsements from fellow writers, authors and their

publishers wish not only to borrow symbolic capital from recognized authorities but also to situate their work within an affiliative matrix of aesthetically, generically, or thematically similar artists.’ (2018). Maguire’s network analysis of endorsements demonstrate (supposed) literary affiliations and marketplace positioning (and thereby reveal constructions of gender, genre and race). Within a UK context, one such pre-publication endorsement which could be read through a prism of genre and race is that by Salman Rushdie for Zadie Smith’s debut novel *White Teeth* (2000) (Squires 2007, p. 179). Maguire further comments that while affiliates and friends might also review an author’s book post-publication, a key difference is that ‘the solicited blurb makes no special claim to impartiality’, but that ‘readers expect the review of a book not to have any conflicts of interest or relationship with the author’, despite friends frequently reviewing each other’s titles (2018). As such, the pre-publication endorsement has no intention to take on the role of objective, balanced review, but is there either to sell books, or to confer a form of literary consecration, or both.

In the sphere of academic writing and publishing, the review is also a crucial part of the publishing process, with pre-publication peer review (traditionally anonymous and set up as a gatekeeping, ‘gold standard’ exercise) arguably having a stronger impact than post-publication reviews in public fora (Butchard et al. 2017). That said, the function of academic book reviews, as argued by a journal reintroducing them to its pages, ‘direct readers to research they might not be aware of, strengthening connections between scholarly work on an international and potentially interdisciplinary scale, and a well written review will point out a book’s key contributions when scholars often have precious little time to read books’ (Gerrard 2019). For scholarly monographs, then, both peer review and post-publication reviews are important in terms of the shaping and reception of long-form scholarly ideas, particularly in the arts and humanities disciplines. Scholars, including Fuller and Rehberg Sedo (for their *Reading Beyond the Book* (2013)), also institute informal, or ‘DIY’ peer review processes among fellow scholars, not in order to make their work more sellable, but to make their scholarship as robust as possible which might, ideally, have the long-term impact of making it circulate further (Butchard et al. 2018). Digital technologies have also enabled innovative, pre-publication forms of peer review, such as Kathleen Fitzpatrick posting an early draft of *Generous Thinking* (2019) online, in order to encourage discussion and feedback of her ideas before the finalisation of the book in its print and e-versions. Such experiments also link to evolving models of peer review including in open and post-publication review (Butchard et al. 2017).

Alongside its effects in the sphere of academic publishing, digital technologies have affected the landscape of the review, and reviewing practices, in broader and substantive ways. Amazon was established as an internet book retailing operation in 1994, and by 1997 it was already enabling its users to post up comments and reviews of titles (Murray 2018, p. 112). Such reviews were both qualitative (normally brief reviews of the books in question) and quantitative (via a 5-star ranking system) in nature (Ray Murray and Squires 2013, p. 16). Their introduction opened the possibilities for amateur and mass reviewing, but also leading to the aggregation of reader-reviewer content through quantitative and algorithmic processes. The early days of Amazon's platform for reader-reviewers also led to a boom in evidence for scholars of contemporary reading practices (e.g. Gutjahr 2002; Steiner 2008), as well as much debate around whether they were democratising reviewing (Murray 2018, pp. 111-112). The anonymity or pseudonymity of Amazon's customer reviews could be manipulated for the purposes of sock puppetry (i.e. attacking rival authors' books), writing multiple positive reviews of your own, your friends, or your company's books, and the mass buying of reviews (Ray Murray and Squires, p. 16).

Evolving digital technologies led to further affordances and possibilities for reader-reviews, via sites such as Shelfari and Goodreads (both initially independent, but subsequently bought by Amazon) (Ray Murray and Squires 2013 p. 14). As the twenty-first century progressed, book bloggers became prevalent, and frequently courted by publishers, alongside Booktubers (book reviewers on YouTube), podcasters, and readers using Instagram and its hashtag #Bookstagram, which reached nearly 30 million posts at the beginning of 2019 (even if the latter are more likely to be thought of visual performances of bookishness than as 'reviews'). Nonetheless, such traces of visual reading and ownership patterns fit alongside a broader 'digital literary sphere' (Murray, 2018).

This sphere, as well as enabling citizen reviewers, also gave much-needed space to more professionalised reviewing on digital platforms such as the *Los Angeles Review of Books* and the *Sydney Review of Books*. Such possibilities led to one commentator to ask – and answer positively – 'Could the Internet Save Book Reviews?' (Fay 2012). Whatever position is taken on the quality of these various reviewing platforms (and whether they are economically sustainable places for professional book reviewers to operate), what is clear is that the spaces within which reviewing in the twenty-first century take place are both proliferating and

metamorphosing. While many of the same historical issues around the review and the practices of reviewing remain in the current period, as does their complex and conflicted nature, it is also throwing up some new challenges. The role of the review and the reviewer in the circulation and reception of books, in their promotion and their consecration, continues, even if in forms adapting to evolving circumstances and technologies.

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